

## **INSPECTION REPORT**

**SACRED HEART OF MARY GIRLS' SCHOOL**

UPMINSTER

LEA area: Havering

Unique reference number: 102354

Headteacher: Mrs B Williams

Reporting inspector: Mr R Peter J McGregor  
3525

Dates of inspection: 19-22 September 2000

Inspection number: 223979

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:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Girls
School address:	70 St Mary's Lane Upminster Essex
Postcode:	RM14 2QR
Telephone number:	01708 222660
Fax number:	01708 226686
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr M O'Riordan
Date of previous inspection:	November 1994

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
3525 Mr R Peter J McGregor	Registered inspector
19653 Mrs Elizabeth Dickson	Lay inspector
2496 Dr Tony O'Sullivan	Team inspector
24142 Mrs Sylvia McConville	Team inspector
25073 Mr Stuart Jordan	Team inspector

The inspection contractor was:

Qualitas Education Consultants Limited  
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
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>6</b>
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	
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	<b>18</b>

## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Sacred Heart of Mary is a Voluntary Aided Roman Catholic comprehensive school for girls aged 11-19, with 811 on roll. It is about the average size for secondary schools. Up to 10% of girls can be allocated places at the school as a result of their musical ability. Other pupils enter the school as a result of meeting the governors' entry criteria. All applicants are invited to attend an interview to discuss the admissions criteria and the child's suitability for the religious character of the school. A very small number of the pupils at Sacred Heart speak English as an additional language; none are at the early stages of learning English. Of the 36 pupils on the school's register of special educational needs, 31 are at the lower stages 1 and 2. The proportion of such pupils is well below average, as is the number with Statements. 5.5% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, below the national average of 18%. Judgements made in this report may refer to similar schools: these are schools where between 5% and 9% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. Entry standards, as indicated by tests taken early in Year 7 for the past five years, are above average. Girls travel to the school from several parishes, some a fair distance from the school. The areas from which the girls come represent a broad range of social and economic backgrounds.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

The girls attain high standards in academic work because of their own endeavour and the good quality teaching. Their achievements are very good. Behaviour is excellent and their personal development is outstanding. A small minority of teaching needs to improve as does the monitoring of teaching and learning, but the care and support provided for the girls are of the highest quality. The school is very well led by the headteacher. The sixth form is cost effective and school administration and systems are most efficient. The school provides very good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- GCSE results in 1999 were in the top 5%, compared with similar schools nationally; results were very good in maths, history and classics, and current standards of work are equally high
- A-Level results in 1999 were well above national averages
- The girls' behaviour is excellent; they are very confident and extremely happy, making excellent use of the many opportunities provided
- In about two in every five lessons observed the teaching was very good or excellent, resulting in girls making very good progress in their work
- Staff promote an excellent educational environment where the girls learn to appreciate the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of their lives, helping greatly with their personal development
- Leadership and management are very good

#### **What could be improved**

- The quality of teaching in a few observed lessons was not good enough, resulting in girls underachieving

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

Sacred Heart of Mary was judged to be a very good school when inspected in 1994, and this is true today. Good progress has been made in most areas of school life, which has maintained or improved upon what was achieved then. Exam results have increased substantially. The proportion of girls gaining five A\*-C passes at GCSE has increased from the high figure of 71% in 1994 to 91% in 2000, and the average grades at A-level

have improved from three Cs to two Bs and a C. The quality of teaching is better with fewer, but still some, unsatisfactory lessons. A weakness which persists in one or two lessons is that teachers 'dominate'. The culture of girls' 'compliance' no longer applies. The small amount of underachievement has largely been eliminated as a result of the school's work in target setting and an emphasis on the success of individual girls. Some subjects remain much more successful than others, however, because of variation in the quality of teaching. The curriculum has been reviewed and restructured, and the time allocation for music and art for girls aged 11-14 is now substantial. Computers are now used well in many subjects. The breadth and choice of subjects at GCSE and the sixth form have been extended and are very good. The caring yet demanding approach of the staff helps ensure outstanding personal development for the girls, who behave very well, work hard and have great confidence in their own abilities. Their understanding of a range of cultures is now very good. The fairly new headteacher has maintained the management strengths, with the support of her senior team and governors, and is aware of the relative weakness in the quality of monitoring of teaching and learning. Good progress has been made in all four of the key action points of the last report.

## STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A	A*
A-levels/AS-levels	A*	A	A	

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

In this report, the term 'standards' refers to pupils' attainment relative to some clear national benchmark, such as national curriculum levels or descriptions, or GCSE grades. 'Above average' standards, for example means that a higher proportion of pupils of a particular age are succeeding at or beyond the level set than in the majority of schools. 'Achievement' on the other hand, reflects the accomplishments of pupils in relation to what you would expect of these particular pupils. The pupils' prior attainment, what they can already do, is the reference point for pupils' achievement.

GCSE and A-level exam results have been very high for several years. The A\*s in the table above mean that the school's performance was in the highest 5% of all state secondary schools. In 2000, 91% of the girls gained 5 A\*-C passes, improving on the 80% figure for 1999 which resulted in the 'A' grade above. The trend of improvement in GCSE grades is greater than the trend of improvement nationally. Over the past two years the highest standards have been in mathematics, history, and classics. The weaker subjects have been science, geography and Italian. At A-level, the girls' average grades of two Bs and a C in 1999, compared with a national average of three Cs, have been maintained in 2000. Some of the A-level groups were small and results not comparable, but girls achieved particularly well in English literature, classical studies and business studies and not so well in economics and general studies.

Attainment of the girls currently in Years 10 and 11 is very high and their achievements are very good, as a result of their own endeavour and effective teaching. The Year 13 groups are attaining standards well above national expectations. Their exam results are likely to be similar to those achieved in the past two years. The Year 12 AS level groups have a large number of high attaining girls just starting on their courses, but standards overall are broadly similar to national standards and lower than in Year 13. This reflects solely the

new entry policy for the sixth form whereby girls can follow an AS course with a C grade at GCSE in that subject. The entry requirement was a grade B for a number of the A-level courses Year 13s are studying. The achievements of girls in the sixth form are very good.

In Year 9, the attainment of 14 year-olds in national assessments in English, maths and science has been well above average in recent years. Improvements in standards at this age, however, have been less than the improving national trend. In 2000, English results improved greatly over those of 1999, the proportion gaining level 6 increasing from 48% to 97%. The proportion gaining level 6 also increased in maths, from 63% to 74%, and in science, from 40% to 63%, but science results are lower than the other two core subjects. Girls currently in Year 9 are attaining at a similarly high level to those who took the national tests in 2000. Science standards are high but remain lower than the English and mathematics. The girls' achievements, overall, are very good, but not as good as those of the older pupils. Some younger girls are still learning how to work and make the most of their lessons.

The school's targets for attainment in 2000 – including 83% to attain five A\*-C passes at GCSE – were exceeded in most areas, and the girls are likely to get higher results in 2001 than the target of 84% gaining 5 A\*-C.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Exceptionally good in all years. Girls are enthusiastic, capable learners who thoroughly enjoy their school lives.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Girls respond quickly and quietly to instructions and are invariably courteous and polite.
Personal development and relationships	Of the highest quality. Around school, unsupervised, girls know they are trusted and respond positively to this. Responsibilities taken very seriously; girls learn from their older peers. Girls have great confidence and pride, without arrogance.
Attendance	Above average, much improved from last year; very little unauthorised absence

The girls want to do very well. They respect one another and all the staff, and believe they are fortunate to be part of a strong, successful community, where learning is enjoyable. The growth in the girls' personal development during their school careers is abundantly clear in the change from the lively and demanding 11 year-olds to the mature, secure and very successful sixth formers.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Overall, the quality of teaching observed was good, with several significant strengths and few weaknesses. 93% of observed lessons were satisfactory or better, 40% were very good or excellent, and 7% were



unsatisfactory. The high proportion of very good and excellent teaching, and of good or better teaching (74%), is a major factor in the high standards and very good achievements of the girls. The quality of teaching of English and maths was very good, particularly for A-level English. Science teaching was sound with a number of strengths but also one or two weaknesses. Girls of all capabilities benefit from the teaching and learn very effectively. Their listening skills are particularly good, improving progressively through the school.

