

INSPECTION REPORT

MARY WEBB SCHOOL

Pontesbury

LEA area: Shropshire

Unique reference number: 123577

Headteacher: Mrs J Brown

Reporting inspector: Mr R. Palmer

31198

Dates of inspection: 28th – 30th January 2002

Inspection number: 189850

Full 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: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Pontesbury
Shrewsbury
Shropshire

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs Y Holyoak

Date of previous inspection: 13th October 1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Mary Webb School is a co-educational, community, comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 to 16 years. It is situated in the village of Pontesbury, near Shrewsbury. The school has 577 pupils (302 boys and 275 girls), a similar number as at the time of the previous inspection in 1996. It is smaller than most other secondary schools. Most pupils are from small hamlets and travel large distances to school by bus. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds. The attainment of pupils on entry at age 11 is similar to the national average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (one in every 16 pupils) is below the national average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is low. Three pupils are at an early stage of learning English. A very small number of pupils is of non-white ethnic background. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, about one in every eight, is below average. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs, about one in 30, is average. Most of these pupils have specific or moderate learning difficulties.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Mary Webb School is a good school. It provides a good quality of education for pupils of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. The good leadership and management of the headteacher and the good work of heads of department are important factors in the school's continuing success. In the past three years, results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 have been generally above, and sometimes well above the national averages. These results represent good achievement based on pupils' average levels of attainment when they joined the school. Pupils achieve well because teachers and pupils have high expectations. Within a friendly, caring and positive environment for learning, pupils work hard and respond very positively to the good teaching they receive. The school has many strengths and few weaknesses. It provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils achieve well. Their results in GCSE examinations are above the national average.
- Good teaching enables pupils to achieve well.
- The good leadership of the headteacher is an important factor in the school's good improvements since the previous inspection.
- The quality of education in art and design is a strength of the school.
- Pupils' very positive attitudes to their work create a good environment for learning.

What could be improved

- Boys attain much lower GCSE results than girls in design and technology.
- Pupils of below average attainment make satisfactory rather than good progress in developing their reading and writing skills.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement since the previous inspection in 1996 is good. The school has done well to consolidate and build upon its previous strengths. Results in external examinations taken by pupils at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11 remain above average. The quality of teaching remains good; at times it is very good and occasionally excellent. Pupils now have very positive attitudes to work. The good leadership and commitment of the head teacher are important contributory factors to the school's many successful developments. The work of

heads of department has improved and has led to pupils achieving higher standards, particularly in English, mathematics and science. Progress has been good in tackling the key issues identified in the previous inspection. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) and in design and technology have improved well and are satisfactory. The attainment of boys has improved so that their results in external examinations are above the national average. Effective in-service training has helped teachers to provide pupils of all levels of attainment with work of appropriate difficulty. Good procedures have been developed to assess and monitor the work of pupils and teachers. An effective review of job descriptions has led to better management of departments. Procedures to promote good behaviour have improved and work well. Pupils now have good opportunities to exercise responsibility. The school still does not meet statutory requirements for the provision of an act of daily collective worship for all pupils.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	B	A	B	C	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

Results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were well above average in 2001. Results were well above average in science and above average in English and mathematics. They indicate good achievement for boys and girls of all levels of attainment when compared with pupils' results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 6, which matched the national average. Compared with the results of similar schools, results in 2001 were above average. Results are improving faster than the national improvement. This is a good achievement for the school because its results at the time of the previous inspection were already above the national average. The standards of work seen in classes in Year 9 are currently above average in English and mathematics and well above average in science.

GCSE results have been above the national average in the past three years. They were well above average in 2000. Performance in GCSE examinations is improving faster than the national improvement. This represents particularly good achievement for boys because their results have risen from below average in 1997. Results in 2001 were well above average in many subjects, including mathematics, science and English literature. In 2001, the GCSE results matched the results achieved in similar schools. Girls' results were well above the national averages for girls. Boys' results in most subjects in 2001 were either at or above the national averages for boys, except that their performance in design and technology was well below average.

The performance of boys has improved in recent years Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in all years because their work is carefully assessed and monitored. Pupils who are gifted or talented make good progress. Pupils of all other levels of attainment, including those of minority ethnic heritage and those who speak English as an additional language, achieve well throughout the school.

