

INSPECTION REPORT

VICTORIA SCHOOL

Bell Hill, Northfield, Birmingham

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103601

Headteacher: Mr J Kane

Reporting inspector: Mrs J Clemence
22629

Dates of inspection: 4 – 7 June 2001

Inspection number: 189030

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special school for pupils with physical impairment, moderate, severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties, and multi sensory impairment.
School category:	Maintained
Age range of pupils:	2 - 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Bell Hill Northfield Birmingham
Postcode:	B31 1LD
Telephone number:	0121 476 9478
Fax number:	0121 411 2357
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr John Williamson
Date of previous inspection:	April 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
22629	Jayne Clemence	Registered inspector	Foundation stage curriculum	How high are standards How well are pupils' taught? How well is the school led and managed?
9756	Ken Parsons	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
7465	Richard Brent	Team inspector	Geography History Post sixteen provision Equal opportunities	
1358	Glyn Essex	Team inspector	English Religious education Special educational needs	
4989	Lynn Lewis	Team inspector	Personal and social education Music French	
18206	Elizabeth Mildner	Team inspector	Mathematics Physical education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
27234	Ian Tatchell	Team inspector	Art and design Design and technology	
1224	Graham Todd	Team inspector	Science Information and communication technology	How well the school cares for its pupils?

The inspection contractor was:

Serco QAA
Herringston Barn
Herringston
Dorchester
Dorset
DT2 9PU

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33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	12
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	16
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	18
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	21
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	23
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	24
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	28
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	29
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	32

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Victoria School is a large special school, for up to 216 children between the ages of two and nineteen. There is a separate medical facility within the school. All children have some physical impairment, including neuro-motor disorders, and many have additional learning difficulties. These range from moderate to severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. There is also a regional unit for up to 15 pupils with multi sensory impairment, who are both deaf and blind. Elsewhere in the school there are 40 pupils with significant hearing impairment and 50 with significant visual impairment. The school has a nursery, primary and secondary department and the "Round Table Centre" for students between the ages of sixteen and nineteen. In addition, there is a small outreach team to support pupils in mainstream schools. Pupils come from five other local authorities, reflecting the very specialist nature of the provision. At each stage, the school considers the possibility of pupils moving to other types of schools both special and mainstream. 39 per cent of the pupils are from ethnic backgrounds including those from a Pakistani, Indian and Black heritage. 59 per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals- a figure that is very high by national comparison. A small minority of pupils are supported in learning English as an additional language. At the time of the inspection a new headteacher had been in post for just five weeks.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Victoria is a good school with many strengths and several outstanding features. There is a high proportion of good, very good and occasionally excellent teaching, and as a result, pupils achieve well in relation to their special educational needs. The school is well led and managed by the new headteacher, and priorities recently set demonstrate a continued commitment to improvement. The school provides satisfactory value for money. Transport arrangements for many pupils means they arrive well after the start of the school day and miss significant amounts of their education. This is entirely beyond the school's control.

What the school does well

- The recently appointed headteacher provides good leadership, clear direction and vision for the school and its future development
- The high proportion of good, very good and excellent teaching is having a direct and positive impact on the pupils' achievements
- The very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development, and excellent provision for cultural awareness adds breadth to their education and learning
- The pupils' very positive attitudes and behaviour towards school and the excellent relationships between pupils and with adults; creates a highly effective atmosphere for learning
- The exemplary provision for pupils with multi sensory impairment ensures they achieve very well for their degree of special educational needs
- The very good provision for children in the nursery ensures they have a secure foundation to school life
- Links with the wider community enabling pupils to be more fully included; and high quality support services for families in the care of their children
- The outstanding teaching in science; resulting in pupils achieving high standards in relation to their degree of special needs

What could be improved

- The deployment and use of managers and subject leaders across the school
- Formal monitoring and evaluation is underdeveloped
- Curriculum planning; there is a wide variation between classes and groups in the curriculum provided
- There is a limited range of nationally recognised awards for the pupils and students and they could realistically pursue more courses
- Transport arrives after the start of the school day in many instances and many pupils miss large parts of their education as a result
- Pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 are organised into very wide age groups; there are missed opportunities for them to move on and up through the school

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the action plan prepared by the appropriate authority.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made satisfactory improvements since the last inspection in 1996, and key issues have been addressed systematically. The management of the curriculum has been developed further. The school has implemented the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies effectively, modifying the framework to suit a wide range of pupils' needs. The senior management and a specialist assessment team have been effective in developing further the school's assessment procedures. The school seeks to include parents in the annual review of their children's statements of special educational needs. There remain a few parents who are not yet satisfied with those procedures.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets by the time they leave the school.

Progress in:	by age 5	by age 11	by age 16	by age 19	Key Very good A Good B Satisfactory C Unsatisfactory D Poor E
Speaking and listening	B	B	B	B	
Reading	C	B	B	B	
Writing	C	C	C	C	
Mathematics	B	B	B	B	
Personal, social and health education	A	A	A	A	
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	B	B	B	B	

* IEPs are individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs.

The school sets appropriate targets, including pupil's personal targets. Pupils achieve well in relation their special educational needs overall. Pupils' progress is often in very small stages. This nevertheless often represents considerable effort and hard work on everyone's part. Pupils make very good progress in their personal development as they learn to handle daily challenges.

Children in the nursery learn the school routines quickly, and grow to acquire new, yet realistic levels of independence. Pupils develop self confidence, as they move through the school, showing humour, resilience and patience towards others. Pupils make good progress towards meeting their personal targets in individual education plans. Pupils are beginning to follow nationally recognised awards, though this has only recently been re-established. As a result, no pupils gained such awards in the most recent academic year.

Pupils make good progress overall in acquiring basic reading skills. In the nursery, children enjoy simple stories, and some realise that print has meaning. Younger pupils with more severe learning difficulties match objects with pictures and symbols with increasing accuracy. Pupils make satisfactory progress in writing through the school, though in many cases, the achievement of the

writing process itself is unrealistic because of their difficulties. As they move through the school, higher attaining pupils complete written work in writing folders to a good standard in relation to their special needs. By sixteen, some higher attaining pupils are able to read simple texts, and write about books they have read. Some students post sixteen use books for the purposes of researching simple information, such as local services. Pupils make good progress in their speaking and listening skills. Pupils with more severe learning difficulties learn to use signs and symbols with increasing accuracy, and higher attaining pupils express their views and opinions appropriately, for example in the context of the school's council. Pupils with multi sensory impairment make excellent progress in communicating their preferences and needs. This is because adults take the greatest care to help develop these skills, and interpret accurately and consistently the pupils' responses. In mathematics, pupils make good progress. They use their number skills to good effect in other subjects, for example counting the pupils in a group for lunches, and weighing ingredients for cooking. Children in the nursery recognise simple shapes and patterns, and some higher attainers use computer programmes to match numbers to objects accurately. As they move through the school, younger pupils learn to count through number rhymes, and higher attaining pupils can add three numbers together to make ten. Older, higher attaining pupils count to higher numbers, and some identify numbers before and after a given digit. Pupils with more severe learning difficulties copy simple rhythms by clapping when greeting one another, and pupils with multi sensory impairment manage to sequence activities, and remember what comes next on their timetable. They become increasingly familiar with patterns and the lay out of the rooms, remembering shapes and spaces accurately in the process.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good; pupils are keen and enthusiastic on arrival to school, and join in as fully as possible with the daily activities and routines
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good; pupils show consideration, respect and good humour towards one another and adults, regardless of their differences or particular challenges
Personal development and relationships	Very good personal development; the excellent relationships between pupils and with adults ensures a great sense of harmony, well being and security for pupils throughout their time at school
Attendance	Satisfactory

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5	aged 5-11	aged 11-16	aged over 16
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Good	Good	Good

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

A high proportion of teaching observed was good, very good and excellent. This is having a positive impact on pupils' achievements. Teachers are secure in their subject knowledge and many have specialist qualifications that add further to their expertise. All teaching was satisfactory or better. In 37 per cent of lessons observed, teaching was good and 40 per cent was very good. 13 per cent of the teaching was excellent. In otherwise satisfactory teaching, the pace of some parts of the lesson became a little slow. Teaching in the nursery was very good overall, with some excellent features. Teaching in the unit for pupils with multi sensory impairment was exemplary. Elsewhere through the school, teaching was good overall. In English and mathematics, teaching was observed to be good throughout the school. Teachers make good links with other subjects, helping pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills practically. Teaching in science was excellent, with outstanding features. Scientific activities were taught creatively, and fully engaged the pupils' attention, whatever their degree of special educational needs. Resources were used dynamically and with great emphasis upon visual and tactile materials. Teaching for pupils' personal, social and health education was very good, enabling them to make very good gains in this aspect of their lives. Communication skills are taught effectively and pupils make steady gains in communicating their needs and preferences with those around them. Teaching is often very good when taught by specialists teaching their subjects across all age groups, for example in science, information and communication technology, food technology, music and French.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad with a wide range of additional activities to support the pupils' learning; it is not yet balanced consistently on teachers' timetables
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good; pupils are well supported in class, with additional help, including Experienced and effective teaching; as a result, pupils achieve well and make good gains in learning English
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, and social development; excellent provision for pupils' cultural development; adding richness and diversity to the pupils' experience and learning
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good procedures for ensuring pupils' well being, health and safety Sound procedures for assessing pupils' achievements and progress

Parents have positive views of the school. The school is very effective in its partnership with parents and makes strenuous efforts to support them practically. There is a good range of activities that make up the curriculum, although there are considerable variations in the amount of time spent on subjects between different groups within the same department. In the practice, pupils have a rich variety of educational experiences throughout their school day and beyond. There are very good links with the local and wider community, and the school's extensive networks with other schools ensures appropriate inclusion wherever possible, and mobility between schools. The school makes every effort to celebrate the rich diversity of the pupils' own backgrounds. The staff is mindful to ensure pupils are cared for with dignity and respect. Staff ensure the pupils' physical needs are managed discretely, and wherever possible, with minimal disruption to their learning.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Sound overall; the new headteacher provides good leadership and management; senior management team work hard in support and make a useful contribution; roles of middle managers and subject leaders are at the early stages of development
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The governing body carry out their responsibilities satisfactorily
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory; there is much useful informal discussion, though this is yet to be more formally established
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory; senior staff are not always used strategically on order to utilise their expertise

There is a good number of well qualified staff ; enhanced by specialist teachers for some subjects, and appropriate and relevant qualifications to teach the range of specialist needs. Learning resources are good. The accommodation, though bright and attractive inside has limitations; there is a lack of specialist areas for pupils, including art and design, design and technology and music. The overall state of the school outside is shabby. The school seeks to apply the principles of best value, though the process is not yet formalised.

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• The school helps children to behave well• The teaching is good• They would feel happy to approach the school with questions or problems• They are kept well informed and school works closely with them	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual review procedures• The level of opportunities for children to integrate with others• The amount of therapy provision• The provision for homework

Most parents have very positive views about the school. Inspectors agree with those positive views. The team considers that the school should clarify with parents the current arrangements for annual reviews, and to ensure they are satisfied with the process. Inspectors consider that the school works hard to include pupils, though older students would benefit further by increased opportunities to attend college, and follow nationally recognised awards. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties would also benefit by further inclusion into groups of more mixed academic and social needs. The level of therapy is judged by inspectors to be adequate, although clearly some pupils could benefit from more if resources were available. Inspectors consider the current level of homework is satisfactory.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The school is successful in enabling pupils to achieve well in relation to their special educational needs. This is in the light of a changing school population with a higher proportion of pupils having more complex, severe and profound learning difficulties than before. Wherever possible, higher attaining pupils move on to other schools at the age of eleven, and pupils arrive with more severe learning difficulties also at this stage. Pupils are beginning to follow nationally recognised awards, though this has only recently been re-established. As a result, no pupils gained such awards in the most recent academic year. The school could realistically expect a higher proportion of pupils and students to gain nationally recognised awards in the future.
2. By the age of seven, the majority of pupils are working towards Level 1 of the National Curriculum. Their achievements are at least good in all subjects. Pupils achieve very well in music, and in science they achieve some outstanding results for their degree of special educational needs. Pupils gain an impressive understanding of simple scientific principles due to the carefully chosen materials and activities that relate closely to the pupils' every day experience and understanding. In a lesson about weather and water, the highly effective use of an umbrella held over the pupils, and water showered softly over the umbrella, coupled with warm water sprayed gently over their heads gave genuine delight and pleasure in the process of learning.
3. Pupils achieve well in their communications skills, and in their use of literacy and number. In literacy for example, pupils are encouraged successfully to read every day notices around the school, and many displays are designed to engage pupils in the labels and short written explanations. Every opportunity is taken during daily routines to assist pupils' literacy skills. Routines at lunchtime, including menus, are labelled helpfully with photographs to assist as the pupils choose their preferred food.
4. By the age of eleven, the majority of pupils are working towards Level 2 of the National Curriculum, although a significant minority are working appropriately in small steps within Level 1. Pupils' achievements are at least good in all subjects, and very good in music, French and personal and social education. Pupils' achievements are excellent in science as the work is developed dynamically to extend their experience and scientific concepts. Pupils learn to recognise and identify water of different temperatures and water that has been frozen. They further understand that some materials change by adding water, for example, the sand at the beginning of a lesson was dry, fine and warm. After pouring water and mixing together with the sand, it was possible to make sandcastles that remained, with shells added to the mix. They build on previous learning effectively and show a growing understanding of the world around them.
5. By the age of fourteen, many pupils are achieving well and making steady and secure gains in their learning. Pupils' achievements are at least good in all subjects and very good in food technology, music, French and personal and social education. Pupils achieve high standards in science. In the sensory garden for example, pupils increase their understanding of the principles of growth and the need for water in the process.
6. By the age of sixteen, pupils' achievements are at least good in all subjects. Pupils achieve very well in music, food technology and personal and social education, and by the time they move to further education in the "Round Table Centre" they show a suitable level of maturity due to the good quality teaching and expectations set for them.
7. By the age of nineteen, students are prepared well for the next stage of their education. They continue to make good gains in their learning and use their literacy and numeracy skills in practical situations. The recent gardening initiative whereby students are planting hanging baskets, costing the plants, soil and containers and carrying out simple market research in their quest for customers, is helping them to realise the importance of a budget and what it means to

make a profit and loss in business terms. They use money to purchase food, and realise its importance when travelling by public transport. Currently the school is starting a range of nationally recognised awards for pupils and students, though this is at the early stages of the school's practice. Activities beyond daily lessons also assist, for example at youth club, pupils and students help with the tuck shop and recognise simple amounts of money in order to make their purchases.