Teaching strengths included very high expectations of what could be achieved, rigorous questioning, clear and effective explanations, and involvement of girls in lessons. The girls' response to challenging and interesting work was excellent participation and an enjoyment of learning. Where teachers were enthusiastic about their subject, the girls responded in like manner. In less effective lessons, teachers sometimes spoke for too long and lesson ends were rushed, resulting in passive, unquestioning learning. The small number of girls with special educational needs are taught well and make good progress.

The skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening and number work are taught very effectively within specialist English and maths lessons, with the result that the pupils use them well in a range of subjects. Opportunities to read, with a good focus on new technical vocabulary, to discuss and to write in different ways, are provided in most subjects. Sometimes grammatically incorrect spoken English goes unchecked. Teaching of numeracy skills receives little emphasis in subjects other than maths.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Broad and balanced with a very good range of academic subjects throughout the school. Meets all statutory requirements. An excellent range of extra-curricular activities and clubs available and good careers education. Good overall.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good, with very good aspects. Girls' educational needs assessed thoroughly. Expert staff provide good support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Outstanding. Opportunities provided for girls to reflect in very good lessons and assemblies. The extremely strong Christian ethos permeates all aspects of school life. Girls taught to distinguish between right and wrong through personal examples of staff and senior girls. Encouraged to care for one another and to take on responsibilities. Many different cultures celebrated.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Quality of pastoral and academic care very good indeed. Highest standards of behaviour expected of all. Girls' performance monitored; they are set targets to improve. Good assessments made of girls' achievements, but not all data used as well as it could be to improve teaching and learning. All staff aware of the importance of child protection issues.

11-14 year-olds have a good personal and social education course as well as two modern languages, and Latin or classics. Increasing time for creative subjects in this age group means the time for English, mathematics and science is at the minimum. Few vocational courses are offered but the number of GCSE and A-level subjects has been increased in response to demand. Some class sizes, particularly for ages 11-14 and in the sixth form are very large, over 30 and 16 pupils respectively, as a result of staffing, accommodation and time-tabling constraints. Arrangements for grouping girls in mixed ability classes, sets and bands is effective for most subjects but not for all years in science.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides very clear direction and strong leadership, with good support from key staff. School managed most effectively and very efficiently. The school's aims and mission statement are central to all its work.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. Statutory responsibilities fully met. Governors involved in and knowledgeable about school life. They hold the school to account for what is achieved and see the school focus as achieving high standards in a caring Christian community.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Senior managers and heads of department monitor the quality of teaching and learning. This is having some good results but is less effective than other areas of management. Good data available, indicating pupils' capabilities and attainment, not yet used to best effect. Great commitment from senior staff and governors to improve further.
The strategic use of resources	The school development plan thorough and useful, indicating clear priorities for improvement and the resources needed now and in the future. Very good use made of staff, equipment and accommodation available.

The school responds to the needs of the Catholic community which it serves, consulting formally and informally with the various interest groups, such as teaching and non-teaching staff, parents, and the girls themselves through their school's council. National and local data is used to make comparisons although not all staff are fully aware of this information. The school is extremely careful to ensure that the funds available are used to the best effect for the girls' education.

## **PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children like school and make good progress</li> <li>• The school helps children to be mature and responsible, and behaviour is good</li> <li>• Teaching is good, with high expectations</li> <li>• The school is well managed and led</li> <li>• The good range of activities outside lessons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A small number of parents believe too much homework is set</li> <li>• A small number believe children's reports, and communication between staff and parents, could be improved</li> </ul>

Nearly half the parents returned questionnaires about the school expressing great satisfaction with what is provided and what their daughters achieve. Inspectors agree with the parents' extremely positive views of the school. Sometimes a substantial amount of homework is set but many girls appreciate the opportunity to extend their studies and achieve the highest standards through this work. No evidence was found to support the view that communications could be improved or that reports were weak.



## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

**GCSE results in 1999 were in the top 5%, compared with similar schools nationally; results were very good in maths, history and classics, and current standards of work are equally high.**

**A-Level results in 1999 were well above national averages.**

1. The schools' examination results at GCSE and in the sixth form have been very high for several years. The proportion of pupils gaining five A\*-C passes at GCSE has increased from 71% in 1994 to 80% in 1999 and 91% in 2000. The figure for 2000 is very high, reflecting the successful target-setting process and additional support provided for girls to help them achieve examination success. Nearly all girls have achieved five A\*-G passes for the past five years. The average points target of 58 points for each girl in 2000 was exceeded and the trend of improvement in GCSE grades is greater than the trend of improvement nationally. When compared with schools that have a similar proportion of free school meals – socio-economic data that correlates well with pupils' attainment levels - the school results were in the top five percent of schools nationally when using five A\*-C, five A\*-G or one A\*-G statistics. GCSE grades at Sacred Heart of Mary can be compared with schools that achieved similar key stage 3 results – an average points score in the range 36 to 39 for the three core subjects in 1997. This value-added data indicates that the 1999 results at five A\*-C were above average, well above at five A\*-G and very high for girls gaining one A\*- G. All these measures indicate that the school is very successful in achieving well above average GCSE grades. Attainment of the girls currently in Years 10 and 11 is very high and their achievements are very good, as a result of their own endeavour and effective teaching.

2. Over the past few years the highest standards have been in mathematics, history and classics. Key contributors to this success are very successful department management, where the focus has been on teaching, learning and achievement, and consistently good quality teaching. In mathematics, for several years, time has been set aside in lunchtimes and after school to provide extra lessons for girls who find work difficult, or those who want to improve their GCSE grades. Where it is thought girls would benefit from coming to these sessions, it is always suggested that they should attend. Staff in many subjects in the school now provide this support, which is much appreciated by the girls. For example, a group taking GCSE technology was observed attending an after school 'club' where pupils practised the skills they had learnt in lessons.

3. The weakest subjects have been science, geography and Italian. The school is aware of the relative success of girls in different subjects, and departments are working hard to improve the situation. No subject is weak; it is just that some are less successful than others. Staffing difficulties have been a major contributory cause in science and Italian; variation in teaching standards is the other significant factor. Standards observed in geography during the inspection were higher than those indicated in previous GCSE results. Effective and consistent teaching has brought about this improvement. In science, the quality of teaching, although sound overall, did not always meet the needs of the girls and hence standards are a little lower than they could be. The school provides good access to two modern foreign languages, both Italian and French. It is one of a relatively small number who offer Italian as a national curriculum foundation language.

4. In a Year 10 textiles lesson, the girls evaluated the results of their own machine embroidery designs with detailed and very knowledgeable support from the teacher. Skills were practised and each girl knew what further work was needed to achieve higher standards. Attainment was very high. A mathematics lesson for a Year 11 top set involved solving simultaneous equations. The skill and practice session, following extremely thorough yet sensitive explanations from the teacher, resulted in all the girls being successful - they enjoyed the lesson. Attainment was again very high and the girls' books showed that challenging work had been set over time. A class of Year 11 girls in an English lesson achieved very highly for their abilities, as a result of being challenged continually by the teaching and because of their own individual endeavour. Standards were

above average. All girls had a good grasp of the motives of the characters in the texts being studied. This lesson exemplifies how the school is assisting such high numbers of girls to gain C grades or better at GCSE.

5. Inspection of girls' work shows detailed and well-presented written tasks of consistently high quality, which are thoroughly marked. Homework is set and marked regularly. The girls take great pride in their books, knowing that they will be important for future examination success.

6. At A-level, the average grades of the girls at Sacred Heart of Mary have been two Bs and a C for the past five years, whereas nationally the average result is three Cs. The high standards achieved by the small number of girls taking vocational courses in the sixth form has been maintained for several years. Some of the A-level groups were small and results are not comparable, but the girls achieved particularly well in English literature, classical studies and business studies and not so well in economics and general studies. Standards are high overall, for similar reasons to the high GCSE results, namely: very well motivated girls who want to do well, and knowledgeable, committed teachers who have high expectations. The Year 13 groups are attaining standards well above national expectations and their exam results are likely to be similar to those achieved in the past two years. A Year 13 classical civilisation lesson exemplified the high standards observed in several subjects. In work on Aristophanes, involving reading a play, the girls displayed very effective skills in summarising elements of the speeches they had read, following good interpretative teacher comment. The work developed from the girls' well-prepared homework. The girls and teacher together then discussed what would be taking place in the next lesson. Standards were above those expected in an A-level set. Girls' written work in Year 13 was of a very good standard and substantial in quantity.