Standards of work observed in classes confirm the above average standards indicated by the test and examination results in 2001. Standards in literacy and numeracy are above average. Pupils of below average attainment make satisfactory rather than good progress in developing their reading and writing skills. Pupils make effective use of their satisfactory ICT skills to enhance their work in many subjects, when given the opportunity. The school met some, but not all of its challenging targets set for performance in GCSE examinations in 2001.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are keen to do their best. They have very positive attitudes, are attentive and concentrate well in class.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils behave very well in class and around the school. They are polite and friendly. The management of the few pupils with behavioural difficulties is very good.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships among pupils of all backgrounds and between staff and pupils are very positive. Personal development is very good, partly because staff know the pupils very well. Pupils respect the views of others.
Attendance	Good. Attendance is slightly above the national average. Unauthorised absence is below average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11
Quality of teaching	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 quality of teaching and the quality of learning are good throughout the school. Teaching is often very good and occasionally excellent. A small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Teaching succeeds in meeting the needs of boys and girls of all levels of attainment. Pupils often enjoy the work because it is usually of sufficient difficulty to make most of them think hard. They want to achieve as well as they can. Throughout the school, teaching is good in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. In the two unsatisfactory lessons seen, the pace of learning was too slow and the work was not difficult enough for all pupils. The teaching of literacy is good in English and satisfactory in most other subjects. The teaching of numeracy is good in mathematics and satisfactory in most other subjects. Pupils use ICT well to enhance their learning in subjects when given the opportunity. Pupils make good progress and achieve well in most lessons because teachers encourage them to raise their self-esteem and to acquire high expectations. Pupils contribute well to their own learning by working hard, concentrating well and sustaining interest throughout most lessons. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 who are studying for the certificate in vocational courses make good progress because very effective teaching has increased their confidence and motivation to achieve well. In many subjects, particularly in science, teachers use assessment very well to detect underachievement, to determine what to teach and to set suitable targets for pupils to improve their work. Pupils know what they are expected to learn and how they can improve, because most teachers mark the work well and frequently review pupils' progress. Very good

relationships between teachers and pupils help to provide a pleasant and purposeful environment for learning. Pupils of all levels of attainment have very positive attitudes to their work. Pupils often make very good progress when working independently or in pairs and small groups, although they do not always have enough opportunities to do so.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and the needs of all pupils. A wide-ranging programme of extra-curricular activities, in which pupils actively participate, enriches their learning experiences.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Provision has improved considerably. These pupils make good progress because they receive good teaching and support that are directed effectively to meet their particular needs.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. The few pupils at an early stage of learning English receive appropriate support that enables them to make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Provision is very good for pupils' moral development, good for social and cultural development and satisfactory for spiritual development. Since the school does not provide a daily act of collective worship, opportunities for spiritual development are restricted.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Staff know the pupils and their needs very well. Pupils receive very good support to assist their personal development. Procedures for assessment are good. The school successfully promotes the social inclusion of pupils of all backgrounds. Good procedures for child protection and for health and safety are in place.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The good, strong and committed leadership of the head teacher is a key factor in the school's good improvement. She sets a very clear direction for improvement and makes suitably challenging demands of staff and pupils. The work of heads of department has improved, is good and has resulted in higher standards, particularly in the core subjects.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactory. Governors have a satisfactory awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They monitor the school's progress well and are supportive and effective in carrying out their duties.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school makes effective use of data to assess how well it is doing and to set suitably challenging targets for improvement. Appropriate systems are in place to monitor teaching and learning.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Adequate staffing, accommodation and learning resources are used well to support pupils' learning. Spending decisions are carefully considered to seek best value and to meet the school's educational priorities. Financial management has improved and is good.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils like school, are expected to work hard and achieve well.• Leadership and management are good.• The teaching is good.• The school works closely with parents.• Parents are comfortable about approaching the school with a problem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The provision of homework.• Reports about pupils' progress.• Provision of extra-curricular activities.

Parents are correct in their view that this is a good school. Inspectors strongly support the positive views expressed by parents. They do not agree with the views about reports, homework and the provision of extra-curricular activities expressed by a few parents. Reports about pupils' progress are usually informative and helpful. They show parents and pupils how well pupils are doing and what they need to do to improve. An appropriate number of consultation evenings is held for parents to discuss pupils' progress with teachers. In respect of homework, this is usually of good quality and suitable amount. Homework plays an important part in pupils' good achievement. The provision of extra-curricular activities in this small, rural school is good and wide-ranging, although transport difficulties sometimes hinder the participation of pupils in some events.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils achieve well. Their results in GCSE examinations are above the national average.

1. Pupils' attainment when they join the school at the age of 11 is usually average. In each of the past three years, pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 in the National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science was close to the national average.

2. Boys and girls both make at least good progress during their time at the school. This good progress is shown by the above average, and sometimes well-above average, results in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations taken at the end of Year 11. In 2000, the school received the School Achievement Award from the then Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in recognition of 'the substantial improvement in results achieved by pupils between 1996/1997 and 1999/2000'.

3. By the end of Year 9, pupils increase their levels of attainment more than would be predicted from their attainment at the age of 11. In two of the past three years, for example, pupils' results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science were well above the national average. In the other year, 2000, pupils gained above average results in mathematics and science, but, as a consequence of lower than usual standards of literacy, results in English were below average. In 2001, pupils' results in the national tests were above the average attained by similar schools, as defined by the proportion of pupils entitled to receive free school meals. The improvement in the school's results in these national tests over the past five years is better than the improvement nationally. Over this same period, boys' results have been consistently above the national average for boys and girls' results have been consistently above the national average for girls.