8. In English, the National Literacy Strategy is being implemented effectively. It has been adapted appropriately, and modified suitably for the pupils' specific needs. This has led to some highly creative and effective literacy lessons, with carefully made teacher resources to further enhance the pupils' learning. The pupils' speaking and listening skills are being developed effectively and the school is seeking further ways to extend their opportunities through the use of control technology. Although some pupils have access to this facility to communicate independently, others rely heavily upon adults to communicate their wishes and preferences. Pupils are developing a greater understanding of how they can influence others, for example through the recently established school council. They take seriously their responsibility to represent the views of others, and appreciate the opportunity to make known their opinions and ideas.
9. Pupils achieve well overall in acquiring basic reading skills. In the nursery, children enjoy simple stories, and some realise that print has meaning. Younger pupils with more severe learning difficulties match objects with pictures and symbols with increasing accuracy. They build further on these skills by following a story and its sequence with the help of well-chosen props. Pupils make satisfactory progress in writing through the school, though in many cases, the achieve of the writing process itself is unrealistic because of their difficulties. Higher attaining pupils manage to build simple sentences with the help of word cards and pictures. They copy simple shapes before forming some letters that are increasingly recognisable. As they move through the school, higher attaining pupils complete written work in writing folders to a good standard in relation to their special needs. By sixteen, some higher attaining pupils are able to read simple texts, and write about books they have read. Some students post sixteen in the "Round Table Centre" use books for the purposes of researching simple information, such as local services. Pupils make good progress in their speaking and listening skills. Pupils with more severe learning difficulties learn to use signs and symbols with increasing accuracy, and higher attaining pupils express their views and opinions appropriately, for example in the context of the school's council. Pupils with multi sensory impairment make excellent progress in communicating their preferences and needs. This is because adults take the greatest care to help develop these skills, and interpret accurately and consistently the pupils' responses.
10. In mathematics, pupils achieve well. They use their number skills to good effect in other subjects, for example counting the pupils in a group for lunches, tapping out different rhythms in response to their names in music, and weighing accurately the ingredients in food technology. Children in the nursery recognise simple shapes and patterns, and some higher attainers use computer programmes to match numbers to objects accurately. As they move through the school, younger pupils learn to count through number rhymes, and higher attaining pupils can add three numbers together to make ten. Older, higher attaining pupils count to higher numbers, and some identify numbers before and after a given digit. Pupils with more severe learning difficulties copy simple rhythms by clapping when greeting one another, and pupils with multi sensory impairment manage to sequence activities, and remember what comes next on their timetable. Pupils who have been in the multi sensory classes for some time become increasingly familiar with patterns and the lay out of the rooms, remembering shapes and spaces accurately in the process. They learn to recognise different times of the day by following well known routines, such as welcoming one another in a familiar environment. The most severely impaired pupils realise that school is coming to an end when they have a daily act of collective worship, the lights are dimmed and the fragrance of incense permeates the room. The National Numeracy Strategy is also being implemented effectively. Pupils are encouraged effectively to use their numeracy skills in other subjects across the curriculum, for example in weighing ingredients for food technology, counting rhythm and beat in music, and drawing graphs to represent data using their information and technology skills.
11. In science, pupils often achieve outstanding results throughout the school, due to the highly effective teaching, excellent facilities and lively activities that sustain the pupils' interest and motivation throughout the lessons. Activities are presented in a dynamic and creative manner to

engage and absorb the pupils. Scientific principles are conveyed visually, using the pupils' senses, and relate closely to their own daily experience and understanding. Pupils with more severe learning difficulties grow to understand the properties of water, for example, noticing differences in temperature between warm and cold water. Higher attaining pupils make observations about dry and wet sand, comparing their efforts in making sandcastles with and without water. Pupils with multi sensory impairment use the sensory garden effectively as they explore and understand sounds, scents and textures, smelling herbs and recognising water as it trickles and splashes on different surfaces. Older students post sixteen understand the purpose of yeast and its effect upon bread making.

12. Standards in information and communication technology are good and developing from strength to strength. Pupils are becoming increasingly confident and skilled in their use and application of ICT skills. The technology suite and its use is making a very positive impact on the pupils' achievements.
13. Pupils have separate targets for language, communication, personal and social development and physiotherapy. They achieve well within the time available in their targets to improve their physical mobility. More speech and physiotherapy time and resources would further accelerate the pupils' achievements over time. All pupils achieve very well in their personal and social targets as they become confident and prepared to overcome the daily challenges of life. There is much patience, good humour and courage displayed by many pupils throughout the school.
14. The school is effective in promoting the pupils' academic, social and personal skills and as a result, pupils and students achieve well for their degree of special educational needs. Although pupils' achievements are often in very small steps, taken over a long period of time, this nevertheless often represents huge effort, perseverance and hard work by pupils, teachers, support staff, therapists and parents alike.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

15. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour have improved since the last inspection of the school. The pupils have very good attitudes towards school and behave very well. Their personal and social development is very good, and relationships between pupils and with adults are excellent. These qualities make an important contribution to the positive atmosphere for learning and pupils' achievements.
16. Virtually all parents agree that behaviour in the school is good. They think that older pupils show mature behaviour and some parents provide convincing examples of the improvement they have seen in their children's social skills and attitudes at home, for example, starting to help with housework. Parents believe that their children like coming to school, and this in fact shows itself in the way the pupils enter the school in the morning. They are pleased to see the staff and are happy to go to their classrooms, with those able to do so going there without delay, often with a smile on their face. Enthusiasm for the school is very good and pupils are very interested and involved in the activities on offer. They are proud of their school and what they themselves achieve there. This was reflected, for example, in the way they expressed the importance of the school in their lives so positively during an assembly. This is a reflection of the friendly supportive environment and the way that pupils are treated and valued by the staff. The hard work and professionalism of the teachers and support staff helps the pupils sustain interest in their studies, by providing challenging and relevant work. This encourages each pupil to participate in lessons as much as they are able and helps them to avoid being distracted by aspects of their condition.
17. The school is a very orderly community and pupils behave very well. This is helped by the way staff know the difficulties some of their pupils face, and deal with emerging problems before matters get out of hand. In most lessons teachers are able to use the available time productively to further pupils' learning. For example, in a secondary-aged class of pupils with moderate learning difficulties, pupils at the start of the day were working quietly on comprehension tasks, keying text into computers and reading quietly to themselves, requiring very little teacher input to stay at their tasks. Teachers do not need to spend an excessive amount of time maintaining order and can use the available time productively to further pupils' learning. There have been no exclusions in the past year. Pupils are generally polite. Behaviour in dining areas is very good, assisted by a strong staff presence, and the playgrounds are unthreatening environments. Pupils

behave well on school visits. For example, another older class with severe learning difficulties listened well to what they were told on a visit to the local post office, and were very pleased to show the letters they had posted to themselves when these arrived back in school. The various ethnic minorities represented in the school community work well together. Bullying or other harassment is a rare occurrence and none was seen in the inspection.

18. Pupils' personal development is very good. They value each other as individuals and understand the impact of their actions on others, helped by a strong emphasis within the school on valuing everybody in such practical aspects as taking turns. The school provides some useful opportunities to take responsibility, which the pupils appreciate and take very seriously. One good example is the school council, ably run by the pupils themselves, which is allowing their opinions to have a meaningful impact on the running of the school, for example, formulating new school rules. Another is the small group of pupils who run aspects of the library, with the minimum of teacher intervention. A third impressive example is the way pupils contribute to the running of the coffee Shop on a Friday. Students in a food technology lesson were motivated to produce flapjacks of a high enough quality to be sold in it, whilst other students act as waiters or use computers to produce posters etc. Many of the pupils have a personal confidence that makes them pleasant people to meet but also contributes to their learning. For example, one charming young person, having met a visitor in her history lesson, introduced him in a very pleasant way to her transport guide later that day. Another example was the way a member of the school council initiated a conversation on its role and its long-term level of influence.
19. Relationships within the school are excellent and make a major contribution to its effectiveness. Students like and respect their teachers and other staff. For the pupils with severe learning difficulties this communication can be through eye contact or touch only, but is nevertheless effective. Pupils can work well together. For example, in a particularly well-taught music lesson with no less than 55 pupils present, all pupils whatever their level of difficulty were fully involved. In a religious education lesson, pupils were tolerant of lower ability classmates and were particularly supportive of them when it came to enacting a little drama. Pupils listen and give due regard to the views of others, even when they are different from their own, and are often supportive of one another. They show respect for the school's property, use equipment sensibly and are trusted by teachers to use resources and facilities depending on their ability level. Pupils usually play well together. Boys and girls can work together unselfconsciously and pupils from different ethnic backgrounds relate well together.
20. Pupils' attendance is satisfactory. The level of attendance by individual pupils clearly depends to a marked degree on their medical conditions. No specific ethnic or social group of pupils has an attendance record significantly worse than the others. There are some pupils with very good attendance records, including a few that have achieved 100% attendance so far this year. Parents report that their children are keen to come to school and in some cases the problem is persuading them to stay at home when they are ill. The last inspection of the school commented on the late arrival of the home to school transport in the morning. Although there has apparently been some improvement, the buses are still routinely arriving up to 9.30am and sometimes, where there have been specific problems, after this time. This means that many pupils are losing over two hours schooling a week, to the detriment of their learning. This remains an unsatisfactory situation, albeit one largely outside the school's control.
21. The pupils' very good attitudes, behaviour, personal development and excellent relationships are a strong and positive feature throughout the school.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

22. The quality of teaching is a strength of the school and makes a significant contribution to pupils achieving well and making good gains in their learning. The high proportion of good, very good and occasionally excellent teaching is having a positive impact in many areas of the school. All teaching observed was satisfactory or better and 37 per cent was good; 40 per cent of the teaching was very good and 13 per cent was excellent. 10 per cent of the teaching was satisfactory. Overall, teaching is very good in the nursery and good in all other key stages throughout the school. Teaching is exemplary in the provision for pupils with multi sensory impairment. The school is effective in meeting the wide ranging needs of the pupils because

teachers are skilled and knowledgeable about their needs. They often have additional and appropriate qualifications that enhance this expertise. These qualities are reflected in the quality of their teaching.