7. The Year 12 AS level groups have a large number of high attaining girls just starting on their courses, but standards overall are broadly similar to national standards and lower than in Year 13. This is a reflection upon the new entry policy into the sixth form, not the girls' achievements or the teaching, which are very good in both Years 12 and 13. A number of the girls currently starting on AS courses in Year 12 have GCSE C passes in their chosen subjects, whereas the entry level was grade B for a number of the A-level courses the Year 13s are following. Girls in a Year 12 biology lesson, just two weeks into their course, worked extremely hard to understand and learn the biochemistry of some quite complex three-dimensional molecules. The high attainers in the very large class grasped the principles involved and succeeded in building the required models, although others, working at the limit of their understanding, found the work too complex and failed to gain a sound knowledge in the time available. This problem was resolved through the provision of tutorials for any girl who had struggled, in the teacher's own time. Standards across the full grade range are likely from this class, with an average standard below the grades achieved in biology in 2000.

**The girls' behaviour is excellent; they are very confident and extremely happy, making excellent use of the many opportunities provided.**

**Staff promote an excellent educational environment where the girls learn to appreciate the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of their lives, helping greatly with their personal development.**

8. In the lessons observed, and around the school during breaks and the lunch period, the girls' attitudes and behaviour were excellent. The school promotes an ethos of tolerance and care but also one where school rules are accepted and applied for the benefit of all in the school community. It is this ethos, which follows from the approach of the staff, that results in the girls' excellent behaviour and attitudes.

9. In Year 7, the girls who had been in school for just two weeks were lively and not always immediately obedient. They were extremely happy and enthusiastic, however, and very pleased to have gained a place at Sacred Heart of Mary School. Older girls in key stage 3 have retained their enthusiasm for learning and enjoyment of school life but were much more discerning and responded quickly to teachers' instructions. Girls in key stage 4 and the sixth form showed great maturity and very high-order personal development. Girls were not cowed or submissive; the school ethos promotes the reverse. Girls are expected to be challenged in

their learning and to challenge their teachers - in a courteous and considered manner - and this they do very successfully. Around the school, girls offer help to visitors, such as the inspection team, most politely and the older students, aware that they are role models for the younger girls, provide an outstanding example. In the sixth form common rooms at break time and in the lunch hour, where space is very much at a premium, the girls enjoy themselves but in a restrained manner, aware of the impact of their actions on others.

10. The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is of the highest standard because all staff subscribe to the same excellent code of conduct. The positive attitudes to learning and outstanding personal development of the girls are a direct consequence of this approach.

11. A strong Christian ethos permeates the school. Assemblies are carefully planned with relevant themes, appreciated by the girls. During the inspection, the value of the family was the central tenet of the week's collective worship. The girls were encouraged to participate and to reflect upon what they had heard in the various, high quality whole-school and house assemblies. The sense of community was reinforced on these occasions. For example, the girls were asked to consider the feelings within a family when a close family member dies. All involved in assemblies had a strong expectation that everyone would behave respectfully and show reverence. There were also occasions in English, particularly through poetry, and in art and music lessons, when the girls were asked to think about the world beyond their immediate environment. Cultural development, which was identified as a weakness six years ago is now a significant strength. Work in English, art and music celebrates a range of cultures. Several school exchanges enable the girls to experience Italian, Greek and French life for themselves and many opportunities are provided to enjoy aspects of more local life, through theatre trips and other visits.

