

INSPECTION REPORT

HOLLY LODGE HIGH SCHOOL

Smethwick

LEA area: Sandwell

Unique reference number: 104018

Headteacher: Mr Julian Souter

Reporting inspector: Ms Margaret Julia Goodchild
15918

Dates of inspection: 14 – 17 February 2000

Inspection number: 187082

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 - 16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Holly Lane
Smethwick
Warley
West Midlands
Postcode: B67 7JG

Telephone number: 0121 558 0691

Fax number: 0121 558 6136

Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs Gillian Billington

Date of previous inspection: February 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
Margaret Julia Goodchild	Registered inspector
Angela Smith	Lay inspector
Declan McCarthy	Team inspector
John Godwood	Team inspector
Carmen Rodney	Team inspector

The inspection contractor was:

The Cambridgeshire Partnership
Business Centre
Suite 2
St John's Court
East Street
St Ives
Cambridgeshire
PE17 4PD

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Holly Lodge High School is a community comprehensive school with 1048 boys and girls on roll. Pupils come from an area noted for its social and economic disadvantage, and over 40 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above the national average. However, pupils' attainment on entry to the school is even lower than this figure indicates. Many pupils enter the school with low reading ages and results from end of Key Stage 2 tests that are exceptionally low even when compared with schools where over 50 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school's intake is ethnically diverse, with the majority being of Asian heritage, and the percentage of pupils for whom English is an additional language is very high compared with schools nationally. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, 36 per cent, is well above the national average and the number of pupils with statements of special educational need has almost tripled since the last inspection.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Holly Lodge High School is a very effective school, which encourages all pupils to achieve to the best of their ability. Pupils respond wholeheartedly to the high expectations promoted by the dynamic leadership and high quality teaching. This results in a vibrant community with learning as its focus and the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Excellent leadership by the headteacher and senior managers unites staff and pupils in raising standards.
- Teaching is very good and has improved significantly since the last inspection.
- Pupils are active, effective and enthusiastic learners.
- The analysis of assessment information, together with challenging targets for further improving examination results, underpins very good academic progress.
- The combination of very good provision for personal development and pupils' positive attitudes promotes optimum achievement.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced with some excellent features.
- Comprehensive systems support pupils' academic and pastoral needs.

What could be improved

- Although pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall, there are some shortcomings in the central co-ordination of special educational needs.
- There is potential for raising standards still further by ensuring that all lessons contain those features found where teaching is at its best.
- The statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils is not met.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good improvement since its previous inspection in February 1996. There has been a substantial improvement in the quality of teaching, with a significant increase in the amount of very good teaching, standards have continued to rise and the school offers a wider range of opportunities to its pupils.

The school has made excellent progress in recognising and celebrating the range of cultures represented in the school and has established very good provision for the development of multicultural awareness. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) has been extended and much development has taken place in this area; the school is firmly committed to continued development of its facilities and in the application of ICT to learning. A much wider range of teaching methods is now evident and schemes of work include strategies for challenging high attaining pupils. Although many teachers match work to the learning needs of all pupils, tasks are not always suitably matched to the needs of lower attainers. The school's aims and departmental handbooks now include a statement on spirituality, with expected inclusion of a spiritual dimension in schemes of work. The school recognises that further development is needed in order to fulfil the statutory requirement to provide a

daily act of collective worship for all pupils. There have been some revisions to the central organisation of provision for pupils with special educational needs and the level of staffing and resourcing to support pupils with special educational needs has more than doubled. However, individual education plans were introduced only quite recently and are not yet having the influence they should on teachers' practice. The central organisation of provision for pupils with special educational needs remains an area for development. The health and safety issues identified in the last inspection report have been addressed, a safety group has been established and regular risk assessments are undertaken.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	D	E	E	A

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

The school's results have improved since the last inspection and the attainment of boys has risen, bringing the difference between the performance of boys and girls in line with the difference nationally. At the end of Key Stage 3, test results are well below those for all maintained schools – with the exception of English in 1997 and 1999 - but above those for similar schools. Results in Key Stage 3 teacher assessments are consistently higher than the school's test results, reflecting the language difficulties many pupils with English as an additional language experience in written examinations. Pupils' spoken knowledge and understanding in some lessons is markedly higher than that indicated by the school's examination results. At GCSE, results are below those for all schools nationally but the average point score per pupil is well above that for similar schools; the GCSE results in science are outstanding and those in mathematics are well above results for schools with a similar intake. Pupils gain some of their best results at GCSE in geography and history, and at GNVQ in business studies.