23. The proportion of good, very good and excellent teaching has improved since the previous inspection. The use of specialist teachers for subjects, including science, information and communication technology, food technology, physical education, music and French is making a valuable contribution to the overall quality of teaching. Specialist teachers teach across all parts of the school, adding their specific subject skills effectively to further the pupils' learning and achievements. This has brought additional expertise and further extended the pupils' skills and knowledge. Some teachers have additional training and expertise in very specialist spheres, such as the provision for pupils with multi sensory impairment. Their own study and research into provision for pupils with such impairment is adding further to the provision and practice within the school, and making an important contribution both regionally, nationally and internationally.
24. Teaching in the nursery is very good overall, with some outstanding features. The children are thoroughly well prepared for starting at school and every effort is made to ensure a smooth and happy transition from home to school. The strong and effective team of teachers and other staff means that children are engaged purposefully and productively throughout the school day. There is great care and attention to their individual needs academically, socially and medically. Although much time has to be given over to health care, this is conducted discretely and efficiently with minimum disruption to the childrens' learning and achievements.
25. Teaching for pupils is good overall in other parts of the school. Teaching is good overall throughout the school in English, mathematics, information and communication technology, religious education, art, design and technology, geography, history, physical education and French. Teaching is very good in food technology and music across the school. The teaching in science is excellent throughout the school, with outstanding features. Teaching for pupils with multi sensory impairment is exemplary. There were examples of excellent teaching in English, religious education, food technology and music.
26. Teaching by specialist teachers is particularly effective, as the specialist knowledge of the subjects adds depth and breadth to the pupils' learning and achievements. Teaching is good and effective in English and mathematics, and the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies are being implemented to good effect. Lessons have been suitably modified to ensure pupils of all abilities are achieving well, and teachers make good links with other subjects, enabling pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills in a variety of practical ways. Teachers have secure knowledge in their subjects. They use resources with care and thought to enhance the lessons. In many examples, teachers and support staff have modified resources to enable the pupils greater access. A puppet depicting an elderly person was used to good effect alongside a book made to help the pupils understand a sense of history. Pupils respond very well to the environment created by use of music, for example during physical education. Teachers are thoughtful about the atmosphere created for pupils' learning. They use materials that pupils can feel, smell and hear as further means to assist their understanding. This is particularly important and effective as so many pupils have some visual and hearing impairment.
27. Teaching for students between the ages of sixteen and nineteen is good overall and there are growing opportunities for students to follow courses and nationally recognised awards during their time at the Round Table Centre. In food technology for example, the activities are suitably ambitious. Students in a lesson were encouraged successfully to plan and prepare for a summer lunch. The teacher's planning was meticulous, thorough and detailed, with suitably high expectations for them academically and socially. There were excellent links enabling students to use information and communication technology skills, and suitable opportunities to further develop use of number and literacy in the process. Students were required to plan and make menu cards and take into consideration quantities of food for a given number of people. The high quality teaching enabled all pupils to participate fully and become increasingly independent in their learning and social skills.
28. As a result of the positive qualities in teaching, many pupils show genuine enthusiasm and delight in their learning. Teachers know the pupils very well, and therefore work is often tailored to their individual needs. This is particularly evident for pupils with more severe learning difficulties and

those with multi sensory impairment. Planning for example, is suitably detailed and takes into account the pupil's wide ranging physical, academic and social needs. The characteristics of very good teaching included lively delivery of the lessons, carefully matched work, and well chosen resources to support the learning. As a result, the pupils were interested, well motivated and able to persevere for long periods of time. In food technology, pupils responded willingly to instructions and the high quality demonstration of food preparation. Resources and equipment had been carefully adapted to their individual needs. In religious education, artefacts were very well used, for example an Islamic prayer mat with a compass absorbed the pupils' interest, as they learned more about the faith.

29. Teachers give considerable thought to celebrating the pupils' achievements and work around the school. This adds further to the pupils' sense of pride, and desire to strive towards further improvements. Many displays relate closely to the pupils' experience and that of the staff. In a lively and engaging display about different faiths, staff with different beliefs were photographed alongside artefacts that are important to their chosen religion. This approach added further meaning to the pupils' knowledge and learning. In physical education, teaching is carefully matched to include physiotherapy targets and the use of music and lighting adds further to the pupils' educational experience, helping them to relax their bodies and move more freely where possible. The good teaching and support for pupils with English as an additional language helps them to gain more meaning from the activities, and therefore achieve well.
30. The excellent relationships between pupils and with adults has very beneficial effects for their learning. In an excellent swimming lesson in the hydro therapy pool, pupils with multi sensory impairment were gaining confidence to find the bars, walk down a slope towards the water, float and move across the pool. The high level of trust between adults and pupils was clearly evident in a potentially frightening and unknown environment. The lesson and its organisation moved swiftly, yet calmly to maximise time in the pool for all pupils. In an inspirational music session for a large group of pupils with complex learning difficulties, the teaching was dynamic and thoroughly engaging as pupils gave their all to sing together using a variety of means to communicate.
31. In otherwise satisfactory teaching, the pace was a little slow at times during the lessons and time was not always used efficiently to maximise the pupils' learning. These examples were relatively rare.
32. Teachers and support staff make a strong and hard working team. The learning support assistants understand clearly their roles in the lessons, and make a valuable contribution to the pupils' learning. The high quality teaching is having a positive impact on the pupils' learning throughout the school.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?

33. The school has made satisfactory improvements since the previous inspection in establishing a curriculum which is broad and relevant and meets the needs of individual pupils. The school has worked hard towards addressing the key issues identified in the previous report. There is some variation in time allocated to different subjects on the timetables that requires greater consistency across the departments. The curriculum is effective in meeting the wide ranging and special educational needs for all pupils. Pupils with English as an additional language are well supported, thus ensuring they have full access to the curriculum.
34. The curriculum is now more firmly based upon the National Curriculum with its programmes of study reflected in the planning for each subject. The planning for Religious Education (RE) is suitably based upon that of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Hence all statutory requirements are met. Due to the wide range of special needs of the pupils the school makes use of a range of appropriate curricular strategies. The Foundation (Early Years) Curriculum is suitably established for children. A specialist curriculum of high quality is established in the unit for pupils with multi sensory impairment. For those higher attaining pupils the National Curriculum is delivered using the National Literacy and National Numeracy Strategies and many other subjects ie science, information technology, food technology, physical education, music and French are taught by specialist teachers with other foundation subjects taught by class teachers. The curriculum for

those pupils with more profound needs is now more closely linked to National Curriculum expectations. There is also a wide range of therapeutic support available to meet the individual needs of pupils. The strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy are good. The school was involved in the pilot stages of each strategy and is fully committed to the schemes. This has been of considerable benefit to pupils' learning and the quality of teaching and planning of those teachers who are using the strategies.

35. The quality and range of opportunities for pupils is good, enhanced by a wide range of curriculum and other extension activities.
36. The breadth, balance and relevance of the curriculum is overall satisfactory. In the Nursery and in the unit for multi sensory impairment, it is very good. Planning of the curriculum is developing and has improved since the previous inspection. Subject planning is now in place for all subjects with long, medium and short term planning. When the subject is managed by a specialist teaching throughout the school, there is more consistency but when the subject medium term planning is the responsibility of the class teacher there are variations in priorities.
37. Timetables are constructed by class teachers on the basis of a range of priorities, so that the use of time and the organisation of the school day varies from class to class. The time allocation for individual subjects is not consistent within key stages. The school intends to develop an agreed rationale so that clear guidance may be given to teachers and the time available may be used more consistently across different parts of the school. The allocation of pupils to specific classes is based on a range of variables which currently means that there is too wide a range of ages in many classes notably in the secondary school. Pupils may stay in that class for one, two or more years and curricular planning does not take sufficient account of this so that again the balance of the curriculum and the entitlement to equal access for all pupils cannot be ensured.
38. The successful introduction of the Equals Access curriculum for pupils with more complex needs has widened those pupils' experience from the previous developmental curriculum. There is not at present sufficient time for the co-ordinator to evaluate its impact and ensure that the scheme is used to its full potential so that pupil's targets are fully based on National Curriculum expectations.
39. The school has prepared a small number of pupils for nationally accredited awards in the recent past. These have included Compact (ASDAN) Challenge Awards for pupils in the Round Table Centre. One pupil has achieved the CLAIT (certificate of learning and achievement in information technology) award in information technology and a group of pupils gained an award for Food Technology from the Royal Agricultural Society. Currently a number of pupils and students are working towards the Edexcel Certificate of Achievement in mathematics, science and English but no pupil has yet taken the examination. There is a need for the school to research and implement study towards a range of nationally recognised awards.
40. The majority of pupils live a good distance from the school so that after school activities are not easy to arrange. Despite this the range and quality of extra curricular activities is very good. There is a regular after school youth club when pupils from Victoria school are joined by others from local schools. Lunch time clubs including a choir are regular features each week. A holiday play scheme is arranged and pupils are part of the West Midlands Club for the Disabled. A wide range of sporting activities are organised with a large group of pupils competing recently in the regional athletics meet with five pupils qualifying for the national athletic meet in Blackpool later in the year. A range of residential visits including Paris Disneyworld are organised so that if at all possible every pupil in the school has the opportunity of going away with the school at some time in their school career.
41. The school's links with the community and with partner institutions are very good and this is of considerable benefit to pupils' learning and progress. The school is committed to integration and inclusion of its pupils wherever possible and has developed good relationships with other local special schools. A range of good support strategies has been developed so that pupils can integrate and may eventually transfer successfully to other institutions. Seven pupils are at present on placements in other schools. Many opportunities are taken to join in activities which include other mainstream schools both in sports, for example the Keilder Challenge and in Arts projects. The school maintains a useful Outreach Support service. The school also welcomes a

wide range of students from teaching and other professions on placement or work experience and has close links with many departments of Birmingham University. The school welcomes the support of the local community. Visits out of school enrich many subjects of the curriculum including history, geography, art and music and a good number of local artists and dancers have worked with pupils in the school. The school arranges for religious education for catholic pupils by nuns from the local convent. The Education Business Partnership supports the careers work of the school and Victoria has also established dialogue with other schools in Europe through the Comenius link.

42. The curriculum for personal and social education is very good. There are suitable arrangements for preparing pupils and students for the next stage of their education, including work experience and careers training.
43. The school makes very good provision for the spiritual, moral and social development of pupils, and excellent provision for their cultural education. Staff make every effort to recognise pupils' achievements, which is very evident in the range and richness of corridor and classroom displays. There is a daily act of collective worship where time is given for reflection often with the burning of a candle, the use of scented oils or of recorded music.
44. A strong ethos of spirituality was observed in the hydro-therapy pool during a session which involves all staff in the water on a one-to-one basis, quietly singing familiar songs which encouraged pupils to float, stretch for the bar and stopping gently to reflect on the movement of their limbs. Each week there is a short religious service for the Roman Catholics taken by a nun, and a priest visits termly to provide a full mass. There is a very strong linkage between life's fundamental questions and the caring philosophy promoted by the teaching. A good example of this is seen in the school council where members not only consult their own classes for opinions but also attach themselves to a class where communication is a fundamental problem. They promote a strong feeling of worth for all human beings irrespective of their physical and intellectual capabilities, religious faith or ethnicity.
45. The school encourages pupils to develop a clear understanding of right and wrong. Control in classrooms is maintained with quiet firmness, to which pupils respond. Pupils are given many opportunities to show their trustworthiness. Learning support assistants (LSA's) promote a very positive ethos of caring during the lunch-time feeding programmes, so necessary for many of the pupils. Throughout the inspection there was a strong ethos of respect and dignity and a complete absence of spitefulness or aggressive behaviour among pupils. There was a strong moral influence in one lesson where pupils considered the issue of greed. Teacher's questions encouraged pupils to reflect on whether they had ever been greedy which promoted some interesting discussion.
46. Social development is rich and of very high quality. There is a strong focus on children and their inclusion into mainstream schools. The Kielder Challenge is a splendid example of this aspect with pupils from a local secondary school working with a group of non-ambulant pupils to solve a range of problems. During the inspection week, a group were roped together with two pupils in wheelchairs and having been given a letter A to F in random order, challenged to move themselves along this line and into alphabetical order. This was an intellectual challenge for all concerned and the task involved all participants in seeking a solution. The school promotes social aspects through its mixed cub pack which meets regularly and will often have weekend activities at Blackwell. One of the pack represented the school in Birmingham's visit to Holland. Residential visits promote the social aspects of education and there have been visits to Austria, Euro-Disney and Blackpool, all with a curriculum focus. This term there is to be a visit to York where the link will be with the study of the Vikings. There is also a First Aid Club affiliated to St. John's Ambulance which is the only such group from a special school in the country. During the week they held a quiz for staff and older pupils which was competitive and fun. A weekly "singalong" is much enjoyed by a large number of pupils and is taken by a retired teacher on a voluntary basis.
47. The cultural development of pupils is excellent and is built upon the strong art, music, modern foreign languages and religious education being offered in the curriculum. In the recent past there has been a compact disk (CD) workshop with a composer and artist who helped pupils to produce a CD, Amazon Soundscapes, linked to their work on South America. There are visits to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and multi-media artists in residence have come to the school, including a jewellery workshop during. There are very good links with the Birmingham Royal Ballet who did

workshops on the Nutcracker theme. Pupils took part in Birmingham Dances Towards The Millennium, which was professionally produced for public performance. Corridor displays indicate the wealth of cultural experiences available to the youngsters and the range of artists studied include Lowrey, van Gogh and Picasso. History is very well represented in these displays by Christopher Columbus and Hernando Cortes and his visit to the city of the Aztecs in Mexico. Music displays includes working with some Chilean musicians, visits to Symphony Hall for African dance and drumming, Japanese Taiko drumming and a gospel workshop. Silver Lining Brass perform on trumpet, horn, trombone and tuba. It is clear from the religious education display that the six major faiths are represented at the school and that their places of worship in the city have been visited. Pupils' own ethnic backgrounds are celebrated and there is a high degree of harmony, regardless of their circumstances, differences or beliefs.