12. Moral and social values are implicit in many aspects of school life. As well as striving for personal success, the girls raise large sums for a range of charities, which they select themselves. They learn what is right and wrong, not just because they are told this, but because issues are debated in personal and social education lessons, girls present their own ideas in assemblies and through discussions in groups such as the school council. The excellent relationships throughout the school both between pupils, and between pupils and staff, ensure that problems are resolved quickly and in the best interests of all concerned. The school's council is seen to be effective by most of the girls as it has had an impact on their lives. Recently, vending machines have been installed and receipts from sales are earmarked for improvements in facilities. Soap dispensers have been placed in the WCs and steps built down to the netball courts as a result of the girls' requests. These changes show them that they have a voice and that they will be heard. Many clubs and activities are provided by staff at lunchtime and after school, and the girls themselves continue to initiate new ones, gaining the support of a member of staff where necessary. Music and sports activities are well represented in the list. Lower sixth girls are attached to forms in Years 7, 8 and 9. The younger girls enjoy speaking with their older peers, and aspire to carry out this task when they reach the sixth form. House noticeboards, displays questioning gender and race misconceptions, and other information displayed around the school, all contribute to the sense of a school community where appropriate social and moral values are important.

**In about two in every five lessons observed the teaching was very good or excellent, resulting in girls making very good progress in their work**

13. Overall, the quality of teaching observed was good, with several significant strengths and few weaknesses. 93% of observed lessons were satisfactory or better, 40% were very good or excellent, and 7% were unsatisfactory. Of those lessons observed, a much higher proportion of very good and excellent lessons was seen in key stage 4 and the sixth form than in key stage 3. About half were of the highest quality for the 14-18 year-olds, compared with about a quarter for the 11-14 year-olds. The high proportion of effective teaching overall is a major factor in the high standards and very good achievements of the girls at GCSE and A-level.

14. The quality of teaching of English and mathematics observed was very good. For example, in an A-level English lesson for Year 12, only two weeks into their AS course, swift transitions between activities ensured that a very good pace was maintained throughout the fifty minutes. Small group work, where the girls worked out the meaning of a John Betjeman poem, was carried out confidently because the teacher emphasised that there were no right or wrong answers. All in the large class were immersed in their discussions and perceptive, very good answers came from high attainers. The teacher asked challenging questions of individual girls in their working groups, deepening their understanding. The teaching engaged the interest of the girls as well as their intellect, resulting in enjoyment and excellent achievement. The homework set followed on from the lesson, reinforcing points learnt. In a second equally good A-level English lesson, for Year 13, clear instructions and group work again resulted in very good pace and the teacher's approach motivated the girls to maximise their efforts. The teacher's preparation for the lesson on Othello was exemplary and her subject knowledge was used to very good effect. Here too the girls' achievements were excellent because of their own commitment to high standards as well as the high quality teaching skills.

15. High expectations such as these were also apparent in several other subjects. In a Year 10 mathematics set, calculating 'highest common factors' and 'lowest common denominators', technical language was used confidently by the girls, with frequent checks on their understanding made by the teacher – "What does the word factor mean?" The girls had learnt the definitions of the terms used and applied their knowledge with great diligence. Number skills were emphasised throughout the lesson. As girls worked on exercises reinforcing their knowledge, the teacher questioned their understanding and provided additional problems for early finishers. When some girls failed to comprehend particular points, several more explanations were given, using different approaches, until the concept was clear. Girls' achievements were excellent and they also enjoyed the challenging work. The high quality of explanations, the excellent relationship between the teacher and class, and teacher enthusiasm were key elements in the success of the lesson. A geography lesson on plate tectonics for Year 8 started with a thorough review of the girls' homework, discussing points with which they had had difficulty. The supportive manner in which this was carried out resulted in a very good start to the lesson. Teacher knowledge was again very good which enabled all the girls' questions to be answered thoroughly and authoritatively. The pleasant but challenging style maintained the pace throughout the lesson and learning was very good.

### **Leadership and management are very good**

16. The headteacher provides very clear direction and strong leadership, with good support from key staff. There is a great commitment from senior staff and governors to improve standards still further. The progressive improvement in GCSE grades over several years, maintaining high standards at A-level, and the positive response to the issues raised in the last inspection report are an indication of the school's appropriate priorities for action and their success in achieving them. The school development plan is a good document enabling all to see the targets, the action necessary and the criteria by which success will be measured.

17. Governors play an important and active role in school life. The committee structure and regular meetings, with regular reports and briefing papers from the headteacher and finance staff, as well as visits to the school, ensure that they are involved in holding the school to account for its actions as well as assisting in shaping the future direction. Progress in working towards the priorities in the school development plan is regularly reviewed. Relationships between governors and staff are professional and very helpful.