4. This good progress by boys and girls of all backgrounds and levels of prior attainment continues so that results in the GCSE examinations taken at the end of Year 11 represent good achievement. In two of the past three years, GCSE results overall were above the national average and, in 2000, they were well above the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE results at grades A*-C and the proportion gaining grades A*-G in 2001 were both well above the national average. They were above the average achieved by pupils in similar schools. Because the school entered an appropriate number of pupils in 2001 for only a few GCSE examinations, the total average points score per pupil matched, rather than exceeded that attained by similar schools. GCSE results for 2001 were further distorted by the underachievement of a small number of pupils who joined the school during Years 10 and 11. Over the past five years the school's results in GCSE examinations have improved faster than the national trend. The above average proportion of pupils who gained GCSE grades A* or A in many subjects in 2000 and in 2001 indicate that pupils who are gifted or talented obtain good results.

5. Standards of work seen in classes in Years 7 to 11 and in scrutiny of pupils' work are similar to those attained in external examinations recently. Pupils are making good progress and producing work that is above average. In a few subjects, such as science, art and design and modern foreign languages, standards of work seen were well above average and represent very good achievement.

6. In 2001, girls obtained well above average results in GCSE examinations in nearly all subjects. Boys gained above average results in most subjects although their results in design

and technology were well below average. Pupils' best results in recent times have been gained in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and also in art and design, geography and French. In 2001, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C was well above average in English, mathematics and science. When compared with pupils' prior attainment in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9, these results represent very good achievement in mathematics and science and good achievement in English.

7. Pupils of all levels of attainment achieve well in English in all years because they are keen to do well and the teaching is good overall. The good and effective management of the English department has helped to raise standards, particularly through the improved teaching of literacy in the department and through raising the expectations of teachers and pupils to suitably high levels. The main reason that achievement is good rather than very good in English is that a few teachers provide insufficient opportunities for pupils to extend their knowledge and understanding of topics through engagement in group activities, investigative work and discussions and debates of the work. As in nearly all subjects, the very good relationships between the teacher and the class and pupils' very good behaviour contribute positively to good learning.

8. Attainment in mathematics improves as pupils move through the school because teachers have high expectations of pupils of all levels of attainment. The regular practice of mental mathematics and the provision of teasing puzzles stimulate pupils' motivation and interest in the subject. Pupils know what is expected of them in mathematics lessons. They make good progress because the work is carefully sequenced and planned well to build on previous knowledge. The work encourages pupils to use and apply their mathematical skills. Teachers assess pupils' work and progress frequently and effectively so that underachievement is quickly spotted and acted upon. The use of short-term targets for learning and constant feedback to pupils about how well they are doing and how they can improve have helped all pupils, particularly the boys, to work well. Teachers have a very good awareness of the requirements of the external examination syllabuses and provide pupils with very good guidance about how to tackle examinations.

9. Standards in science have improved substantially in recent years. Pupils' attainment in science, as measured by the results in external examinations, represent very good achievement at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11. The main reasons for pupils' well above average attainment are teaching that is good, imaginative and sometimes outstanding, and very good use of assessment to review progress and to set targets for individual pupils. The frequent and regular tests at the end of each topic and the careful use of questions from past papers keep pupils informed about their progress and sustain their interest. The regular monitoring of pupils' exercise books to check on pupils' progress helps to detect underachievement quickly. The department provides pupils in all years with a very good booklet to guide and aid their learning. Parents have written to the school to express their appreciation of the science department's very good attempts to get pupils to achieve the highest possible standards. Parents of pupils in Year 11 are particularly appreciative of the extensive targeting of pupils and the special programme of revision in science that is set up after the GCSE mock examinations. In many of the science lessons and in extra-curricular activities such as the science 'drop-in' club, pupils learn very well because the teachers and support staff create a sense of enjoyment and fun, without losing rigour.

10. Pupils' very good achievement in modern foreign languages illustrates the success of the department's strategies to encourage pupils to work independently. In the lessons observed in French and German, pupils were actively involved in their own learning. Teachers have high expectations for pupils' attainment. As a result, the school enters an above average proportion of pupils for GCSE examinations. In recent years, GCSE results in French have been well above the national average, with a good number of candidates attaining the highest grades of A* and A. Although girls' attainment overall is higher than that of boys in modern foreign languages, the department's strategies for raising boys' achievement is meeting some success. The grouping of classes so that they contain roughly similar numbers of boys and girls, improved procedures for assessing work and checking progress and the considerable increase in the use of ICT have a positive effect on the learning of boys as well as girls. Recently, the best GCSE results obtained by pupils taking two modern foreign languages have been by boys. Pupils of low attainment make good progress on the certificate of education course. Pupils enrich their experiences and extend their learning in modern foreign languages through participation in a very good programme of extra-curricular events such as trips and exchange visits to continental countries, use of E-mail to communicate with schools in France and Spain and participation in a project with design and technology that is sponsored by the European Union of Countries.