48. Since the last inspection there has been a major improvement in the spiritual development of the pupils. Moral development is very good and being well led by strong adult role models. Social development is now very good, and although strong in the last report, cultural experiences for all pupils are now excellent.
49. In summary current strengths in the curriculum include:
- High quality curriculum for the nursery and pupils with multi sensory impairment
 - Appropriately adapted curriculum for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties
 - Very good activities outside lessons, including residential opportunities
 - Very good provision overall for pupils spiritual, moral and social development and excellent provision for their cultural understanding
 - Effective and suitably adapted curriculum for implementing the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies
 - Very good curricular provision for pupils' personal, social and health education
 - Strong links with the wider community and partner institutions to enrich the pupils' curriculum and include them more fully into mainstream schools where possible
 - High quality curricular provision in science, information technology, music, food technology and French
50. Areas for further development include:
- Greater clarity in class timetables, including consistency in time allocated to different subjects
 - Organisation of the pupils into groups to reflect more accurately their ages and key stages; thus ensuring greater progression through the curriculum
 - Developing further the coordination of the curriculum; ensuring subject leaders have a more comprehensive overview of their subjects for the purposes of planning
 - Further opportunities for pupils and students to follow nationally recognised awards as part of the curriculum

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

51. The school provides a very caring environment for its pupils, in which they can feel valued and emotionally secure. This is an important aspect of the school's provision for most of its pupils and is an achievement in which staff can take pride. Staff throughout the school are sensitive to pupils' needs and put considerable effort into meeting them.
52. Procedures for child protection and pupils' welfare are very good. The school has a purpose-built medical centre for the treatment of children attending the school, with its own paramedical staff. Procedures for first aid, accidents, illnesses and the administration of medicines are very good. The child protection provision is excellent, with a very experienced and proficient designated teacher, who has ensured that all staff are aware of their responsibilities and school procedures. The school has effective links with the relevant agencies, particularly in monitoring pupils on the at-risk register, and comprehensive records are kept. The PHSE curriculum helps pupils to look after themselves as they grow more mature. The school is very aware of the needs of pupils with dietary or medical problems, and attends to their bathroom needs with due emphasis on maintaining their dignity. The standards of care by school staff are high. Fostering pupils' independence is seen as a priority by the school and staff are successful in making pupils want to do things for themselves as much as possible.

53. The school has a suitably detailed health and safety policy in place and is efficient in carrying out all routine testing and maintenance procedures. Staff are very active in maintaining a safe environment and appropriate routine health and safety procedures are all in place. Lifting of pupils is an area where there is a need to ensure that all staff understand the school's expectations and policy. The buildings are clean and hygienic internally. Bathrooms are well equipped to meet the needs of pupils and there are sufficient staff to meet their needs. An appropriate risk assessment process is carried out before pupils go on school trips. There is good attention to health and safety in lessons and safe practice was seen in all lessons during the inspection.
54. Procedures for monitoring pupils' academic progress and personal development are satisfactory. There are well-established procedures for drawing up individual educational plans and the carrying out of annual reviews. These include the setting of specific targets for future development of the particular pupil. These targets are usually clearly expressed and are sufficiently precise for their success to be measured. The school has developed the use of progress scales to monitor the progress of the least able pupils, and its Communication and Assessment Team (CATs) for the provision of learning programmes for pupils with impaired communication skills. There are very good relations between teaching and medical staff, and medical and other professionals do contribute to such targets. The school's effective approach, whereby professionals from wide ranging backgrounds work closely together, contributes significantly to pupils' ability to learn. Therapists and nurses are appropriately qualified. Other aspects of the school's provision, such as the snoezelen room and hydrotherapy, are also effective in this respect. Development of life skills is given appropriate priority in the school's work to meet the needs of individual pupils, augmented by external visits and residential trips where possible. The relative lack of accredited courses in the later phases of the pupils' education means that there is a insufficient formal assessment information at this stage. Since the last inspection, the school has implemented a more coherent system for collating information on individual pupils, which the school's experienced staff are able to use to assess their needs. Some parents would like to be more involved in the process of annually reviewing their children's statement of special educational needs
55. The school's procedures for monitoring pupils' attendance are satisfactory. They use the fact that bus guides have daily face-to-face contact with individual families and hence can inform the school of absences and the reasons for them. Pupils are keen to attend school and their parents are supportive, so in practice there is no need for overly sophisticated attendance monitoring procedures.
56. The school's procedures to monitor and promote behaviour are good, based in part on effective implementation of the school's behaviour policy but owing most to the experience and skills of staff members. Pupils know what is expected of them and try to comply. Where pupils have particular problems staff are skilled at dealing with them. Similarly, the school is effective at dealing with any incidents of harassment or bullying that occur. Pupils feel supported and that any problems they may report will be taken seriously. Overall, the quality of the school's provision for the care of its pupils has been maintained since the last inspection of the school.
57. The school has satisfactory procedures for assessing pupils' achievement and progress. This is an improvement from the last inspection when assessment was judged to be a weakness. New assessment procedures have been introduced. When pupils first enter the school the pre-National Curriculum Levels, are being successfully used by teachers to measure pupils' achievement. The recent introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies has been beneficial to teachers and is sharpening up assessment procedures in English and mathematics. Teacher assessment procedures are satisfactory in relation to the higher attaining pupils who are entered for the national tests. Accreditation is improving for pupils in Key Stage 4 and at post 16 through the recent introduction of a wider range of courses.
58. The use of assessment to guide teachers' planning is satisfactory. In some subjects that are taught by specialist teachers, such as science and food technology, assessment is used very well. However, practice is inconsistent throughout the school and there is no standard format for recording. Teachers are using pre-National Curriculum Levels satisfactorily to measure achievement, and future learning goals are often set on the basis of such information.

59. Issues relating to special educational needs raised by the last inspection have been addressed by the school and improvements in provision have resulted. More consistency has been achieved, for example, in the use of individual education plans and of alternative communication methods. Access to the curriculum has been further improved for all pupils by the practice of more precise differentiation of tasks and activities to meet individual needs.
60. A major concern of parents at their pre-inspection meeting related to the availability of speech and language therapy and physiotherapy at the school. The inspection found that the provision of speech and language therapy is very effective. Therapists work very closely with school staff. The service is delivered in a variety of ways, ranging from one-to-one or small group sessions to support in the classroom and training for school staff but the emphasis is very much on collaborative work. The Communication Assessment Team and the Communication Key Workers add much to this process. Pupils with specific communication needs make good progress. The provision of physiotherapy has been improved by an increase in physiotherapist hours in the current term.
61. While this allocation is still not generous in a school where it is estimated that about ninety per cent of the pupils require some form of support in their physical development, very effective liaison between therapists and school staff is again a very positive factor in the quality of the support which is provided. Pressures on their time mean that physiotherapists find it difficult to monitor all of the pupils who they would like to see regularly in their classes but, as in the case of speech and language therapy, the collaborative way of working ensures that pupils' needs continue to be effectively met. The experience and expertise of school staff in the area of motor development are apparent in the high-quality work done in "motor classes" and physical education lessons and the school's flexible approach in using a variety of methods, such as those espoused by conductive education, is appreciated by parents.
62. The school provides a very effective provision of family support. There is a weekly meeting with a fixed agenda, and allows for full contributions to be made by teachers and the other professionals involved in the work of the school. It is a meeting with status and raises far reaching issues and family problems and keeps them in focus. It is chaired by a co-ordinator who has a remarkable understanding of the medical conditions of the pupils and the general problems that face families who have children with profound and multiple learning difficulties. At the meeting held during the week of the inspection there was a wide variety of concern raised covering social difficulties and medical needs. Some of the contributors sought help for a particular problem and it was most encouraging to see other professionals making a range of suggestions for consideration. At present inclusion and medical issues tend to dominate but there is reference to assisting parents with their entitlement to benefit allowances. In addition there is a termly meeting for parents. The co-ordinator of family support has written a sensitive paper on "The Dying Child" which has been helpful to parents in their bereavement, and staff and pupils who had been close to the person. Much of the pastoral work under-taken, centres on helping pupils through their bereavement. This is a necessary and much needed support for families and is much appreciated by them and their children. There is very effective support for parents who have English as an additional language. There are specialist staff who make every effort to translate and communicate regularly with the families, helping them to express more accurately their views and opinions in formal settings.
63. There are wide ranging categories of special educational need as judged by the primary needs specified in pupils' statements. This complex situation is managed well by the school and the quality of the provision made across this broad spectrum of need is reflected in the good progress achieved by pupils at all levels of attainment.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

64. Most parents who took the opportunity to express a view hold positive views about the school. They believe that their children like school, behaviour and teaching is good, they would feel happy to approach the school, and they are kept well informed about their child's progress. There are few problems communicating or working with the school. Overall, parents think the school is good. Inspectors agree with these positive views.
65. The school provides a sound range of information for parents. Parents have three formal opportunities a year to come into school, to discuss progress with teachers. The school does not

produce a separate written report on pupil progress, relying instead on annual review documentation. This does not necessarily provide a full picture of the individual pupil's progress and attainment. As reviews, they are generally good, with comments that reflect the individual nature of the children, information on progress, together with specific targets for improvement. Use of the home-school books as a two-way means of communication with parents has improved since the last inspection and parents now believe they are useful and effective. These books are augmented by more informal but effective verbal links with the bus guides, who provide useful face-to-face contact on a daily basis. There are no regular newsletters to keep parents in touch with events in the life of the school; this would be a useful facility given the distance many parents live from the school. The school prospectus and the Governors' Annual Report to parents are satisfactory documents that reflect the school. A Parents Group meets regularly in school to hear about various topics of interest, with an Urdu translation provided. This is part of the work of a senior teacher who is very effective in her responsibility of co-ordinating links with parents.

66. Parents make a good contribution to their children's' learning. The school and parents work well together to improve the social and life skills of the pupils. Parents do consistently attend parents' evenings. Some parents would like to be more fully involved in their child's annual review and inspectors consider the school should seek to ensure all parents are satisfied with the process. There is an active parent teachers association, which organises social and fundraising events. The school sees its role as supporting the whole family where necessary and is active in pursuing this objective.
67. Parents believe that the quality of the partnership with parents has been improved since the last inspection of the school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

68. Overall, there is a good level of commitment to improve further and a shared desire to succeed. The staff demonstrate a high level of dedication and desire to see pupils overcome challenges and have a quality of life both educationally and socially during their time at Victoria. They add much to the pupils' educational experience. The school has been through a major transition with the retirement of a long standing headteacher. Between inspections, the previous headteacher was seriously ill, and temporary arrangements made with senior staff in acting posts. The well-established structures, long standing strengths of the school, and experienced staff ensured the school carried on effectively over this time. The appointment of a new headteacher means the school is well placed to improve further under the new leadership.
69. The leadership and management of the school is sound overall. The new headteacher's good leadership qualities has quickly gained the confidence of staff, pupils and parents alike. In a short time, there has been a realistic and sharp analysis of the school's relative strengths and weaknesses, and very appropriate priorities established for the immediate and medium term future. This is ensuring clarity, vision and direction for the school and its future.
70. The senior management team work hard to support the headteacher and have broad responsibilities in many aspects of the school's life. These have evolved over time. Middle managers have limited roles and responsibilities and the role of subject leaders is only temporary in many instances and largely underdeveloped. The management structure has necessary overlap, but in some cases, responsibilities could be further delegated to ensure maximum use and benefit of senior staff, their expertise and time. At times, senior staff are carrying out routine administration and day to day tasks that could realistically be deployed to others, thus enabling their expertise to be used more strategically.
71. The headteacher and senior staff are working hard seeking ways for improving pupils' transport arrangements. On a day to day basis, the organisation of routes, escorts and pupils is thorough and efficient. The school is hampered by pupils arriving late on a regular basis, and often more than half an hour after the start of the school day. Lessons are frequently delayed and disrupted, as group activities cannot begin promptly. Many pupils have travelled for long periods of time, with journeys often well over an hour. The headteacher is hoping to work with the local education authority to improve this unsatisfactory situation. This weakness hinders the amount pupils can achieve, as they have reduced time in lessons.

72. The governing body fulfil their roles responsibly and satisfactorily, and have sought to become more active over time. Governors have started to monitor the school's work, though this is at an early stage of development. There are satisfactory procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching. Formal methods for evaluating the impact of the school's actions on teaching, pupils' achievements and standards are yet to be fully established.
73. Financial planning is sound, and the headteacher has carried out an initial audit of planned expenditure to ensure the budget is affordable. The proportion of funds carried forward from the previous year has been carefully considered in the light of necessary improvements to the building and accommodation. The carry forward is entirely appropriate in view of this necessary consideration. Grants are used appropriately, and allocated for specific purposes. Spending is linked closely to educational priorities.
74. Day to day administration in the office is smooth and efficient. This ensures a calm and welcoming atmosphere and very positive first impressions for all who arrive at the school. The site manager takes a keen interest in the premises and makes a valuable contribution to the quality of the pupils' environment.
75. The school has effective procedures to introduce new members of staff to its work. A senior manager conducts weekly induction sessions which all new staff attend, including for example during the inspection week 4 work placement students. There are no newly qualified teachers on the staff at present but the school has the necessary capability to provide training for new teachers.
76. The school office makes good use of information and communication technology, for example, with most relevant procedures computerised. Staff are using e-mail to send messages and to download information.
77. The school has a good match of teachers and support staff to the needs of the curriculum. There is a sufficient number of suitably trained and qualified teachers for the number of pupils and their specific requirements. A high proportion of teachers have a teaching qualification directly relevant to special education. The teaching staff as a group have an immense amount of teaching experience in this type of school. The complex and varied nature of the needs of individual pupils places considerable demands on the expertise of the teaching staff, and this high level of experience is an important factor in being able to meet those needs. Although most teaching staff are deployed to teach subjects across the curriculum, there is effective use of subject specialists in some subjects such as music and physical education.
78. The school has an above average number of support assistants, many of whom are appropriately qualified. These staff make a major contribution to the school's educational provision. This applies both in the classroom and in other aspects of the school, such as in the bathrooms. Bus guides are also integral to the school's provision and make a positive contribution to the experience pupils receive. Support staff see themselves as an integral part of the team. There is close and effective collaboration between teachers and assistants. The school has a structured programme to offer staff further training opportunities to improve their effectiveness.
79. The speech therapists and physiotherapists are well organised and make a useful contribution to the quality of the pupils' educational and physical development. There are inevitably limitations upon their time and resources, and more of both would add further to the pupils quality of education.
80. Accommodation at Victoria is satisfactory overall, but with some elements that are good and some unsatisfactory. This is a reflection of the complex series of requirements posed by the pupils and how those have changed over time. As was highlighted at the time of the last inspection, certain subjects such as DT, art and music would benefit from the provision of specialist teaching rooms. Many of the teaching rooms are bright and large enough for the number of pupils they accommodate. Conversely, others are quite cramped and difficult to get around when all pupils are present. The Round Table Centre, originally designed as a residential unit for autistic children, is now used for a totally different purpose, namely post 16 provision. The room sizes and doorway widths were simply not designed for students of this age in wheelchairs.