18. The school's mission statement and explicit aims and values are reflected in all its work. A particular strength is its commitment to good relationships amongst all staff and girls, and equality of opportunity for all the girls. This stems from the leadership of the headteacher which, although clear and firm, is fair and friendly.

19. Management responsibilities are effectively delegated and understood. The senior team work very well together, showing complementary skills. Finance, pastoral support for staff and girls, administration and

curriculum development are all managed with the clear intention of maintaining school strengths and improving standards. Several heads of department are very effective managers and leaders, working extremely hard to enable girls to achieve their potential. Clubs and extra lessons are provided and schemes of work guide staff through national curriculum and examination syllabuses. Work is scrutinised to assess compliance with the school's assessment procedures. In the best practice, regular staff meetings focus on teaching and learning approaches, resulting in consistent and high quality teaching. Some department meeting minutes, although informative, emphasise administration rather than teaching and learning information.

20. A good start has been made in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning of all staff, involving a programme of visits by senior managers and heads of department. The headteacher is aware that this is an area for further improvement. The current form used to record lesson observations results in 'ticking boxes' where threshold levels have been achieved. It lacks an overall judgement on the quality of the teaching and its impact on the girls' progress and attainment. The lack of consistent standards amongst all in the evaluation process results in variation in threshold judgements. The school generates, and has access to, a substantial amount of performance data, on pupil entry levels, inter-subject comparisons at key stage 3, GCSE and A-level. The headteacher interviews all heads of department each year to discuss this data, but the school is aware that this is another area needing further development. The plethora of information is now such that clear guidance is needed on what is important and necessitates interpretation and application.

21. Financial management is excellent. Audit reports are positive and indicate that practices are effective and efficient. Departments bid for resources each year based on their needs and senior managers ensure that an equitable distribution of the available finance is made. This results in good resources, well used. For example, information and communication technology facilities have greatly improved since the last report and are well used. Staff are very effectively deployed, making use of their specialist expertise. The headteacher retains a teaching commitment, which is appreciated by the girls and teaching staff. Other senior managers have a substantially lower teaching commitment than in other schools, which does have an impact on class sizes, although they make good use of their non-contact time. Overall very good use is made of the staff, equipment and accommodation available.

## **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

### **The quality of teaching in a few observed lessons was not good enough resulting in girls underachieving**

22. Weaknesses in teaching observed were far outweighed by strengths but, where problems did occur, girls' achievements were less than they should have been. Senior managers are aware of the differences in the quality of teaching and a current priority is to improve the quality of the school's teaching and learning monitoring procedures.

23. In a design and technology lesson introducing GCSE project work, very good relationships were apparent at the start of the session but excessive teacher talk led to fidgeting and loss of interest. Planning was clear but the practice was dominated by the teacher. The teacher's apparent good subject expertise was wasted and girls learnt barely sufficient from the lesson. In one or two other lessons, in a range of subjects and mainly in key stage 3, the teacher talk dominated to too great an extent and the girls were insufficiently involved. In a GCSE geography lesson with a number of strengths, including a clear and effective start and an emphasis on important technical vocabulary, the lesson lacked challenge because the girls were recipients of the lesson rather than involved in it. Girls in a key stage 3 English lesson, reading a short story, worked co-operatively together and with the teacher, but opportunities for them to read aloud were not taken. Teacher direction and closed questions restricted initiative. The approach resulted in a rather hurried end to the lesson.



24. Although the quality of teaching of science was sound overall, with a number of strengths in several lessons, some weaknesses were also observed. Girls were enthusiastic about science, particularly practical work, but interest waned when teachers spoke for too long. Opportunities to predict outcomes to practical work were not always taken and the ends of lessons were rushed when practical work started late, giving insufficient time to draw the lesson together. When a published textbook was used as the basis of a Year 8 lesson, expectations were not clear and the pace of work was rather slow resulting in an ineffective end. One or two lessons were insufficiently well prepared and explanations did not provide high attainers with good answers.