11. GCSE results are very good in art and design and in geography. In 2000 and in 2001, a large proportion of pupils attained grades A* and A in both subjects. Standards are high in these two subjects because the teaching is often very good, expectations are high and the schemes of work focus on helping pupils of all levels of attainment to achieve their best. Pupils receive plenty of encouragement to do well. The arrangements for monitoring pupils' work provide all pupils with appropriate and personal guidance on how to improve.

12. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in most subjects and gain good results in GCSE examinations. They benefit from the good help from classroom assistants or support teacher and receive work that is carefully matched to their needs. The few pupils who are at an early stage of learning English are making good progress as a result of the specialist support they receive. The achievement and progress of pupils of ethnic minority heritage match that of other pupils.

Good teaching enables pupils to achieve well.

13. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection. The proportion of very good teaching has increased and it occurred in about one third of the lessons observed. The quality of teaching and the quality of learning are good throughout the school. A small amount of excellent teaching was seen. Unsatisfactory teaching was observed in two lessons. Throughout the school, teaching is good in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Parents are justified in their view that the teachers have high expectations and provide good care and support for pupils' academic and personal development.

14. Teaching is effective in meeting the needs of pupils of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs, including those with statements, has improved considerably since the previous inspection. It is now good because, in most lessons, pupils receive work that is suited well to their capabilities. Pupils of low attainment and motivation in Years 10 and 11 have responded very positively and are making good progress on the certificated course of vocational studies. They enjoy this course because it has a strong practical element, involves much work in ICT and is taught very well. The use and deployment of support assistants are effective in helping pupils with special educational needs in all years to make good progress. The good and sensitive use of suitably detailed and informative individual education plans by teachers in all subjects

ensures that pupils with special educational needs work at a good pace, maintain interest in their work and feel an integral part of the class. Pupils with behavioural difficulties receive close attention and sympathetic support from teachers and support assistants that enable these pupils to achieve well and avoid potential disruption of other pupils' learning.

15. The teaching of pupils who are gifted and talented has also improved and is now good. The school recognises that further work is needed to ensure that not only are all the gifted and talented pupils clearly identified but also that each department makes appropriate provision for the differing needs of these pupils. In some subjects such as art and design, science, mathematics and modern foreign languages, pupils who are gifted and talented frequently receive very challenging investigative, research or creative activities that extend and deepen their understanding of the subject. Extra-curricular activities in subjects such as physical education and music often provide events and activities that push the highest attainers to their limits.

16. The very few pupils who are at an early stage of learning English make good progress as a result of a small amount of specialist support and the close care and attention they receive from subject teachers and particularly the staff in the special educational needs department. Some of these pupils make sufficient improvement in their reading skills that by the time they are 15 they act as 'reading buddies' to provide good help to enable pupils in Year 7 who have reading difficulties to improve their reading.

17. Pupils achieve well because they make good and sometimes very good progress in most lessons. They consolidate their knowledge and develop their understanding of work in many subjects through completion of homework that is good, but varies overall from very good to satisfactory. In geography, for example, homework is a very important factor in pupils' high achievement. Pupils in a Year 10 class in geography were prepared well by the teacher for the relevant and suitably demanding written task to be completed at home on investigations into food-management schemes. That homework was of suitable difficulty for pupils of all levels of attainment in the class. By contrast, pupils of a wide range of attainment in a Year 7 English class, in which the teaching and learning had otherwise been good, were all set the same task of colouring in a picture and listing five facts learned about Shakespeare and The Globe Theatre. This task was of insufficient challenge for the highest-attaining pupils in the class.

18. Teachers in all subjects encourage pupils to work hard. Pupils respond very positively to teachers' high expectations. Pupils present their work well. Most teachers mark pupils' work well so that pupils know how well they are doing and how they can improve. Pupils' very good behaviour and their very positive attitudes create a good climate for learning in nearly all lessons. Accordingly, when given the opportunity, pupils work well as individuals, in pairs and in groups to develop their skills of independent learning.

19. Teaching is good because teachers use their good knowledge of their specialist subject to give pupils the confidence that they can do well. In many subjects, for example in mathematics, science, art and design, geography, modern foreign languages and music, teachers' very good success in enthusing the pupils helps to account for their very good progress in lessons. The particular strengths of the teaching across subjects is that in nearly all classes, teachers have high expectations of pupils, manage their classes very well and make effective use of time, resources and support staff. As a result, pupils usually receive work that is of appropriate difficulty and interest. A further contributory factor to pupils' good achievement is the good knowledge that the specialist teachers have of their pupils. Teachers in this small school know the personal and social backgrounds and circumstances of pupils. They make increasingly effective use of the school's good arrangements for assessment to determine accurately how well pupils are doing and to set suitable targets for

improvement. In subjects such as mathematics, teachers frequently use the results of assessment or marking to adapt their programme of teaching to deal with underachievement or misunderstanding. This good practice helps pupils to develop their basic skills in the subject and prepares them well for examinations.