The buildings provide some good facilities, such as the snoezelen, the pool, the library and the science room. The interior of the building is well maintained and kept very clean through the hard work of the cleaning staff. Teachers have mounted attractive displays of pupils' work and the accommodation provides a bright and attractive learning environment. The upkeep of the exterior is to a much lower and unsatisfactory standard.

81. Learning resources are good and enhance pupils' learning in all subjects. Science facilities in particular are excellent, enabling a wide variety of pupils with different needs to access the subject, through the availability of hydraulic variable-height tables and moveable gas and water modules. Information and communication technology resources in particular have been improved since the last inspection of the school.
82. There is very good provision of aids and specialist equipment such as orthopaedic shoes and wheelchairs. Bathrooms are well equipped with hoists and hydraulic beds. A neat feature of the school is the wheelchair guidance track that has been inserted in the floor around the building.

Provision for pupils with multi sensory impairment

83. The school has well established provision for pupils with multi sensory impairment, and offers places to pupils from other local education authorities, as it is a regional resource. Staff in the unit are highly knowledgeable and experienced. The provision is exemplary due to the excellent leadership of the unit, highly effective teaching and the very positive impact upon the pupils' achievements over time.
84. The accommodation, resources and organisation for pupils with multi sensory impairment have been carefully considered and very deliberately designed to ensure maximum independence for the pupils. Furniture, flooring, wall designs, resources and objects for the pupils' reference are high quality and ensure every opportunity is used for them to learn, and understand further the world around them. The environment has contrasting colours and sensitive lighting, with due thought to unnecessary and unhelpful distractions.
85. The curriculum is planned systematically with due consideration to individual pupil's needs. The programme follows a particular educational approach pioneered by experts in this sphere of education. This ensures a well integrated and coherent range of activities and daily timetables designed to help the pupils start from their own points of reference, moving from a narrow core curriculum to a broader curriculum over time. There is appropriate emphasis upon helping the pupils communicate within a familiar and structured environment that becomes known and understood over time.
86. The programme for pupils is designed to assist them becoming part of a wider group, including into the main body of the school, and thus into a more inclusive setting wherever possible. This is planned carefully, with close liaison to ensure the sessions are purposeful and beneficial to the pupils, and that they are able to communicate efficiently whilst outside the safety and security of the unit and its routines.
87. The organisation of staff is highly efficient and effective. All pupils have an individual key worker who has specific responsibility for aspects of their life at school. This approach ensures a high degree of continuity for the pupils and detailed understanding of their needs. The benefits may be seen as pupils show a high degree of trust and well being on arrival to school and throughout the day. They have very positive relationships with adults in potentially fearful surroundings such as the hydro therapy pool.
88. The quality of teaching observed was often very good and a significant proportion was excellent. Highly effective teaching was observed in all areas of the unit. Lessons are well planned and carefully structured to ensure pupils can make sense of the activities. The routines at the beginning of the day assist this process, as pupils work individually on their timetables and sequence of events for that day. Every opportunity is used to communicate with the pupils and offer them choices, for example in food, snacks and lunches. The group activity whereby pupils and staff welcome one another is well structured and enables pupils to experience being part of a group at the onset of the day before following more individual programmes. Support staff work seamlessly with teachers and make a strong and effective team. The knowledgeable and experienced nursery nurse support adds further to the strength of the team. As a result of the highly effective teaching, pupils become quickly absorbed in the daily routines. Every pupil has a key person whose responsibility it is to welcome them on arrival and teachers use a range of objects and sounds to help the pupils' understanding. Pupils show obvious delight and enthusiasm as they recognise and look forward to favourite lessons. In an excellent physical education lesson, the pupil became increasingly confident and aware of moving across different textured surfaces, following a familiar sequence. The skilful and sensitive teaching ensured the pupil's responses and preferences were being taken into consideration throughout.
89. The leadership and management of the unit provides exemplary practice in teaching for others to model and follow. This ensures a highly consistent approach to all aspects of provision in the unit. There are suitably high, yet realistic expectations for pupils academically, socially and emotionally. There is evidence to show considerable gains in the pupils' learning over time, as they become more confident, mobile and able to communicate with a widening group of people.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

1 *Improve further the leadership and management of the school by:

- using senior managers' expertise fully and effectively
- developing further the roles and responsibilities of middle managers and subject leaders
- establishing systematic methods for monitoring the school's progress, and evaluating the impact of its actions on pupils' achievements, ensuring governors have a useful role in the process

As referred to in paragraphs 70, 72, 130, 138, 144, 151

2 *Further raise pupils' achievements by:

- ensuring all subjects are planned for and delivered systematically through the school
- increasing the range of nationally recognised awards for pupils and students
- establishing more rigorous and consistent timetables for pupils' daily activities
- enabling pupils to be grouped more closely according to their ages in the secondary school

As referred to in paragraphs 6, 9, 27, 36, 37, 38, 39, 50, 107, 108, 128, 129, 132, 138

3 *The school should seek to improve transport arrangements for pupils by:

- seeking assistance from the local education authority to improve the current level of transport and its organisation
- ensuring all pupils arrive by the start of the school day
- reducing where possible the length of time some pupils are travelling to and from school

As referred to in paragraphs 20, 71

* Indicates these priorities are identified by senior management in the school's development plan.

The school should also consider the following less important weaknesses:

- improving aspects of the accommodation to include more specialist facilities
- increasing further pupils' capacity for communicating with others, through the wider use of control technology and information and communication technology
- ensuring all parents are satisfied with arrangements for reviewing annually their children's statements of special educational needs

As referred to in paragraphs 53, 65, 80, 105, 130, 157, 163

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	126
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	50

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
13	40	37	10	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	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	216
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	115

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	6

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	7

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8%

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	5%

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	6
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	3
Indian	10
Pakistani	34
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	160
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	36.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	6
Average class size	8

Education support staff: YR – Y13

Total number of education support staff	74
Total aggregate hours worked per week	2222

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Financial information

Financial year	00/01
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	£
Total income	2763977
Total expenditure	2732249
Expenditure per pupil	13011
Balance brought forward from previous year	31728
Balance carried forward to next year	31728

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	211
Number of questionnaires returned	106

Percentage of responses in each category

My child likes school.
 My child is making good progress in school.
 Behaviour in the school is good.
 My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.
 The teaching is good.
 I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.
 I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.
 The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.
 The school works closely with parents.
 The school is well led and managed.
 The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.
 The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
70	28	1	0	1
50	39	7	1	4
61	31	1	0	7
28	20	11	11	29
73	21	0	0	3
64	27	7	1	1
79	15	3	1	2
67	21	4	2	7
60	29	5	4	2
60	28	1	3	8
49	28	5	2	16
50	21	12	3	14

Additional comments may be found in the summary section under Parents' and Carers views of the school

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

90. Children start in the nursery after a thorough and detailed assessment of their needs, discussions with parents, and visits to the school, to ensure Victoria is an appropriate placement for the child. All children in the nursery have a wide range of complex, severe and profound learning difficulties, along with some form of physical impairment. Currently there are 16 children in the nursery and a large team of support staff working alongside the teacher. In all areas of learning, children are working towards achieving the early learning goals. For many children, the steps towards those goals are small and may take them well beyond their time in the foundation stage.

Personal, social and emotional development

91. Children achieve very well in their personal, social and emotional development due to the highly effective teaching and emphasis upon helping them in this area. They learn that they are part of a group from an early age, for example at the beginning of the day, children sit or lie in a circle together and adults welcome them individually, following well-established routines. There is an atmosphere of calm and well being in the nursery and children settle quickly. Activities are structured carefully to help the children cooperate, share and learn together wherever this is practically possible and realistic. There are daily times when children come together, have a drink and share news. If one child is away, staff take great care to help children understand their absence, and equally welcome them back on their return. This is particularly important as some children may have periods of ill health away from school. The routines are carefully thought through to ensure maximum comfort and continuity for the children with their routines at home, for example in sitting and standing positions, feeding programmes and noting any signs of distress swiftly and responding appropriately. The close and highly effective links between home and school in the nursery adds to the children's emotional well being, as parents maintain close contact with the staff. The teaching in this area is very good and as a result, children settle very well into school life from the beginning. This very positive foundation helps to build their confidence, self esteem and security from the start.

Communication, language and literacy

92. Children achieve very well in communication, language and literacy. They are encouraged successfully to communicate with one another, respond to their own names and greet others. Where appropriate, children use switch technology to make their preferences known, for example when choosing food and drinks at snack time. Some children are able to use terms such as "please and thank-you" at appropriate times. At the same time, many learn the principles of taking turns and waiting when necessary. The consistent use of the books between home and school means that those children will more limited communications skills have an appropriate adult reinforce what has happened at home, make relevant comments and add further meaning to the child's world. Many children show signs of pleasure when familiar stories are read and enjoy the illustrations and repetition of actions to certain themes. They listen attentively and point to pictures and well known characters in books. The teaching is very good in this area as every opportunity is taken throughout the day in other activities to emphasis these skills.

Mathematical development

93. Children achieve very well in their mathematical development. They learn to recognise simple shapes and patterns using puzzles, objects and matching games. The well chosen equipment and activities help children develop their number skills, for example a bullseye target range using special adhesive is used to encourage children to aim at certain parts of the board with small bean bags. Some children recognise simple numbers in the process. A few children

count with help and recognise written numerals. The quality of teaching is very good in this area. Resources and materials are well chosen to engage the children, for example as they learn simple rhymes, and mathematical activities relate closely to their own experience.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

94. Children achieve very well as they gain knowledge and understanding of the world around them. They start from learning about themselves and build out to their families, friends and others in their world. The teaching is skilfully structured to include spiritual dimensions such as listening to stories with moral elements, and handling special artefacts, as well as visits to important places in the locality. The teaching is very good overall in this area, and the teacher's detailed knowledge of the children and their family circumstances helps to add further meaning to activities. The nursery curriculum seeks to find creative ways of helping children understand further the world around them, for example, they looked at different pets including goldfish, made goldfish bowls with mobile fish before a visit to the local pet shop.

Physical development

95. Children achieve very well in their physical development. They follow regular routines to keep as mobile as possible during the day and move through a variety of sitting, lying and standing positions to develop further their physical awareness. They swim regularly and this activity brings genuine pleasure and delight to many. The water and warmth add further to the children's mobility and the unique opportunity to move more freely and independently for some adds further to these physical skills and helps them have increased control over their bodies. Teaching in this area is very good, and staff pay meticulous attention to maintaining and improving the children's mobility and posture throughout the day. This is carried out discretely, yet effectively often whilst other activities are underway.

Creative development

96. Children achieve very well in their creative development. They learn rhymes, use finger puppets and enjoy paint, modelling materials and dough. The newly acquired control technology animals including an elephant, giraffe and duck cause endless delight to children as they learn to converse with them and follow their movements and expressions. The activities are very well planned to include a wide variety of experiences across the curriculum. In a highly effective food technology lesson, children prepared the ingredients, and chose toppings for their pizzas as they chopped tomatoes and mushrooms, grated cheese and rolled the dough for the pizza base. There were some impressive results and children were thoroughly absorbed in the wide ranging stages of preparing, cooking and eating the pizzas. The activity gave the children rich opportunities to develop their language, use their mathematical skills in sharing the dough and halving the quantity with their partner, and co-operate with adults as they followed their lead in rolling, chopping and preparing the food. The teaching is very good in this area, and every effort is made to ensure the learning environment is colourful and interesting for children wherever they are positioned in the room.

97. The nursery is a bright, attractive and purposeful room with well chosen resources to assist the children's learning. Medical routines are carried out sensitively and with minimal disruption to the children's education. The nursery staff are strong and highly effective team. Learning support assistants are thoroughly informed of activities, and well prepared to make a full and effective contribution to the children's learning. There is a high level of consistency in handling and managing the children because all adults are so well informed of their individual needs. They gain an appropriate balance between supporting the children and enabling them to achieve growing levels of independence wherever possible. Support staff work as a cohesive and smooth running team, where time is used efficiently, and the children gain maximum benefit from their contribution.

98. Strengths identified at the time of the previous inspection have been sustained, and a higher proportion of very good teaching observed.