The school's central focus is on raising standards and it is working very well towards meeting the challenging targets it has set itself. Assessment data is used very effectively to track progress and to eliminate any underachievement. Pupils achieve very well when their prior attainment is taken into account and the 1999 GCSE results showed excellent improvement on the same pupils' Key Stage 3 results. Higher attaining pupils are encouraged to fulfil their potential and are well served by the climate of high expectations. Thirty-five pupils gained 8 or more A* to C grades at GCSE in 1999. Those of average attainment frequently perform better than their prior attainment would suggest. The school makes effective provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language and the majority make very good progress; those who are at an early stage in acquiring English make good progress overall and achieve particularly well when they are given intensive individual or small group support. Lower attainers and those with special educational needs make good progress because of high quality subject teaching across the curriculum. The results of different ethnic groups vary somewhat from year to year but pupils of Indian heritage generally achieve the best examination grades.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
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Attitudes to the school	Pupils have very positive attitudes, appreciate the opportunities the school provides and many show an obvious enjoyment in learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is almost always at least good, frequently very good and behaviour in lessons is at times exemplary. Pupils generally get on with their work with a minimum of supervision.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils flourish in the racially rich and harmonious community, and relationships are founded on mutual trust and respect.
Attendance	Attendance is broadly in line with the national benchmark of 90 per cent and shows gradual improvement.

Pupils' very positive attitudes and orderly behaviour contribute significantly to the progress that they make. They are proud to be a part of a harmonious and positive community, and they are quick to identify the school's many strengths. A growing maturity is evident as they move through the school so that they respond very well to the many opportunities that the school provides for them to take responsibility and to acquire self-discipline.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

High quality teaching has a very positive impact on learning and on the progress that pupils make. Teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons seen; it was at least good in 81 per cent of lessons; it was very good and at times excellent in 43 per cent. At Key Stage 4, teaching is of a particularly high quality: it is at least very good in 50 per cent of lessons. Teaching in English and mathematics is good, being somewhat better at Key Stage 4. Teaching in science is very good overall and much of it is excellent at Key Stage 4.

The school is largely effective in meeting the various needs of its pupils, and teachers use a range of strategies to engage and motivate pupils. They exploit the use of speaking and listening skills in virtually all lessons and plan activities so that pupils have very good opportunities to make progress. Teaching is always purposeful and teachers' expectations are high. In the best lessons, teaching is lively and energetic, pupils are challenged to contribute, and skilled use of questioning draws on and extends previous knowledge.

Pupils are given a satisfactory grounding in literacy and in basic numeracy skills. The practice of some teachers draws very effectively on the National Literacy Strategy but there is scope for further development in this area, as recognised by the school's introduction of a language policy. The school has begun to introduce more mental arithmetic activities as a result of the National Numeracy Strategy; some subjects, notably science, design & technology and the GNVQ in business studies, give pupils the opportunity to apply numeracy skills within their learning.

The school successfully conveys to pupils the fact that learning is in their best interests and this underpins their enthusiasm. Pupils are active and effective learners who are prepared to take the initiative, and who focus and concentrate exceptionally well. They research well, develop ideas, and make good use of resource opportunities, including information technology, to explore topics. They work purposefully, whether individually or in groups, and frequently display high expectations for themselves. The commitment to learning by boys is much greater than is found in many schools nationally and this goes some way to explaining the improvement in boys' performance over recent years.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced, with some excellent features. The science curriculum is exemplary; a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities is provided; the school makes very good use of community and business links to extend pupils' experiences.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The quality of teaching in the school as a whole enables pupils with special educational needs to make good, and sometimes very good, progress. However, there are some shortcomings in the co-ordination of special educational needs.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The school provides very well for the majority of pupils who have English as an additional language. It provides well for those who are at an early stage of learning English; they make best progress when they are withdrawn for intensive support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school's very positive ethos makes an excellent contribution to pupils' personal development. Provision for moral, social and cultural development is very good. The requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship is not met, although spiritual development is effectively promoted through some subjects of the curriculum and especially through display.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides a high level of care for the academic and pastoral needs of its pupils; the fusion of these two aspects contributes much to the very good progress that pupils make.

The school curriculum enables pupils to achieve very well academically against their prior attainment and to make very good personal progress. Careful attention is given to meeting the needs of particular groups, so that Latin is available as an additional GCSE and community languages are offered within the option system. There are many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and to extend their horizons, socially, morally and culturally. Procedures for child protection, behaviour management and the systems for monitoring and promoting attendance are excellent. The school provides very good support to pupils when they transfer from primary school and offers them very effective guidance throughout their time at the school.