20. Some of the features that made some lessons very good, namely the active involvement and participation of pupils in their own learning, the careful structure of the lesson, the provision of a wide variety of teaching and learning methods, including the effective use of paired and group work, were not always prominent in the good and satisfactory lessons. In all of the very good lessons, the programme of work was planned well so that pupils very quickly knew what work was to be done, why and how it should be done and where it was leading. In these lessons, the teacher made sure that pupils had fully understood previous work and provided a good variety of stimulating, interesting, suitably difficult and carefully timed activities to make pupils think for themselves. These lessons contained frequent checks on how well pupils were progressing and usually ended with a relevant and rapid revision of what had been learned in the lesson. These features were present in many of the lessons seen in science, mathematics, geography and modern foreign languages.

21. An example of such activities leading to very good learning was seen in a science lesson for high attaining pupils in Year 11 dealing with the topic of water balance. The lesson contained a good range of activities that included very clear explanations by the class teacher, very good discussions about the work among pupils, stimulating practical activities and a very effective plenary session in which pupils reinforced their knowledge and understanding of the work done. The teacher had planned the lesson very well so that pupils of all capabilities, including the small number with special educational needs, made very good progress. The teacher's very effective explanation of the process of ultra-filtration in a kidney tubule helped pupils to gain a very good understanding of the re-absorption of important molecules into the blood system. Pupils then applied their knowledge of previous work to explain how the body controls the concentration of water in the bloodstream. The teacher successfully encouraged pupils to use their previously completed work on homeostasis to explain accurately how to detect the concentration of water in blood through the switching on and off of the anti diuretic hormone. Pupils were fascinated and very motivated by the practical activities in which they carried out investigations on three samples of mock urine to determine which represented urine from a diabetic person and which indicated faulty functioning of the kidneys. Pupils showed that they have been taught very well over time by their competence and confidence in using their knowledge to devise tests to identify samples and to make good predictions about a person's medical and other characteristics. The enthusiasm of the teacher was transferred to the pupils. This generated a very positive atmosphere in which the pace of learning was rapid throughout the lesson. Pupils enjoyed the challenges posed and worked at full stretch. The teacher's high expectations were rewarded by the pupils demonstrating a willingness to think for themselves and to apply their knowledge to solve problems of increasing complexity. Pupils worked very well because they saw the relevance of what they were doing. They prepare themselves very well for GCSE examinations by keeping very good notebooks to aid their revision.

22. Pupils acquire good skills, knowledge and understanding in the different subjects. They improve their basic skills of literacy, ICT and numeracy. The teaching of literacy is good in English lessons. The teaching of numeracy skills is good in mathematics. Pupils use their good mathematical skills to satisfactory effect to assist their work in many subjects. Most teachers have acquired good skills in ICT. As a result, pupils receive some good opportunities to use their ICT skills to good effect to develop their work in many subjects. In a very good lesson in music, for example, pupils of all levels of attainment in a Year 9 class

used a computer program very well to experiment and to improve their musical compositions to illustrate film themes.

The good leadership of the headteacher is an important factor in the school's good improvements since the previous inspection.

23. The good leadership and management of the headteacher have been the key factors in the school's good improvement since the previous inspection. Her contributions to the rising standards of attainment and the good quality of education are particularly valuable. At best the head teacher receives good support from members of the senior management team. This team has benefited particularly from recent appointments. Under the strong and positive leadership of the head teacher, considerable improvements have been made in the quality of work of heads of department which is now good and in a few instances, very good.

24. The headteacher has been largely responsible for the improved procedures for evaluating the school's performance and planning for improvement. The outcomes of these procedures are good. The school has developed a self-evaluating culture. The work of the governing body has improved since the previous inspection as a result of training. Governors now have a satisfactory awareness of the school's strengths and the areas for development. Governors and staff concentrate suitably on raising achievement, assisting pupils' all-round personal development and seeking improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Suitably challenging targets are set for pupils' and all departments' performances in external examinations, after a careful study of pupils' prior attainment and other relevant assessment data.

25. The previous inspection report identified eight key issues for the school's attention. Through the determination and commitment of the headteacher and the effective work of heads of department and pastoral leaders, improvement on seven of the eight key issues is good. The one issue that remains as unsatisfactory is that, despite improvements and a generally good quality of assemblies, the school still does not meet statutory requirements for the provision of a daily act of collective worship.