ENGLISH

99. Achievements in English are good. There is a very wide range of attainment in all aspects of the subject among pupils of all ages in the main school. It is inappropriate, therefore, to use the results of statutory assessments or National Curriculum levels for the purpose of comparison. One of the assessment schemes used for the subject by the school consists of a very appropriate structure of Foundation, Emerging, Apparent and Fluent performance and the vast majority of pupils are at the Foundation or Emerging levels, with the attainment of a much smaller number within the higher levels, at the equivalent of Levels 1 or 2 of the National Curriculum. Pupils at all levels, however, are making good progress in their speaking and listening and basic communication skills and in their reading. Attainment in writing is lower but shows satisfactory development throughout the school and a significant number of pupils in the Secondary and Upper School classes make good progress in this area of their work, particularly in word-processing skills.
100. The development of pupils' speaking and listening or basic communication skills benefits greatly from their very good relationships with staff. Confidence and awareness of others blossom in the Infant and Junior classes and the pupils' ability to listen, to take turns and to interact with their classmates and with staff improves markedly. This is particularly noticeable in pupils with severe communication difficulties. In one Junior class of mainly Year 5 pupils, for example, the use of a box containing a variety of instruments for them to choose from was very successful in engaging their attention. Pupils watched and listened well, followed instructions closely and responded in a variety of ways, including signing, to the teacher's questions.
101. The teaching of English, including reading and writing, is good overall throughout the school. Teachers are knowledgeable in the subject and have adapted the National Literacy Strategy effectively to add further meaning and purpose to the lessons. Numerous examples were noted during the inspection week of the effective use of signing by staff and pupils. This together with the use of symbols and a variety of colourful and stimulating "props" are important factors in the good progress made by pupils with more complex learning difficulties in expanding their range of communication. There is some use of British Sign Language as well as the more widely applicable Makaton system and the school may wish to review the efficiency of this arrangement. Staff have differing levels of expertise in each of the signing systems and pupils do not always have consistent access to their preferred signing system as a result. The previous inspection found that the use of alternative communication methods with these pupils lacked consistency. There has been satisfactory improvement in this respect.
102. The establishment of communication key workers and the valuable input and close liaison with speech and language therapists is having a positive impact on pupils' communication skills. The development of more precise communication targets for individual pupils, although these are still variable in quality, and a better range of resources have all combined to take the school closer towards its aim of a "total communication policy". Some inconsistency still exists, however. In two lessons observed, staff were making insufficient use of signs, symbols or supporting resources with the result that pupils were given no opportunity to communicate their response to the activities. In general, lessons are rich in opportunities for the development of language and communication. Among the higher-attaining pupils in the Secondary and Upper classes particularly, the effects of these could clearly be seen in the confident way in which they talked to visitor, in their mature contribution to an assembly and in the very good performance of a mixed class of upper school pupils in a Drama lesson which required them to speak to the class as representatives of their own "political party".
103. Pupils enjoy books and there is much evidence of a healthy culture of reading in the school. There is a well-stocked library which all pupils have regular opportunities to use. Teaching focuses to good effect on the basic skills of reading, such as the matching of letters and combinations of letters with spoken sounds and the recognition of whole words. The adoption of the National Literacy Strategy has clearly added clarity and consistency to teachers' planning and record-keeping. Younger pupils and those with more complex learning difficulties make good progress, moving from the matching of objects with pictures and symbols to the recognition of an increasing number of symbols, letters and words. Teaching is particularly effective in promoting the enjoyment of books and the following of a story

through the text by these pupils by the use of a wide variety of props, sound effects and the physical involvement of the pupils in the acting out of the story. In one lesson for a class of mainly Year 9 pupils with severe learning difficulties, for example, these methods brought a very lively response from pupils who looked and listened intently as the story unfolded, reached out for and felt resources, vocalised and laughed. Higher-attaining pupils show increasing levels of independence in their use of books as they move through the school. In their literacy sessions at the beginning of the day, they are keen to settle down with their books and read on their own. By the time they are sixteen, they are reading a variety of books, both fiction and non-fiction, and other materials, such as worksheets in other subjects of the curriculum, with increased accuracy, confidence and understanding.

104. Achievements in writing are appropriate at the various levels of attainment which exist in the school. For pupils with more complex learning difficulties, for example, there is evidence of progress from the cutting and pasting of symbols to build a simple sentence to the over-writing and in some cases copying of letters and words. Higher-attaining pupils complete a good quantity of written work in their folders, often linked with their reading schemes, which develops through Infant and Junior classes to include more independent writing, for example, in their news books. Spelling and handwriting continue to be less well-developed in the Secondary and Upper classes but the range of what pupils attempt to record broadens both in English and other subjects of the curriculum and there are good examples of word-processed work in which pupils have used the "spellcheck" facility to improve their accuracy. By sixteen, some higher-attaining pupils are writing about books which they have read and are beginning to organise more complex ideas in sentences. This represents good progress.
105. Learning resources for English are good, although the reading schemes used for older pupils do not provide subject matter which is appropriate for the age and developing interests of these pupils. The use of alternative communication devices seen during the inspection week was limited but individual education plans provide evidence that they are being used effectively to improve pupils' ability to communicate. The delays caused by the need to have this equipment repaired off-site and the heavy cost to the English Department's budget of purchasing or replacing these items are constraining factors which need to be reviewed by the school.
106. Assessment in English is producing a useful array of data about pupils' progress in all aspects of the subject but the collation of this information to help the school to compare the performance of different groups of pupils, to moderate assessments or to set whole-school targets is still underdeveloped. Opportunities for pupils to gain some form of accreditation in the subject are inadequate. Responsibility for the co-ordination of English is currently divided and this arrangement does not lend itself to the effective management of whole-school issues such as these. A good development plan has been formulated for the subject, however, and a start has been made on areas such as the use of assessment data. Overall, improvements in English since the last inspection have been good. The quality of teaching has improved with more good and very good teaching than previously reported, and assessment is used more effectively. The National Literacy Strategy is being creatively adapted to ensure good access for pupils' wide ranging needs and this is having a positive impact on their achievements.

MATHEMATICS

107. Pupils' achievements in mathematics are good overall with pupils showing good levels of learning both in their lessons and over time. There are a wide range of special needs within the school which makes comparison with national data difficult but results of teacher assessments in national tests at 7,11 and 13 show pupils are attaining levels on a par with those in similar schools. Higher attaining pupils in the upper school and in the post 16 (Round Table Centre) are preparing for the Edexcel Certificate of Achievement in mathematics with some pupils taking the exam for the first time in July 2001. There is a wide range of achievement levels within each year. Those pupils following the National Numeracy strategy are given specific learning targets and their achievements are improving and are overall good. Other pupils with more complex needs have not had such clear numeracy targets in the past and their progress over time has been satisfactory. With the implementation of the Access (Equals) curriculum in mathematics these pupil's numeracy targets are now more focused and their learning in lessons was seen to be good overall.

108. The youngest pupils, up to the age of seven, are beginning to count often through number songs and games and the higher attainers can match a written number to the correct number of objects. Older pupils up to the age of 11 are becoming more secure in counting up to five and are beginning to realise the concept of subtraction and addition through songs, for example, about little ducks swimming away from mum and then coming back. Higher attainers are able to add three numbers together to make 10, they know the idea of more than and less than. Pupils with complex needs are able to feel shapes such as balls and triangles and in playing a game of skittles realise the difference between 1 and 2. Pupils up to the age of 13 are confident in counting to higher numbers and can locate the number before and after correctly. They are learning the concept of zero. They can recognise two dimensional shapes such as circles and triangles and the higher attainers have used fractions including halves and three quarters. Pupils with complex needs are experiencing heavy and light objects and are able to indicate which is which so that the objects can be sorted. Others are learning the vocabulary of up and down and to the side by watching a light beam. Some of the older higher attaining pupils working on the numeracy strategy are on their five times table. They are able to identify the pattern of odd and even within the table and then apply the concept of multiplication to working out their six times table. Some of the pupils up to the age of 16 are working on the syllabus of the Certificate of Education.
109. Pupils use their numeracy skills effectively in many other subjects. Counting the number of pupils in class for registration is common. Weighing ingredients in Food Technology, measuring throwing distances in physical education, counting traffic in a survey in geography and sequencing time in history all help pupils extend their use of numeracy .
110. The quality of teaching is overall good with one third of lessons seen being judged very good. The school has established the National Numeracy Strategy and methods for the higher attaining pupils throughout the school and the Access (Equals) curriculum for pupils with more complex needs and the methodology of dividing the lesson time into whole class work and individual work has been adopted. This means that teachers are now using plans which have clear learning objectives and that tasks are well matched to individual pupils so that each pupil is able to consolidate or develop new work in the lesson This is a major improvement from the time of the previous inspection. Teachers and support assistants are skilled in using open questions that encourage pupils to think about how they are solving problems. There is very good use of resources, television and role play to generate motivation and help pupils maintain concentration. In one lesson with pupils with very special needs music was well used to indicate a change of activity and tactile materials helped pupils recognise numbers. The use of signing and symbols has not been fully developed in numeracy sessions and on the few occasions when it was seen it was of great benefit to the pupils understanding and ability to participate. In some senior classes, computer programmes are used well being specifically adapted for individual pupils which helps them gain the confidence to learn independently. In a very good lesson the crisp pace, challenging questions, meant that the pupils had to really think for themselves and they learnt quickly as a result. The plenary session at the end of the lesson not only celebrated these achievements, but also through encouraging pupil's comments and observations, re-inforced the learning of the lesson for everyone.
111. Pupils enjoy their mathematics and show considerable motivation and diligence in joining in and completing work. This is a good improvement since the previous inspection. Those pupils who can write do so with care and neatness. All pupils are confident to participate especially in whole class discussion.
112. There has also been good improvement in the organisation and planning of the curriculum with the establishment of the National Numeracy strategy and the Access (Equals) schemes. This means that pupils' entitlement to the national Curriculum can be delivered. Those teachers using the numeracy strategy are now experienced in using this planning to set personal targets for each pupil and assessing their achievements against them. Teachers using the Access curriculum are developing their ability to adapt from the pupil's previous practice and pupil targets are becoming more focused on challenging and progressive objectives. Pupils are now assessed termly against the QCA 'P' scales and their achievements recorded to give an overview of progress. This is a good improvement since the previous inspection.

113. The co-ordinator has worked effectively to establish a sound foundation for the teaching and learning of numeracy across the school and she is determined to improve on this foundation in particular through involvement in the Key Stage 3 numeracy strategy. Other school commitments this academic year have limited her opportunities to monitor and evaluate developments in the subject as she would have wished. The school realises the need to establish consistency in time allocation and access to the subject. Currently there is significant variation in different classes, their timetables, and allocated time for mathematics.
114. Resources in the subject are good and ICT is being developed especially for older pupils to help consolidate their mathematical skills.
115. In summary, there has been a good level of improvement in this subject since the previous inspection including:
- The effective implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy
 - Enabling pupils to use their numeracy skills frequently in other subjects, thus reinforcing their practical understanding of number
 - Pupils' enthusiasm and motivation for the subject
 - More systematic assessment of pupils, using information appropriately for future planning
- These improvements have all led to pupils achieving more, and increasing their understanding in the practical use and application of mathematics in every day life.

SCIENCE

116. The achievement of the majority of pupils throughout the school is excellent when measured against their previous knowledge and understanding of science. They achieve high standards because of outstanding teaching by the specialist science co-ordinator.
117. Excellent lesson preparation helps some of the youngest pupils in the school, with severe communication difficulties, to experience the characteristics of water. They watch and reach out to try and catch the bubbles that have been fanned above them. The stimulating activities with water help them to vocalise, smile and clap their hands as they begin to notice the difference between cold and warm water. Learning support assistants are very well deployed and assess any small gains in pupils' achievement.
118. Higher attaining 11-year-old pupils are studying electricity. Very good resources, such as a toaster, kettle and radio, demonstrate common household appliances that are plugged into the main electrical circuit. Probing questioning helps pupils to consider other forms of electricity we use in the house; they think of batteries and items such as a torch and handheld fan. This leads into a challenge, with pupils having to make a circuit with batteries and wires to light a bulb. They thoroughly enjoy the practical activity and work co-operatively together until they get their bulbs to light. Pupils are proud of their achievements and learn, through investigation, that a complete circuit is needed for their bulb to light. With help from learning support assistants and the teacher, they use the digital camera to record their achievements.
119. By the age of 14, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties are studying materials and their properties. In the sensory garden, they explore sounds, scents and textures. Excellent teaching and support helps the pupils to feel and smell different herbs, listen to the sounds made by water and pebbles and generally encourage an interest in the environment. The pupils respond and achieve excellently, showing their likes and dislikes by eye pointing, smiling and moving their heads in reaction to the sensory elements of the garden. With physical assistance from an adult, pupils make a tile using clay and materials found in the garden such as gravel and twigs.
120. In an excellently planned lesson the teacher challenges the 16-year-old pupils to find out why bread needs yeast. Very good questioning enables pupils to think about how they will carry out the investigation, make sensible predictions about the outcome and ensure a fair test. All resources and materials are to hand, which enables the lesson to run smoothly and make effective use of time. Pupils follow the written lesson notes and accurately measure out the yeast, salt, sugar and water before putting it into a test tube and attaching a balloon to the end. They watch intently as their balloons start to rise, which confirms the predictions of

many. The higher attainers record their results accurately. Pupils achieve well in this lesson, learning that scientific evidence may cause them to change their mind. The older pupils show an increasing independence and are much less reliant upon the teacher and learning support assistants for help.