Whilst pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall, individual education plan targets lack precision, and assessment to diagnose the precise nature of some pupils' learning difficulties is insufficient. Support teachers for pupils with special educational needs and English as an additional language work well in the learning support bases but their role in the classroom is frequently too passive.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher and senior managers provide excellent leadership and management, and have effectively united staff in pursuit of excellence. The headteacher is visionary, dynamic and extremely strategic in the way that he is working to improve the school further.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are well informed about the work of the school. They are involved in developments and fulfil their statutory responsibilities well, with the exception of providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school is very active in evaluating its own performance; a high level of awareness gives rise to continual and systematic development.
The strategic use of resources	The school has some excellent facilities and uses its resources very effectively, including those for information technology, which is a particular priority within the school at present.

The high quality leadership and management provided by the headteacher and senior managers is the key factor in the school's success. The headteacher is aware of the school's strengths and is most perceptive in identifying where there is scope for development. He is very outward looking, whether seeking and obtaining funding for exciting new developments, or involving the school in local and national initiatives. He is especially skilled in directing the school in a way that achieves a shared sense of purpose for staff and pupils. Senior managers are of high calibre and their management ensures that the school's clear aims are understood and that the goal of raising achievement remains central. The school undertakes a great deal of monitoring and evaluation. It has rightly identified the need to involve curriculum co-ordinators now in more formal monitoring, including the monitoring of teaching within their subjects. The school thinks strategically about the use of resources and has begun to address the full principles of best value; some aspects of best value are already in place.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school and it enables them to make good progress. • The school helps their children to become mature and responsible. • The teaching is good and the school expects their children to work hard. • The school is well led and managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents feel that their children do not receive the right amount of homework. • Some would like to be kept better informed about how well their children are getting on. • Some believe the school could work more closely with parents.

Inspectors' findings confirm parents' positive views. Whilst the stated amount of homework set is a little low, homework tasks mostly provide sufficient challenge and there are some excellent homework tasks, particularly in science. The school makes every effort to involve parents and provides regular information about the life of the school and about their children's learning. The curriculum booklets produced for parents of each year group are a very effective means of sharing information with parents. The school is quick to contact parents directly, if necessary, about their children's progress, and communicates with them through a range of reports and consultation evenings. The one area where closer parental involvement would be desirable is in the setting and review of targets in pupils' individual education plans.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Excellent leadership by the headteacher and senior managers unites staff and pupils in raising standards

1. The headteacher and senior managers provide excellent leadership and management, and have effectively united the school in the pursuit of excellence. High quality leadership is the key factor in the school's success, ensuring that staff and pupils alike remain focused on the central aim of raising standards. The headteacher is visionary and dynamic. Since taking up post five terms ago, he has been most perceptive in identifying the school's strengths but also in pinpointing where there is scope for development. A programme of departmental monitoring visits, strong management structures and regular meetings at which the school's progress is evaluated provide opportunities for fine-tuning. The headteacher is very outward looking, whether seeking and obtaining external funding for exciting new developments, or involving the school in local and national initiatives. This has enabled him to build on the development that has characterised Holly Lodge High since it was founded in 1992 from the amalgamation of three former schools. He is also extremely strategic and especially skilled in directing the school in a way that achieves a shared sense of purpose for staff and pupils; this gives rise to high staff morale and a very positive climate for learning.
2. Other members of the senior management team are also of high calibre, providing invaluable support and managing the school very effectively to ensure that its clear aims are implemented. The school is very active in evaluating its own performance, with much detailed analysis, and a high level of awareness gives rise to continual and systematic development. Very good progress has been made since the previous inspection and the school is very well placed to keep up its momentum: a new long-term strategic plan identifies a number of appropriate priorities that should lead to further improvement.

Teaching is very good and has improved significantly since the last inspection

3. High quality teaching has a very direct impact on learning and on the very good progress that pupils make. Teachers are unusually effective in focusing pupils on learning and in gaining their full co-operation. Almost all lessons include a number of important strengths and this is why so much of the teaching is at least good. Lessons are purposeful, appropriately structured, and well organised so that no time is wasted. Tasks are motivating and explanations are clear. Teachers have high expectations and they frequently convey their expectations for learning and achievement within lesson introductions. Behaviour is skilfully managed, with an approach that is confident, caring and supportive, yet firm. Praise is used effectively and an ethos of success is established. Pupils are given regular opportunities to take responsibility, to make choices within their learning, and to work collaboratively. Group work is used to good effect and teachers exploit the use of speaking and listening in virtually all lessons. This provides especially valuable development in communication skills for the many pupils with English as an additional language. Teachers make good and sometimes very good use of resources. They show an awareness of the difficulties of pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language and effectively reinforce previous learning. In many classrooms, colourful displays help to create a positive learning environment.
4. In the best lessons, teaching is lively and energetic. It proceeds at a rapid pace and pupils are invited to contribute as very active learners. This was especially evident in a Year 11 English lesson, where the teacher used whole class discussion to arrive at an in-depth analysis of a poem. His demanding questioning and highly skilled channelling of pupils' enthusiasm created an atmosphere that was nothing short of electric. Pupils showed extreme excitement at the poet's use of language and imagery, and their contributions were of a very high quality despite the difficulty some experience with written English. They revealed a profound awareness of the theme of the poem, the use of symbolism and an understanding of the vital relationship between literary form and content rarely found at GCSE level. Such lessons are founded on exceptionally