26. One of the most important key issues was to improve the attainment of boys. The school has succeeded in raising their attainment. This is evident in the GCSE results in the past three years, which have been above the national average for boys whereas GCSE results were below the average for boys in both 1997 and 1998. The headteacher constantly reminds staff that boys can do better still. She tries hard to convince staff not to underestimate the academic potential and attitudes to learning of boys. Teachers no longer use the excuse that boys' underachievement is due to some boys not having the motivation to work at their studies because they know they will work on the farm when they leave school. Currently, the differences in the attainment of boys and girls are similar to the national differences. Staff have benefited from good programmes of in-service training that have given them the confidence to try out different methods to help boys to improve. In many subjects, the practice of sitting boys next to girls has resulted in boys concentrating well in class. The setting of short-term and clear objectives and the use of a good range of different methods of teaching and learning have helped boys and girls to improve their standards. Teachers now make good use of assessment to track the progress of all pupils and to set suitably challenging targets for boys and girls. One of the reasons that the gap between the attainment of boys and girls has not narrowed more is that the strategies to raise boys' achievement have also succeeded in raising girls' attainment even higher.

27. Good improvements in the work of heads of department, which had previously been of an inconsistent quality, have contributed well to the school's successes. Heads of department and heads of year are more effective in monitoring standards of work because

the headteacher has successfully encouraged them to be more accountable for the work of their areas. These middle managers are now effective in their managerial duties, including monitoring and evaluation of departmental work, because they are actively involved in decision-making. Good reviews of job-descriptions have improved management and accountability in recent years. The introduction of performance management has helped heads of department to develop their managerial skills. The considerable improvements in standards in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science occurred following the appointment of new heads of department in these subjects. In all three subjects, the heads of department have carried out effective revisions to the curriculum and extended the range of teaching methods used. They have also succeeded in raising standards through increasing the expectations of teachers and pupils.

28. In respect of other points for improvement identified in the previous report, the school has continued to develop work that is suited well to the pupils' capabilities. Pupils of low attainment and those with special educational needs receive work of suitable difficulty and interest. Most subjects provide work of sufficient challenge for the highest-attaining pupils, as indicated by the above average proportion of GCSE results at the highest grades of A* and A in 2000 and in 2001. Regular reviews of the curriculum have led to the introduction of more appropriate courses for pupils of lower attainment such as the certificated vocational courses in Years 10 and 11. The provision of ICT has improved considerably. However, because teachers have improved their competence and confidence in using ICT to enhance teaching and to extend pupils' learning, pupils do not always have sufficient access to ICT facilities. Standards in design and technology, an area of weakness previously, have improved. Girls now attain well above average GCSE results in design and technology, but the results of boys vary considerably from above average in 2000 to well below average in 2001. The management of pupils' behaviour has improved through a more consistent application of the school's policy to encourage pupils to behave well. Clear guidelines for dealing with anti-social behaviour are in place. The school succeeds in promoting the social inclusion of pupils of all backgrounds as shown by pupils' very good behaviour in classes and around the school. Pupils now have more opportunities to undertake responsibilities. Discussions with pupils indicate that they value such activities as form and school council representatives. The system of 'reading buddies' enables older pupils to exercise responsibility in assisting younger pupils to develop their reading skills and to develop their social skills.

The quality of education in art and design is a strength of the school.

29. The art and design department is one of the school's outstandingly successful areas both in terms of academic attainment and in respect of the positive influence of the work of the department on the overall quality of education. Standards in art and design are very high because the quality of teaching is very good. Sometimes it is excellent. The teachers share good practice very effectively and team-teach from time to time. Pupils improve their work as a direct result of teachers' very good implementation of very effective and innovative procedures for assessing pupils' work in Years 7 to 9. The local education authority recognised the very good outcomes of these arrangements for assessment and use them as exemplars for other schools.

30. The enthusiasm and commitment of staff ensure that the subject is a popular choice for study at GCSE level. Results in the GCSE examination are consistently high. The proportion of pupils entering the GCSE examination in art and design is above average. The proportion of pupils attaining grades A*-C is usually well above the national average. Pupils of high attainment perform very well in art and design as shown by one third of the candidates in 2001 attaining grades A* or A in the GCSE examination. Boys attain as well as girls in art and design. Pupils achieve very well in art and design because the schemes of work build well on previous work and contain activities that pupils find relevant and interesting.

31. Pupils enhance their learning in art and design through a good range of art activities outside the classroom. The quality of display of pupils' work in art is very good. Not only does it provide a considerable lift to the general environment of the school but it also serves as a motivation to other pupils to achieve their best in the subject. Pupils produce very good work in ceramics that is displayed prominently around the school. This very good quality of work reflects the particular specialism of the head of department and inspires many pupils to seek high standards in art and design. Teachers make very good use of financial help from the New Opportunities Fund to provide excellent programmes of enrichment. For example, the Wednesday evening classes attract members of the community as well as pupils and are well attended. Currently these classes are conducted by practising artists in silk painting, sculpting and ceramics. Several pupils attained a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at Key Skills Level 2 through the department's work-related programme run in conjunction with a local firm. Many pupils extend their experiences in art by attending workshops at the West Midlands Show. Saturday morning clubs are run by outside artists for pupils of primary school age. These help to provide pupils with a positive attitude towards the subject before they join the school and underline the teachers' commitment to their subject.

Pupils' very positive attitudes to their work create a good environment for learning.