25. Some classes and sets are very large, with over thirty pupils in key stage 3 classes and over 16 in A-level groups. Teaching in such classes, particularly where the spread of ability is wide, is very demanding. It is difficult to provide the help and guidance required to meet the needs of high and low attaining pupils in such large groups. Individual teachers have found their own answers to resulting problems, for example by using their non-contact periods for sixth form tutorials, and lunch and after school times for main school extra lessons. These extremely professional responses put great pressure on staff but ensure that the girls are effectively taught. The school has employed a full-time learning support assistant to provide additional help for lower attainers.

26. Sometimes grammatically incorrect spoken English goes unchecked by teachers in lessons. A number of the girls tend to say “we done” and “I done” and similar constructions, but these are not usually corrected. Such oral language hardly ever appears in written work, which is thoroughly marked with helpful constructive criticism where mistakes are made. Teaching of numeracy skills although very effective in mathematics lessons did not receive a focus in other subjects, where use was made of numbers, rather than any teaching of numeracy.

## **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

27. In order to raise standards further the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- (1) improve the quality of teaching in a small number of lessons. Key points include:
  - reduce the extent to which teachers talk at girls in lessons, thereby increasing their involvement
  - in science, prepare lessons more thoroughly and ask girls to predict outcomes to experiments before carrying them out
  - ensure that ends of lessons are not rushed and are used to draw together what the girls have learnt
  - review class sizes, particularly AS groups in the sixth form, and ensure that teaching quality is not suffering where class sizes are large
  - provide sensitive, constructive criticism of girls' standards of oral English, ensuring that incorrect grammar is corrected
  - make greater use of opportunities that occur to teach numeracy in a range of subjects.

Improvements in the quality of monitoring of teaching, currently in hand, will enable the excellent practice which exists to be identified and replicated and individual teaching weaknesses to be supported and resolved.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### *Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection*

Number of lessons observed	59
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	28

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7	33	34	19	7	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

### *Information about the school's pupils*

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7- Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	638	173
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	15	6

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 - Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	35	1

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	9
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	7

### *Attendance*

<b>Authorised absence</b>	%
School data	7.0
National comparative data	7.9

<b>Unauthorised absence</b>	%
School data	0.1
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	127	127

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	117	113	110
	Total	117	113	110
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	92 (98)	89 (89)	87 (90)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	48 (64)	63 (64)	40 (64)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	121	118	126
	Total	121	118	12
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	95 (98)	93 (90)	99 (91)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	67 (67)	59 (64)	80 (65)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

Percentages in brackets refer to 1998, 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	119	119

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	0	0	0
	Girls	95	118	119
	Total	95	118	119
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	80 (79)	99 (99)	100 (100)
	National	47 (45)	91 (90)	96 (95)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	54 (59)
	National	38 (37)

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

### Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	0	66	66

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	0	22	22 (22.1 )	0	0	0 (0)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

Figures in brackets refer to 1998, the year before the latest reporting year

### Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	33
Black – African heritage	7
Black – other	0
Indian	10
Pakistani	9
Bangladeshi	3
Chinese	3
White	734
Any other minority ethnic group	12

### Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	2	
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	1	
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)	50.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16

FTE means full-time equivalent.

#### Education support staff: Y7– Y13

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	212

#### Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72.2
---	------

### Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
----------------	-----------

	£
Total income	2474450
Total expenditure	2460253
Expenditure per pupil	3087
Balance brought forward from previous year	105387
Balance carried forward to next year	119584

**Average teaching group size: Y7- Y11**

Key Stage 3	26.0
Key Stage 4	21.3

***Results of the survey of parents and carers***

**Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	811
Number of questionnaires returned	331

**Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	67	29	3	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	67	27	1	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	70	26	0	1	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	49	43	5	0	3
The teaching is good.	63	33	1	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	54	36	4	0	5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	65	30	2	0	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	85	13	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	52	39	5	0	3
The school is well led and managed.	74	23	1	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	72	25	0	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	58	32	3	1	5

A small number of parents believe too much homework is set, and that children's reports, and communication between staff and parents, could be improved. Comments made by parents overall, however, were extremely

positive and supportive of the school. Parents are very pleased to have gained a place for their daughters at Sacred Heart of Mary.