high expectations, combined with support and respect for pupils. The setting of high expectations for examination success is a key feature in science where pupils sit the GCSE foundation paper in Year 10. Some of the very best teaching in the school takes place in science and the excellent use of differentiated homework tasks contributes significantly to pupils' progress. Such tasks relate scientific knowledge to everyday experience, require pupils to engage in thought-provoking investigation, and provide a high level of challenge for pupils of all abilities. In very good teaching, skilled use of questioning draws on previous knowledge, as in the introduction to the climate of deserts in a geography lesson, where careful reasoning led pupils to a deeper understanding. Ongoing assessment takes place, as in a Year 8 history lesson when the teacher tested pupils' understanding of the causes of the Civil War, and excellent use is made of assessment information. Resources are extremely well chosen and relevant so that they consolidate pupils' knowledge. Learning objectives are clearly defined and shared with pupils. In the best lessons in English and consistently in science, teachers reinforce basic literacy skills, so that pupils extend their knowledge of spelling rules, key words, and improve reading skills, such as skimming and scanning. In a Year 8 English lesson, the National Literacy Strategy informed very effective use of word level work. In science, excellent attention is given to spelling aloud scientific vocabulary such as 'vertebrae', 'radius', and 'ulna', and use is made of techniques such as mnemonics to facilitate memorisation of scientific knowledge.

Pupils are active, effective and enthusiastic learners

5. The school successfully conveys to pupils the fact that learning is in their best interests and this underpins the enthusiasm that is evident in many lessons. They are exceptionally focused, follow classroom routines sensibly and get straight on when a task is set. They make very good use of the chance to achieve and appreciate what the school has to offer them. They hardly ever waste any time with chatter or through being off task. There is evidence of real enjoyment in learning in the best lessons and at times, - for example in the excellent Year 11 poetry lesson - pupils are 'high' from the sheer exhilaration of learning and the excitement generated by the subject. In most lessons, pupils engage very well with their work, readily answer questions and show interest. The best learning takes place in science where pupils sustain extremely high levels of concentration and take pride in their achievements, showing real understanding of the subject. Pupils almost invariably listen carefully to the teacher and to one another, and they apply intellectual and creative effort. They are totally absorbed in their practical work in music and science to the extent that they become almost oblivious to what is going on around them.
6. Pupils are active and effective learners who are prepared to take the initiative, and concentrate very well. They organise their work effectively, for example using tools and equipment responsibly in design & technology and information technology. They research well, develop ideas, and make good use of resource opportunities, including books and information technology, to explore topics. Many use computers independently. They work purposefully, whether individually, in pairs or in groups, and frequently display high expectations for themselves. They persist when faced with challenge or difficulty, nearly always trying their hardest and seldom giving up. They constantly seek to improve their work, for example in science, checking and re-checking their results in experiments. They present their work well, with a sense of pride and achievement, for instance in GCSE resistant materials and in mathematics coursework. They understand their work and readily explain what they are doing.
7. Particular to Holly Lodge is the high level of participation in learning by boys. Their commitment is much greater than that found in many schools and this goes some way to explaining the improvement in boys' performance over recent years. The school's very positive ethos, its excellent system of behaviour management and the follow up of any slippage of effort means that boys are 'swept along' by the school's expectations. As a result, they frequently show a maturity, sensitivity and self-composure that is not typical of many boys of their age, and apply these qualities to their learning.