32. In all subjects, pupils make a very positive contribution to their own achievement through their very good behaviour and a responsible and mature approach to learning.

33. The large majority of pupils behave very well and come to school ready to learn. Relationships among pupils and between pupils and staff are very good. Pupils know that the school expects them to work hard and to achieve well. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and successfully promote the social inclusion of pupils of all backgrounds. Pupils improve their self-esteem and become confident learners as they move through the school. In this small school, staff know their pupils very well so that pupils feel safe and secure. In many classes, pupils' very positive attitudes to work enabled all pupils to learn well. This was particularly evident in many of the lessons in which much of the work was carried out in pairs or small groups. In these classes, teachers knew that they could give their undivided attention temporarily to one group of pupils, confident that the other groups in the class would continue to work well.

34. Pupils' very positive attitudes to school are reinforced by very effective personal support and guidance from the teams of experienced tutors and heads of year. Pupils value the system of mentoring, particularly when it is used to counter underachievement. Good formal and informal communication among staff ensures that they are aware of the needs and successes of individual pupils. Pupils respond very well to the school's caring approach. They show their enthusiasm and very positive attitudes to school through good attendance and considerate and courteous behaviour. They have a commitment to work hard to achieve high standards, display tolerance and respect for the feelings of others and show a readiness to cooperate well with each other and with their teachers. They willingly engage in the wide range of school activities.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Boys attain much lower GCSE results than girls in design and technology.

35. In 2001, girls' results in the GCSE examinations for design and technology were significantly above the national average. The school enters an above average proportion of girls for the GCSE examination. In 2000, more than seven out of every ten girls entered for the examination gained a pass at grades A*-C. This proportion rose to just over nine in every

ten girls entered in 2001. The proportion of girls gaining GCSE results at grades A* or A in design and technology rose from four in every ten in 2000 to five in every ten in 2001. In both 2000 and 2001, girls gained higher grades on average in design and technology than in the other GCSE subjects that they sat.

36. In sharp contrast, although boys' GCSE results in design and technology were above average in 2000, with more than five out of every ten pupils entered gaining grades A*-C, boys' results in 2001 were well below average. The school enters a higher than average proportion of boys for the GCSE examination in design and technology but, in 2001, less than three boys in every ten entered gained a pass at grades A*-C. The proportion of boys attaining A* or A grades fell from one in ten in 2000 to one in fifty in 2001. On average, boys attained very much lower GCSE results in design and technology in 2001 than in the other subjects they took.

37. Boys' standards in design and technology have been lower than those of girls partly because the accommodation in resistant materials, graphics and electronics, which are the subjects studied by many more boys than girls in Years 10 and 11, is inadequate. Standards in these subjects have also been adversely affected, until recently, by the shortage of qualified teachers in graphics and electronics.

38. Senior staff have recognised the need to improve standards in design and technology. They have developed good plans for action that have raised standards in the subject overall. The improved accommodation for food technology, for example, has played an important part in raising standards in this subject, which is taken by many more girls than boys. However, boys have not matched the very good improvements made by girls in raising attainment since the previous inspection. In classes observed, the indications are that boys' attainment in design and technology is improving. The arrival of a new head of department just over a year ago has resulted in some important changes. Teachers are now able to teach their own specialist part of the subject. The previous lack of expertise for the teaching of electronics had a detrimental effect on standards. Because boys have attained weaker results at GCSE examinations in design and technology over the years than in their other subjects, their attitudes towards the subject have not been as positive as they are towards other subjects. Boys and girls for the most part choose their courses for Years 10 and 11 on traditional lines. Very few girls follow courses in resistant materials or electronics. Very few boys study food or textiles technology. Girls have benefited from teaching at GCSE level that is often very good. Until recently, standards attained by boys on GCSE courses have been below expectations, particularly when aspects of the course such as graphics or electronics have been taught by non-specialist teachers in ill-equipped rooms. GCSE results in graphics were weak because the subject did not have an appropriate base in which to operate and there was a shortage of suitably qualified teachers. The good support provided by the head of department and effective use of in-service training have improved the quality of teaching and pupils' learning in graphics.

39. The department is developing suitable strategies to improve the performance of boys. The monitoring of pupils' progress in the subject has improved. Teachers have accumulated more and relevant data about pupils' work and potential in the subject. They look carefully at how pupils are performing to try and detect and correct underachievement. Teachers recognise the need to raise the status of the subject, particularly among the highest-attaining boys. Appropriately, the courses taught in Years 7, 8 and 9 are being amended in order to generate more interest among boys and girls in the courses in resistant materials and control systems. Teachers are aware of the need to create a better balance of boys and girls in classes in the different subject areas within the department. The recent introduction of the certificated vocational course in Years 10 and 11 has enabled several pupils, mainly boys, to increase their competence in practical work. The allocation of a teacher of high status in the

school to teach this vocational course has helped to raise standards and improve the motivation of these low-attaining pupils.