121. Overall the co-ordination and teaching of science is outstanding. Seven lessons were observed during the inspection, of these four were excellent and three very good. Signing is used very well in science lessons. Since the last inspection there has been a significant improvement in teaching and curriculum development. Accreditation in science has just begun with pupils starting the first year of a two-year course leading to the Certificate of Achievement. The curriculum is enhanced by visits to places such as Springfield Environmental Studies Centre and Birmingham Botanical Gardens. The new accommodation is designed specifically to meet the needs of the pupils. For example, hydraulic, height adjustable tables are making science much more accessible for non-ambulant pupils. There are good links with numeracy, design and technology and English, such as the measuring and weighing of ingredients and the teaching of scientific language. Information and communication technology is being very well used for recording the results of investigations and labelling and preparing visual aids. The pre-National Curriculum Levels, are being used very effectively to assess pupils and set targets for learning. The high quality teaching of science is a strength of the school.

ART AND DESIGN

122. It was only possible to observe a few lessons, so judgements about pupils' achievement and progress are also based on the scrutiny of teachers' plans, records, displays around the school and discussions with the co-ordinator. Pupils' achievements and progress in art and design are good overall. They demonstrate a good range of skills and abilities at all key stages. At times their achievements are very good, particularly when the teacher has expertise in the area being taught. There are strengths in the way pupils' artwork is used to enhance the environment and to extend sensory experiences. The inspiration provided by professional artists, who visit the school, is used effectively to enhance the curriculum and pupils' artistic experiences.
123. Since the last inspection there have been good improvements overall. Teaching has improved, curriculum planning is better and work is now more closely matched to the needs of the pupils. Art and design makes a greater contribution to pupils' cultural education because of the impact of agreed whole school cultural themes
124. During Key Stage 1, pupils experiment with a variety of techniques including hand and finger painting, sticking, painting and collage. As part of their work on transport Year 1 pupils' paint the background for a large road scene, they make choices in colours to be used and experience simple pattern making using blocks and sponges. Pupils with more profound and complex difficulties co-operate with an adult by accepting hand to hand support while working. By the time they are seven, pupils use a range of art and design skills to produce colourful collages. Paper and paint is used very creatively to produce a rainforest and the butterflies and birds that live there. Clear representation is made of leaves, trees and creatures through good use of different materials, paper, plastic and paints of many colours.
125. Throughout Key Stage 2, pupils work on observational drawings and produce a range of two and three dimensional work exploring the possibilities of a variety of materials and processes. By the time they are eleven, pupils are beginning to use paint and colour effectively. They use a combination of watercolours and pastel to create landscapes.
126. During Key Stage 3 pupils experience collage, printing and producing 3D models. Year 7 pupils explore a variety of different materials, colours and textures. Higher attaining pupils are able to choose their own materials from a selection when making models or contributing to a large collage. Pupils with visual impairment are provided with verbal information and one to one support make their contribution to artwork for a display on materials.
127. During Key Stage 4 pupils study the work of known artists, for example pupils looked at Jackson Pollock's abstract painting as part of their 'History of Art' theme, and talked about the

techniques he used. They then created their own abstract paintings in the style of Jackson Pollock, working in-groups and using their colour mixing skills. By the time they are sixteen most pupils can use a range of methods to convey observation, ideas and feelings and also design and produce images.

128. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and at times it is very good. Relationships with pupils are very good, which helps them to tackle work confidently. Pupils enjoy what they are doing and work hard to produce work of which they can be proud. This is evident in the many displays in corridors and classrooms representing the work of many pupils. Teachers and support staff know their pupils well and plan activities to give a range of appropriate experiences to enhance pupils' sense of colour, form and texture. Staff ensure that art is used well to promote communication skills and support work in other subjects. Examples of topic work that included English, history and RE illustrated in collages, paintings and sculptures produced by the whole class were seen in several classes. Pupils co-operate well with each other, concentrate hard and are proud of their work. Teachers' planning provides for pupils of all abilities and makes good use of support staff to give many pupils one to one support. However there are no opportunities for older pupils to take accredited courses and gain qualifications in the subject.
129. The work displayed in classrooms and around the school is attractive and shows that pupils experience a good range of techniques including pottery, painting, observational drawing, 3D sculpture and collage. There is still no clearly defined path of learning to show the skills and techniques pupils should learn as they move through the school, and this means there is no guarantee that they will build on skills they have already learnt. In addition there is no recognised way of assessing what pupils have learnt, which means that art lessons are experiences for the whole class rather than developing and extending the skills of individual pupils. While information technology is under used as a creative force, it is used well to record pupils' work, for example Year 2 sculptures were recorded alongside Andrew Goldsworthy's sculptures on CD to provide an interactive resource for pupils.
130. The subject co-ordinator is experienced, and works hard to extend pupils' artistic experiences, but as yet is not given the time to monitor planning and teaching in order to obtain a whole school view of standards and the overall levels of pupils achievement. Resources for art and design are good but the school still lacks the specialist facilities noted at the last inspection.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

131. Pupils' achievements and progress in design and technology are good overall. Judgements about pupil's achievement and progress are based on lesson observations, scrutiny of teachers' plans, pupil's records, displays around the school and discussions with the two co-ordinators.
132. Since the last inspection good improvements have been made in curriculum planning and teaching, however at present there is a lack of opportunities for older pupils to take accredited courses in design and technology.
133. By the age of seven, through a multisensory approach, pupils taste a variety of fruit and make judgements about the shape, colour and taste. Other elements of design and technology can be identified through other subjects such as art and design and science. Year 2 pupils make musical instruments from plastic pots and bottles. With support they design and make the instruments as part of a South American topic. The highest attaining pupils apply the papier mache and paint the finished object. Pupils with profound and complex learning difficulties rely heavily on the support of the teacher and support assistants to complete their designs but nevertheless show keen interest when given the opportunities to experience the smells and textures of food, for example fruit juice.
134. Pupils in Key Stage 2 design and make stamps, cards, envelopes and flags using a variety of paper and card. They use templates and different ways of joining materials to produce items they are pleased to take home. By the age of eleven, during a food technology lesson, pupils produce a Viking and present day picnic, and discuss which is healthier. Higher attaining pupils suggest ways the Viking may have packaged their picnic when on the move.

135. Pupils in Key Stage 3 produce a good range of South American rain forest creatures using junk materials, textiles, paint and glue. They design and make snakes, butterflies and monkeys. Working with tools, equipment and materials, they discuss and plan their constructions, suggesting how to progress as their ideas develop. By the age of fourteen, pupils can use pictures and words to show what they are making, and use tools and materials, with assistance if needed, to make good products from food and resistant materials. Pupils with profound and complex difficulties succeed in making rainforest creatures using junk materials with the hand on hand support of a member of staff, for example Year 9 pupils make a realistic looking crocodile by using egg boxes. Higher attaining pupils working with a specialist teacher use brightly coloured wool to create felt animal prints.
136. Pupils develop their skills appropriately as they move through the school and by the end of Key Stage 4, higher attaining pupils are able to work more independently on their designing and making activities. For example, pupils in Key Stage 4 have recently been working with a specialist teacher to design, make and transfer designs to tee shirts. The pupils involved made good use of the computer when planning and evaluating their designs and staff make good use of information and communication technology to record pupils' achievements using digital cameras. Post sixteen pupils design and make a number of food products such as pizza, scones and flapjack for sale in the school's coffee shop and consider the importance of design and taste, in their evaluation of the finished product. These higher attaining pupils are using information and communication technology effectively to invite guests to the coffee club and produce menus, labels and price lists using the computer. They were recently highly commended for a new savoury recipe, which was entered into the Food and Farming Challenge, supported by the Royal Agricultural Society.
137. The quality of teaching and learning is always good and sometimes very good or excellent. In the very good and excellent lessons teachers' planning is very good and learning intentions are clearly defined which helps to develop the concept of design and to teach new skills. Clear instructions, good demonstrations and good use of resources, many adapted to enable all pupils and students access to materials and equipment, means effective use is made of time. In all food technology lessons, rules of hygiene are well taught. Staff ensure that pupils wear protective clothing and are careful to observe safety guidelines when using tools. Pupils listen carefully and concentrate well for relatively long periods of time because of teacher's good pupil management skills. Relationships are very good which helps pupils to benefit from the assistance given by the teachers and support assistants when designing and making in classrooms. Learning support assistants are very well trained and have clearly defined roles. They provide effective support and are skilled in helping individuals or groups of pupils.
138. There are class schemes of work, which give pupils a wide range of experiences over time. However, there is no current whole school scheme of work linked to a system of recording achievement, progress of knowledge or skill development. The subject co-ordinator work hard to extend pupils' design and technological experiences, but as yet are not given the time to monitor planning and teaching in order to obtain a whole school view of standards and the overall levels of pupils achievement. Regular visitors enhance the curriculum providing opportunities for pupils to learn new skills. Resources for design and technology are good but the school still lacks the specialist facilities noted at the last inspection.

GEOGRAPHY

139. Pupils in all key stages achieve well in geography and make good progress. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Additionally, the curriculum provides an interesting range of opportunities, so that pupils enjoy a wide range of experiences and thus enhance the quality of their learning.
140. The younger pupils explore their immediate environment and all the adults help them to learn about what happens in different parts of the school. Those with more severe learning difficulties respond well to sensory stimuli, especially when on field trips where they listen attentively for the sound of traffic or people to identify known routes outside the school environment. By the time that they are eleven, pupils have experienced a rich variety of field trips and skills have been developed carefully. Teachers organise lessons effectively so that

pupils make suitable progress. For example, they learn first about map outlines and compass points before moving on to the use of atlases, comparisons, compasses and an awareness of physical features.

141. By the time that they are fourteen, the higher attaining pupils understand about the countries of the United Kingdom; they know that Scotland has its own unique characteristics. They are aware of places beyond their locality, and can talk about what gives places their character; this is helped by visits to the Birmingham area and the skilful use of videos to show, for example, how Pakistan is different to Birmingham. Pupils show interest in their area: for example, older pupils with less severe needs look at Birmingham's recent development and talk knowledgeably about it. Standards are helped by some interesting photographs on 'Our Brum' which stimulate reflection and further questions. Pupils with more severe learning difficulties are able to follow simple routes around the school between different areas.
142. Teaching is good. Planning and preparation are detailed and show appropriate expectations of what pupils will learn. As a result, those with greater difficulties respond to the one-to-one support in order to engage with the tasks and experiences offered. For example, Key Stage 3 pupils with profound learning difficulties responded well to sensory elements around the subject of water and, in another class, they were able to become aware of aerial views using maps of their classrooms. Support staff make a significant contribution to the quality of learning: they work effectively and discreetly: for example they took the necessary photographs of the classroom plan so that the lesson could proceed briskly. Relationships and classroom management are very good; this enables clear physical and emotional boundaries to be established so that pupils can explore ideas and places safely. Teaching benefits from good resources. Teachers plan activities creatively, for example when Key Stage 2 pupils enjoyed a multi-sensory approach to a visit to the sea side by feeling sand and experiencing steam.
143. The curriculum has satisfactory breadth and balance. It also has some good features, including a wide range of visits, and a residential trip to York. The school makes a good contribution to pupils' cultural development through its contrasting studies of a range of places; similarly, many lessons enhance the pupils' communication and listening skills.
144. The new co-ordinator has been in post a matter of weeks and is aware of what needs to be done. Nevertheless, the subject has benefited from good teaching and improved resources over time. In order to improve the subject further, the role of the subject coordinator needs to be more clearly defined. In addition, there needs to be sufficient time to monitor the subject and its development.

HISTORY

145. Pupils in all key stages achieve well in history and make good progress. This is mainly because they study interesting and relevant topics and are taught by teachers who are both enthusiastic and skilled at meeting their needs. There has been good improvement since the last inspection: standards of achievement remain good, teaching has improved and resources are now much more plentiful. As a result the quality of learning is now better than it was.
146. The younger pupils study history as part of a topic with geography but opportunities are taken to emphasise historical themes such as change over time. For example, the pupils are able to recognise that their clothes get bigger as they grow older and so they sequence babies' clothes and those of older children. By the time that they are eleven, pupils carefully develop their understanding of history by some imaginative teaching. For example, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties discovered what it was like for people who went on holiday in the past and travelled on steam trains. Older, higher attaining pupils can point to photographs showing their friends as babies and recognise their own baby toys. Others with less severe learning difficulties understand that combs and jewellery have not changed much from Viking times but that wedding feasts no longer last for a month!
147. By the time that they are fourteen, pupils are developing skills of chronology through well planned teaching. For example, when being taught about the quarrel between Becket and Henry II, higher attaining pupils could place cards in a date sequence to reflect the story

accurately. Pupils experience and enjoy aspects of history from a range of civilizations, often through dressing up, role play and handling artefacts. When they bake a nettle and herb pie, visit a Viking museum, take part as Romans in a toga tea party or decide whether to allow into their village anybody who might have the plague they respond to sensory stimuli, listen attentively and develop their communication skills.