Analysis of assessment information, together with challenging targets for further improving examination results, underpins very good academic progress

8. The school's central focus is on raising standards and it is working very well towards meeting the challenging targets it has set for itself. Senior managers analyse a great deal of data to identify the school's strengths and weaknesses, and as part of this, assessment data is used very effectively to track progress and in an attempt to eliminate any underachievement. The extensive academic tracking includes analysis of Key Stage 2 results, reading and other test results, Key Stage 3 assessments, GCSE, and ongoing teacher assessment. Whole school results are analysed by gender, ethnicity and pupils' background. A Key Stage 2 booklet provides good information to teachers on the potential of new pupils and 'assessment sweeps' take place a number of times a year, when each pupil's grades in every subject are circulated for comparison by all who teach them. This enables staff to identify any pupil who is performing less well in a particular subject and is a powerful means of following up any underachievement before it becomes serious.
9. Particularly good practice is evident in science, where each pupil's attainment is recorded regularly on a database arranged by year group. This is checked and printed out on a monthly basis and shared with staff at science meetings. It identifies pupils who are slipping behind and triggers an immediate response so that parents are contacted and invited to attend a meeting with the teacher. Any additional strategies needed to raise achievement of particular pupils are then incorporated into the next topic and inform teaching methods.
10. In the curriculum as a whole, the school is quick to act on any underachievement or relaxation of effort by discussing this with pupils, tutors and parents, then taking appropriate remedial action. Pupils' predicted and target grades are used strategically by the senior management team to raise expectations and to emphasise the importance of value added. Thus, a school with a highly challenging intake and whose results are mostly below the national average, has a tangible means of measuring its success and setting targets to raise standards further.
11. This system contributes much to the very good progress that pupils make. They achieve very well when their prior attainment is taken into account, and the 1999 GCSE results showed excellent improvement on the same pupils' Key Stage 3 results. Higher attaining pupils are encouraged to fulfil their potential and are well served by the climate of high expectations, whilst those of average attainment frequently perform better than their prior attainment would suggest. The school's results have improved since the last inspection and the attainment of boys has risen, bringing the difference between the performance of boys and girls in line with the difference nationally. At the end of Key Stage 3, test results are above those for similar schools and teacher assessments are higher still. At GCSE, the average point score per pupil is well above that for similar schools; the GCSE results in science are outstanding and those in mathematics are well above those for schools with a similar intake.

The combination of very good provision for personal development and pupils' very positive attitudes promotes optimum achievement

12. The school's ethos makes an excellent contribution to pupils' personal development. In return, most pupils enjoy school and are proud to be part of a harmonious and positive community. They recognise that the school has much to offer and, through their response to the school's high expectations, actively perpetuate the ethos that has been established. Pupils' very positive attitudes and their receptivity contribute significantly to the progress that they make.
13. Provision for moral and social development is very good. Staff are excellent role models for pupils, treating them with respect and encouraging them to believe in their own potential. Moral development is underpinned by excellent procedures for managing behaviour and promoting discipline. As a result, behaviour is almost always at least good, frequently very good and in some lessons, it is exemplary. Pupils generally get on with their work with a minimum of supervision and frequently need no reminders of how to behave. Though lively and enthusiastic, pupils also behave in an orderly manner and most are very self-disciplined. As groups and individuals move around the corridors, the atmosphere is both calm and vibrant. Pupils are polite and exceptionally respectful to teachers and one another. Indeed, relationships throughout the school are founded on mutual trust and respect.

14. An emerging maturity is evident, especially as pupils progress through the school, but some pupils even in Year 7 show exceptionally positive attitudes and behave most sensibly for their age. In an excellent personal and social education lesson in Year 7, pupils displayed outstanding attitudes for their age. They were able to discuss the theme of 'vandalism' and showed an excellent understanding of the negative effects such behaviour has on others in society. They engaged in a discussion that showed them to be thoughtful, responsible and sensitive to the feelings of those around them and to the needs of the wider community.
15. The school provides many opportunities for pupils to take part in group work and there are very good opportunities to take responsibility. Pupils act as prefects, they administer the school shop, mentor younger pupils and work in the community. The school council is a further example of the way the school gives pupils the chance to influence developments and the way pupils, in return, show initiative. The school council is run by pupils, with senior staff acting as advisers, and at a school council meeting during the inspection, pupils dealt sensibly with real issues. Members of the governing body attend meetings of the school council and pupil representatives attend governors' meetings as observers. Pupils are therefore actively involved in the school's decision-making processes and this helps them to take on a sense of ownership of developments.
16. Provision for cultural development is very good and pupils flourish in the ethnically diverse and harmonious community. Relationships between pupils of different ethnic origins are warm and respectful, and pupils appreciate the rich cultural mix that makes up the school's population. There has been an excellent improvement in provision for multicultural development since the previous inspection. Pupils are made aware of a range of cultures, as well as celebrating those cultures represented in the school. Displays provide information on different beliefs and traditions, and include religious artefacts and imagery related to a range of festivals. Visual references provide positive role models and celebrate the work of western and non-western artists. The multicultural element within the curriculum is also very strong, for example within science the school extends the range of images and information beyond a Eurocentric view to a world perspective. Pupils are made aware of early astronomy in North Africa and Islamic science, alongside a western approach to the subject.
17. The requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship is not met, but assemblies contribute meaningfully to pupils' personal development. Each assembly during the inspection week, though on the same theme, was very thoughtfully tailored to each year group, and led to a deepening of personal and communal values. In this sense, the assembly theme pointed to an inner life where real values matter. Spiritual development is effectively promoted through some subjects of the curriculum. In English, most especially in the study of poetry at Key Stage 4, pupils have very good opportunities to consider the inner world of the writer, and through art, dance, science, and religious education as well, as through displays around the school, there are opportunities for reflection. Pupils' readiness to think deeply is evident in science, where they reflect carefully on observations before recording results and drawing conclusions. Pupils' projects on religious leaders show that they have an interest in and respect for others' beliefs and values.