40. As a sign of its commitment to raise standards for boys in design and technology, the school is using its own funding, together with some financial support from the local education authority, to upgrade two of the workshops in the near future. The intention is to create a more attractive area for design and technology with a greatly increased provision of ICT equipment. The lack of such good facilities hinders the learning, especially of boys, in design and technology. The work carried out by the head of department in the short time he has been at the school indicates a capacity and a commitment to move the department further forward.

Pupils of below average attainment make satisfactory rather than good progress in developing their reading and writing skills.

41. Pupils enter the school with standards in reading and writing that are average overall and range from well above average to well below average. Pupils who have average or better skills in literacy develop their reading and writing skills well in most English lessons and make good use of these skills to assist their work in many subjects. Pupils with below average skills in literacy satisfactorily improve their skills in reading and writing in English lessons and, where appropriate, through the good support of staff in the special educational needs department. The school's records of improvements in pupils' reading ages show that in Years 7 to 10 many of the lower-attaining pupils increase their reading ages satisfactorily. These pupils make satisfactory rather than better progress in reading and writing in many subjects because the school does not monitor closely enough the teaching of literacy to ensure consistency of approach and application.

42. Much good work to promote pupils' literacy occurs in subjects such as art and design and personal and social education, for example, through the prominent display and very effective use of key words to improve pupils' spelling and vocabulary. In a very good lesson in geography, the teacher provided good guidance to pupils in Year 10 about writing techniques and emphasised the importance of the selection of material and the concise handling of it.

43. However, scrutiny of pupils' work in several subjects revealed an inconsistent approach among teachers to the marking and correction of common spelling errors. In some books, particularly of lower-attaining pupils, spelling errors were not pointed out to the pupils. The written work in literature of lower-attaining pupils was sometimes superficial and brief, indicating little beyond an elementary understanding of the plot. In classes in which teaching was less than good, teachers missed opportunities to encourage pupils to read aloud and did the reading themselves. In many classes, teachers provide good guidance and suitable prompts for pupils to present their written work well but, in other classes, pupils do not receive such help. In a few classrooms, teachers make little use of key words to consolidate pupils' learning. In one of the English classes seen, the written work of some pupils of below average attainment was not as good as it should be. In this class, although pupils' writing was fluent, it lacked accuracy in punctuation and spelling and was not organised or presented well.

44. Pupils of all levels of attainment make insufficient use of the library to develop their reading, writing and research skills. The library is not a particularly welcoming area for pupils. Its position as a potential through-route to other classrooms restricts its use. The amount and range of books are satisfactory but many of the books are in poor condition and need replacing.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

45. The school has a suitable awareness of its strengths and the areas for development. In order to improve standards further the school should continue its work on the following issues.

- (1) Raise boys' attainment in design and technology so that boys' results in GCSE examinations in design and technology are as good as their results in other subjects by:
 - improving the curriculum in all years so that boys and girls have equally good learning opportunities in the subject;
 - increasing the provision and use of ICT;
 - upgrading the accommodation for resistant materials, graphics and electronics.(Paragraphs: 28, 36-40)

- (2) Improve the reading and writing skills of pupils of below average attainment by:
 - ensuring that all subjects contribute fully and in a consistent way to the development of pupils' skills in literacy;
 - monitoring teaching to check that all subjects use the methods consistently;
 - evaluating across all subjects how well the methods of teaching literacy are helping these pupils to improve.
 - Improving the quality of resources in the library and encouraging pupils to make good use of them.(Paragraphs: 41, 43, 44)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	49
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	31

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	2	14	23	8	2	0	0
Percentage	4	29	47	16	4	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	577
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	36

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	17
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	103

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	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	11

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1

National comparative data	8.1
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National comparative data	1.1
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Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	63	59	122

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	39	44	48
	Girls	51	45	49
	Total	90	89	97
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	74 (58)	73 (72)	80 (76)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	34 (13)	57 (48)	55 (37)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	43	43	49
	Girls	51	45	47
	Total	94	88	96
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (67)	72 (72)	79 (67)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	36 (30)	51 (43)	47 (30)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	49	54	103

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	22	47	48
	Girls	41	51	53
	Total	63	98	101
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	61 (64)	95 (98)	98 (99)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results	GCSE point score
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Average point score per pupil	School	42.1 (43.7)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	574
Any other minority ethnic group	1

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	2	3
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 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	35.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	102

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	70
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.0
Key Stage 4	22.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	1 583 818
Total expenditure	1 611 629
Expenditure per pupil	2 813
Balance brought forward from previous year	340 306
Balance carried forward to next year	312 495

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	5

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	577
Number of questionnaires returned	89

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	40	52	8	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	44	52	1	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	27	61	6	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	67	9	1	3
The teaching is good.	25	71	1	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	64	11	0	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	55	42	2	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	45	54	0	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	25	65	9	0	1
The school is well led and managed.	37	60	1	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	28	61	1	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	27	55	9	1	8