The curriculum is broad and balanced with some excellent features

18. The curriculum enables pupils to achieve very well academically against their prior attainment and to make very good personal progress. Careful attention is given to meeting the needs of particular groups, Latin is thoughtfully included as an additional GCSE since it gives access to some important career routes, as well as community languages.
19. The science curriculum is exemplary and gives rise to exceptionally high results at GCSE compared with similar schools. A new curriculum has been developed to ensure continuity and progression across all attainment targets between Key Stages 3 and 4. Each unit contains work matched to different abilities, including extension material for higher attainers, and guidance on homework tasks. There are tailor-made resource banks, including assessment record profiles and essential key vocabulary lists, for each topic. Much emphasis is placed on ensuring pupils gain full understanding of scientific technical vocabulary. To this end, information and communication technology is used very effectively to facilitate understanding of new concepts. There is extensive use both of scientific language through the central focus on practical

investigations and of the Internet and CD-ROMs. Pupils are expected to make use of computers independently as a matter of course, for example, when researching for homework the topic of cystic fibrosis.

20. A wide range of extra-curricular opportunities is provided. There is a large number of lunchtime and after school clubs, including sporting and cultural activities and a lunchtime bank, and there are many other opportunities for pupils to extend their experience outside formal lesson time. Pupils go on visits, for example to the theatre, and residential opportunities have included a study skills weekend, trips to Plas Gwynant Outdoor Education Centre and to Bracelands Camp, and a Latin summer school for those following the extra GCSE option.
21. The school also makes very good use of community and business links to extend pupils' experiences, and collaborates with a number of its feeder primary schools. It is very active in involving local businesses, for example local business people visited the school as part of Year 7 personal and social education, and a number of companies contribute to the GNVQ in business studies, including Cadburys, Restall Bros. Ltd., Senior Flexonics, McDonalds and HSBC. The school has a link with Sandwell Enterprise Centre for careers, personal and social education and English. It also makes use of the Smethwick Enterprise Centre and the Asian Resources Centre. A Muslim community link facilitates Ramadan observance and a Vaisakhi celebration was held in the school. The local community is involved in a summer spectacular event and pupils from local primary schools perform at the Holly Lodge summer music concert. The school has held steel band workshops for pupils from five primary schools and other primary school pupils have attended ceramics sessions at the school. A member of staff in each subject department is responsible for curricular links with the feeder primary schools to support progression from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3.
22. Much progress has been made since the last inspection in improving resources for information and communication technology (ICT) and in implementing the National Curriculum more fully. Procedures for assessment are developing appropriately. There is still a need, as identified by the school, to integrate ICT further into the curriculum but new hardware and expansive new plans (with a recent successful bid) should achieve this and build on existing good practice.

Comprehensive systems support pupils' academic and pastoral needs

23. The school provides a high level of care for the academic and pastoral needs of its pupils. The pastoral programme is seen in the context of academic achievement and it is the fusion of these two aspects which contributes much to the very good progress that pupils make. Pupils are made aware that the school will support them but that by co-operating they will achieve more themselves and allow others to do the same. Procedures for child protection, behaviour management and the systems for monitoring and promoting attendance are excellent. The school provides very good support to pupils when they transfer from primary school and offers them effective guidance throughout their time at the school.
24. Pupils are confident to approach their form tutors in the event of a problem, and year co-ordinators make themselves very accessible to pupils, providing a strongly supportive relationship. At the 'review and guidance day', tutors and pupils have an in-depth one-to-one discussion on the pupil's academic and personal development. Together, tutors and pupils identify targets, which help to motivate pupils and focus their attention. They know that the school is monitoring their progress and that support and guidance will be forthcoming if it is needed.
25. The school's clear code of conduct and firm behaviour management system ensures that pupils feel secure and that they are able to learn without being disrupted by the inappropriate behaviour of others. Pupils say that bullying is rare and that it is invariably dealt with effectively. Pupils also attest that 'there are no racial problems', that this is 'a very good achieving school', and 'one big happy family'. Inspection findings support pupils' views.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Although pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall, there are some shortcomings in the central co-ordination of special educational needs

26. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress as a result of high quality teaching across the curriculum and the attention many subject teachers give to their needs. Moreover, where teaching is very good or excellent, pupils with special educational needs make very good progress along with their peers. Special educational needs provision is well resourced and the special needs base is stimulating, with attractive displays. The level of staffing to support pupils with special educational needs has increased substantially since the last inspection. Teaching within the Enhanced Learning Provision base is very good, and good practice includes the paired reading project and the 'card support' system, which provides additional support to pupils who need help with coursework.
27. There are, however, shortcomings in the co-ordination of special educational needs. The special needs development plan takes insufficient account of recent developments, particularly the Government's Response to the Green Paper 'Excellence in Schools' and National Standards for Special Educational Needs Leadership / Special Educational Needs Specialisms. Important aspects of the special educational needs co-ordinator's role remain undeveloped, although the job description has recently been revised to take full account of the National Quality Standards. Some informal monitoring takes place by the special educational needs co-ordinator through discussion with staff but there is little or no formal monitoring by the co-ordinator of the impact of special educational needs provision on pupils' progress. Whilst support teachers very occasionally engage in team teaching with the subject teacher, and sometimes provide good support, they are frequently involved in mundane tasks or are too passive in subject lessons. There is insufficient diagnostic assessment, for example to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies a pupil uses in reading and spelling, and no error analysis of written work. Diagnostic assessment is not used to determine a pupil's cognitive preparation for learning mathematics, or to identify mathematics learning styles. Individual education plans were formulated only quite recently and are not yet having the impact they should. Individual education plan targets are imprecise and are not set regularly enough to enable small steps of progress to be targeted and measured. The process of setting and reviewing individual education plan targets does not involve parents and the targets are not written by key providers: English and mathematics teachers and form tutors are not involved sufficiently, especially given the large number of pupils on the special educational needs register.

There is potential for raising standards still further by ensuring that all lessons contain those features found where teaching is at it best

28. Teaching is a clear strength of the school and has improved a great deal since the previous inspection. A combination of factors has led to higher quality teaching, including a whole school focus on teaching and learning. Assessment data is used in a way that emphasises for teachers the importance of raising achievement, and attention has been given to ensuring that departmental documentation is of high quality. The headteacher has undertaken a significant amount of lesson observation and his perceptive findings have been communicated to staff. Very good and excellent features are to be found in many lessons and in the vast majority of lessons, teaching is at least good. Whilst no unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection, there is scope within those lessons which are satisfactory for improvements to be made.
29. Although many teachers match work to the learning needs of different pupils, some could take a fuller account of the range of difficulties and differences, especially in mixed ability classes. This was particularly evident when scrutinising samples of pupils' work. In mixed ability classes in English and in some work in mathematics in Year 7, pupils' of differing prior attainment are set work that is identical or insufficiently matched to their different learning needs. The work is generally well suited to the higher attainers and sufficiently accessible to middle attaining pupils but it is at times too difficult for lower attainers and those with special educational needs. Across Key Stage 3, these pupils make good progress – since work begins to be better matched to ability later in the key stage - but within some pieces of work especially in Year 7, their achievement is limited. Marking is at times unduly harsh where pupils of lower attainment or those with special educational needs have been unsuccessful with work that was too difficult for them. For example, a

pupil gaining two out of ten in a mathematics test received harsh criticism, though his work showed that he was trying very hard with all the tasks set for him. Marking in English sometimes includes useful comments but, despite a helpful marking policy, some teachers pay insufficient attention to correcting spelling errors, even where few errors are present in the work of middle and higher attaining pupils.

30. The school has begun to make use of the National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy and some teachers apply the principles from the Literacy Strategy very effectively. There is a lack of urgency, however, in the application of a structured approach to literacy and numeracy within the English and mathematics departments respectively. All teachers where appropriate should incorporate literacy and numeracy into their lessons, embodying the best practice already found in the school and in order better to meet the needs of the pupils. Teachers in English and mathematics are not currently formally involved in the setting of literacy and numeracy targets in pupils' individual education plans; if they were so involved, it is likely that their focus on pupils' precise difficulties would serve to sharpen the practice of some teachers.
31. On no occasion during the inspection did any teacher come near to losing control of a class and most teachers manage pupils' behaviour so effectively that inappropriate behaviour rarely occurs. A small minority of teachers are less skilled, however, at achieving the level of quiet, concentrated working that is the norm in the school as a whole. These teachers have lower expectations for what constitutes an acceptable level of attention or have difficulty in achieving silence before they speak and, so, the quality of learning within their lessons does not quite correspond with that found throughout the school.
32. The school has rightly identified the need to strengthen the monitoring role of curriculum co-ordinators to include more formal lesson observation within their departments. This is important in order to ensure that the very good practice already so evident in the school is disseminated and that any areas for development within teaching are quickly identified and addressed.

The statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils is not met

33. Since the last inspection, where failure to provide a daily act of collective worship was identified as a key issue, the school has undertaken some work to improve the quality of assemblies but pupils still experience only one assembly per week. An assembly is held for a different year group each day and during the inspection, the theme of 'dreams' was carefully adapted for different age groups. Thus, pupils in Year 7 came to understand dreams through quite different visual and verbal imagery from that used with pupils in Year 11. Assemblies therefore connect with pupils much more effectively than is the case in many schools, and assemblies are spiritual in so far as they raise pupils' awareness and help them awaken to what is truly important in life. Each assembly was very effective in identifying the importance of lasting inner values and of care for others over the trivia in which human beings may become lost. They engaged pupils' attention by providing very good opportunities for them to contribute and the theme was made relevant to pupils' own lives. Assemblies stop short, however, at acknowledging the existence of a deity or at providing pupils with any opportunity to pray or silently reflect in a way suggestive of prayer or meditation. They do not, therefore, constitute a collective act of worship although they do make a meaningful contribution to pupils' personal development and to the sense of community and shared values that is so evident within the school.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to build on the school's continuing development and to raise standards further, the headteacher, senior managers and governors should:

- (1) Strengthen the co-ordination of special educational needs, to include:
 - regular formal monitoring of the impact of special educational needs provision on pupils' progress;
 - diagnostic assessment which is sufficiently precise to identify the nature of a given learning difficulty and to inform support;
 - individual education plan targets which are set and reviewed more frequently, are specific and measurable, and actively involve input by English and mathematics teachers and form tutors;
 - the involvement of parents in the setting and review of individual education plans targets;
 - more cost-effective use of support staff, with a clearer definition of the support role where pupils are supported in class.

- (2) Disseminate the very good practice found in much of the teaching in the school and strengthen the formal monitoring role of curriculum co-ordinators to ensure that:
 - set tasks – and the marking of work - are sufficiently matched to the different learning needs of pupils, including lower attainers and those with special educational needs;
 - teachers consistently incorporate methods from the National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy within their teaching and adopt these methods with greater urgency;
 - all teachers have high expectations for behaviour so that pupils concentrate as well in their lessons as they do in other lessons in the school.

- (3) Ensure that the statutory requirement to provide pupils with a daily act of collective worship is met, and extend existing good practice by including a distinct element of worship within all assemblies.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	68
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	20

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
9	34	38	19	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1048	N/A
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	424	N/A

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	30	N/A
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	371	N/A

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	256

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	51
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	23

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.2
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	2.6
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	120	90

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	69	53	38
	Girls	64	40	24
	Total	133	93	62
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	63 (29)	44 (32)	30 (35)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	25 (9)	17 (21)	7 (10)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	56	55	65
	Girls	56	42	45
	Total	112	97	110
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	54 (31)	46 (32)	53 (50)
	National	64 (61)	64 (64)	60 (61)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	20 (7)	17 (15)	26 (20)
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (30)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	123	91	214

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	32	103	112
	Girls	34	82	84
	Total	66	185	196
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	31 (35.9)	86.91 (84)	92.1 (88.1)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7 (93.4)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	30.5 (29.7)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	79
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	11
Indian	404
Pakistani	154
Bangladeshi	121
Chinese	0
White	262
Any other minority ethnic group	14

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	18	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	14	3
Pakistani	7	0
Bangladeshi	1	0
Chinese	0	0
White	13	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	64.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked per week	351.25

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7– Y11

Key Stage 3	24
Key Stage 4	22

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	2512916
Total expenditure	2520082
Expenditure per pupil	2401
Balance brought forward from previous year	68894
Balance carried forward to next year	61727

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1050
Number of questionnaires returned	147

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	52	44	2	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	50	44	3	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	54	35	7	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	48	41	7	4	1
The teaching is good.	54	41	1	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	49	37	11	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	58	33	5	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	82	16	0	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	44	40	12	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	57	35	1	0	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	55	38	3	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	55	32	7	1	5