148. By the time that they are sixteen, pupils continue to consolidate skills of chronology and communication. In a lesson on the twentieth century, pupils showed that they can sequence events and the lives of different people. They are keen to explain or to show their work.
149. Teaching is consistently good and often better. There were examples of very good teaching for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties: planning was precise, resources carefully chosen and the pace was brisk. As a result, pupils were as aware as possible of the activity, through their senses and surroundings as when going to the seaside, discovering the Vikings or making medieval food. Activities are matched to pupils' needs so that their quality of learning is enhanced; as when studying the Second World War or recognising the difference between kings and archbishops. Teachers use an interesting variety of signs and symbols to ensure that they communicate effectively with the pupils. Support staff are used efficiently and everyone knows their responsibilities; as a result, pupils are able to respond well. For example, in a lesson on the twentieth century when pupils were in groups support staff helped progress by helping forward their understanding of the order of events. Overall, the carefully organised lessons, taught with appropriate pace and variety, enables pupils to sustain their interest and concentration, despite their attention difficulties.
150. The history curriculum is broad and balanced. The co-ordinator has shown imagination in making important historical knowledge and skills accessible and enjoyable for all pupils. In particular, she emphasises the importance of local history, role-play, artefacts and opportunities for dressing up. Teachers know pupils well and clear records are kept. Photographs are used particularly well to document activities.
151. The subject is led well by a capable and energetic co-ordinator. She ensures that the subject makes a good contribution both to spiritual and to cultural development. ICT is used imaginatively and the subject makes a strong contribution to the ethos of the school. Currently, however, she has received insufficient non-contact time to pursue her management functions. Additionally, there is a lack of clarity around her responsibilities for curriculum and assessment across the school.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

152. Throughout the school, the achievement of the majority of pupils in information and communication technology is good. Peripheral devices such as concept keyboards and touch screens, different types of switches and software such as "Writing With Symbols" are being effectively used to aid pupils' communication. The new co-ordinator is having a very positive impact in developing the wider use of information and communication technology and the training of staff.
153. By the age of seven, some of the higher attaining, non-ambulant pupils are learning to program a robotic toy. The specialist teacher plans the lesson very well, linking it to work being done in mathematics and challenging the pupils to estimate distances of up to a metre. She gives accurate instructions using good signing. The pupils enjoy the task and find it fun, but they soon learn that it will not travel the one metre distance if it is not programmed accurately.
154. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties who are 11, know that if they touch a switch it will produce a sound or an action. They enjoy using switch toys such as an elephant, cat and giraffe. Some react to the vibrations by smiling, whilst others show their feelings by moving their head and looking at the moving toy. The teacher uses the last five minutes of the lesson effectively to discuss how well each group have worked. At this time, information is gathered from the learning support assistants and parent governor helping in the classroom, about pupils' achievements and the development and use of fine motor skills.

155. Fourteen-year-old pupils with communication difficulties learn how to use switches to access technology. The teacher communicates well with the pupils, getting them to listen, follow instructions and make a choice between a switch to operate a radio light or a disco light. With practise, they begin to do this more accurately and show their obvious delight by smiling and moving their heads when they make the correct choice and music is played on the radio.
156. Pupils with severe learning difficulties, aged 16 years, use information and communication technology to assist them in counting to six. The computer room is well equipped and prepared for them and they have a touch screen, pressure switches, concept keyboards and a roller ball to motivate and help them to reinforce their number skills. The co-ordinator gives very good individual support and ensures that the pupils use the equipment sensibly and derive the most benefit from it. The older pupils in the school show an increasing competence in using the equipment and are becoming far more independent when using it.
157. The co-ordination of information and communication technology is very good. Money has been well spent on hardware and software and in developing the new computer room. Since the last inspection, pupils' achievement has improved and is now good. Teaching is good overall and very good in the discrete lessons. The majority of staff use the digital camera effectively for recording pupils' achievements and the word processor is used well to label displayed work. The main weakness is the use of information and communication technology in other subjects throughout the curriculum, although there are some good examples of it being well used in English, science and history lessons. More staff training is required in areas such as control technology, the use of CD-ROMs and the Internet to enable staff to help pupils to develop their research skills. There has been a significant improvement in the development of the curriculum but the school is aware that further work is required to improve the assessment and recording of pupils' achievements.

FRENCH

158. Pupils learning and achievement is good and at Key Stage 2 it is very good. Teachers assessment is closely linked to the planning for the next lesson and this has particular advantages making sure pupils continue to build their vocabulary. Pupils are highly motivated and their retention of vocabulary is a strength. One Key Stage 4 group, having their first French lesson since before the half-term break, surprised even the teacher with their recall of work undertaken before the holiday. They were enthusiastic when they sang "Head and shoulders, knees and toes" in French and found it a very exciting activity. However, there are times when pupils are restricted by their spelling of English words and their handwriting skills. This was the case in a lesson where they were required to translate from written French into English. A small group found that they could do the translation perfectly but were disadvantaged by their uncertain spelling and motor control.
159. Since the last inspection, the co-ordinator has made some significant improvement in the quality and range of the resources. Assessment procedures are now good and inform future planning and the introduction of the certificate of achievement has assisted in raising the profile of the subject within the school and pupils achieve more. There is still no permanent base for the subject, which in the last report was judged to inhibit its development.
160. The quality of teaching in the small sample of lessons observed is good and can be very good. All of the teachers of the subject are enthusiastic, have a very good command of the language and are highly skilled and experienced in teaching pupils with severe learning difficulties. Planning is very thorough giving pupils a clear indication of what is to be covered in the lesson. Teachers commitment to high achievement is a strength of their work. There is a high level of target language used in the lessons, this being particularly strong at Key Stage 2. Here pupils enjoy speaking French and are able to complete sentences to describe what their peers are wearing. In this lesson the teacher used a range of aids such as cardboard dolls and clothes to reinforce the learning taking place. There are times when pupils make well planned use of information communication technology (ICT) to access the learning opportunities. However, there are numerous occasions when opportunities are missed for the use of ICT in lessons. Behaviour in all of the lessons seen was very good and there are times when pupils want to continue using their French well beyond its conclusion. Following one lesson a short class

assembly ended the day with the teacher saying "goodbye" to the pupils as they left, with one offering an "au-revoir".

161. The curriculum is appropriate and relevant for these pupils. It is based on schemes of work which lead to external accreditation through the certificate of achievement assessed by the Birmingham Comenius Centre. Judging by the high quality of the learning at Key Stage 2, the co-ordinator recognises the need to explore other external accreditation for some of the pupils at the school. The co-ordinator is a graduate in French and adds a flair and dynamism to the management of the subject. Resources are good, being sufficiently varied to meet the needs of the pupils and are based on the "O.K." published scheme. There is no designated room for the subject which deprives it of a large display area where the ambience of France might be created. The co-ordinator does make every effort to overcome this and there is a whole school French day for every child. This adds further to their experience and understanding of the language, culture and life in France.

MUSIC

162. Achievement in music is very good across the key stages and at times it can be excellent. Most pupils listen attentively, pay visual attention and explore tactile objects. At Key Stage 1, they understand pulse and are able to clap rhythmically. Pupils are able to listen to a piece of music and pick up the rhythm perfectly. They are able to clap in repeating fours and then extend it to eight. There is very good appreciation of long and short sounds and they are beginning to be confident in playing simple instruments such as the triangle. At Key Stage 2, pupils are able to develop rhythmic patterns by clapping. They can identify the number of syllables in their first names and clap that number in a unified composition with their peers in the group. At Key Stage 3, pupils show good levels of anticipation of what is to follow which is based on their musical experience. The higher attainers can hold and play instruments, explore tactile objects, join in with movement when appropriate, with a minimum of prompting. At Key Stage 4, pupils understand the variation of percussion patterns, how they inter-relate and their relationship with time.
163. Since the last inspection, a specialist co-ordinator has been appointed and this has raised the range and standard of music being delivered at the school. Pupils' achievement in music is now very good across the key stages. The quality of teaching in music is now very good and occasionally excellent. However, there is still no specialist room and the co-ordinator undertakes the time consuming chore of transporting equipment over extensive distances within a large, complex building. The lack of a specially equipped music room restricts further developments in the subject. Insufficient use is made of information and communication technology and this remains the case.
164. The quality of teaching across the key stages is very good. There are times when pupils' experience teaching of a quite exceptional standard. This is typified by a multi-class music and Makaton signing lesson. During the inspection this group was more than fifty children who participated fully in a 'theatrical' experience of drama and music all accompanied by highly skilled signing by the teacher and his support colleagues working with individuals in the "audience". When the session ended after 45 minutes the pupils wanted more. This was an inspirational session with everyone accessing the learning and gaining immeasurably from it. Where music is taught to a single class, the progression across the key stages is very evident. Teaching for younger pupils focuses appropriately on the introduction of pulse and rhythm and one can trace this development through to more sophisticated aspects of composition. Teaching is very well planned with thorough assessment being made after each lesson and recorded on the evaluation section of the lesson plan. These evaluations form the basis for the planning of the next lesson to ensure that each pupil will have full access to the learning. The teacher's technical expertise and knowledge of both the subject and the special needs of the pupils, is excellent.
165. The subject co-ordinator is a graduate musician with a second degree in education specialising in multi-sensory impairment. Her expertise has added a new dimension to the subject and her flair has encouraged pupils and colleagues across the school to use music in their teaching. A volunteer comes in to take a 'singalong' lesson where pupils sing their favourite popular songs. This makes an outstanding contribution to the subject and is an excellent experience for the

many pupils (38 on the day), who had the privilege of attending. The lunch-time choir practice, an extra-curricular activity, is much enjoyed by a regular group of youngsters who want to sing. They give performances at concerts and coffee mornings during the year. Further enrichment is provided by visiting players such as Silver Lining Brass and 'Caliche', musicians from Chile. During the autumn term all of the lower school were involved in performing Ffinlo's Christmas Circus. In May, two classes attended World Music Day at Symphony Hall in Birmingham and a visiting peripetetic percussion specialist is to be employed to teach drumming. Not to be outdone, the staff have been involved in a hand-chime group and given two public performances. The subject makes a huge contribution to the excellent cultural development and is a strength of the school.

166. Resources are rich and varied covering classical, ethnic and popular music which are very well used by the co-ordinator and borrowed by colleagues across the school. There is a need to extend some areas of resources such as percussion instruments and information communication technology programs but, the biggest impediment to the further development of music at the school is the lack of a specialist room.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

167. Pupils' achievements are good in physical education (PE) at all key stages. Pupils in Victoria School have a wide range of mobility and physical capacity but through a teaching programme based securely on the National Curriculum programmes of study. There are high expectations and all pupils show the confidence to attempt a range of tasks. Overall they are making good progress. The youngest pupils up to the age of seven are able to stretch, roll and sit up and enjoy balancing on the physio ball. Some older pupils with more complex needs are able to experience changes in position, pressure and weight bearing as they are able to move more freely on the soft mats in the PE hall. They particularly enjoy the sensation of the wafting of air when the parachute is waved over them. Pupils up to the age of 11 and 13 are beginning to practice for the athletics sports day at the end of term and they are learning the techniques of throwing, measuring their throw and thinking of ways to improve their performance. Pupils in the secondary school up to the age of 16 enjoy a range of sports activities. One group playing cricket practised the basic skills of catching and throwing and then learnt the techniques of batting and bowling so that they were able to join in a simple game together with all pupils including those in wheel chairs involved. Other pupils are preparing for the Keilder Challenge with a group of pupils from a local mainstream school in learning how to solve physical problems through teamwork and co-operation.
168. All pupils in the school have a swimming session each week. This is not only enjoyable and relaxing but pupils are able to increase their mobility in the water and many are confident to float and move around independently with buoyancy aids in the hydro pool. A significant number of pupils have gained sufficient skills and confidence to move to swimming sessions in the local leisure centre pool.
169. The quality of teaching in PE is good with some very good elements and the pupils' learning is also good. Teachers are skilled and experienced and plan tasks that are closely related to clear learning objectives, thus helping pupils develop their mobility, balance and physical skills. All lessons start with a warm up and end with a cool down and all activities take suitable regard for health and safety. Teachers start the activity with a very good explanation and demonstration of the task so that pupils are confident to have a try and support teachers and assistants are clear of the expectations. These expectations are high and teachers encourage pupils to aim for 'the real thing' in letting them see and feel, for example, a real discus before they practice their throwing with softer beanbags. Older and more able pupils are using the real thing in competing in the regional athletics meet. In fact in the week prior to the inspection a group of five pupils had qualified for the National Athletics meet in Blackpool later in the year. Teachers give time to pupils to think about their efforts and how they can improve them so that many pupils were able to improve their throw the second time.
170. Pupils have a very positive attitude to their PE sessions. They enjoy them, listen carefully and follow instructions so that they and others are safe and they can learn quickly. Senior pupils playing cricket behave well following the rules and showing sportsmanship. The Keilder

Challenge group used collaboration and a sense of humour to get out of the tangle problem given them by the teacher.

171. The subject is well led by a specialist teacher and there is now a whole school scheme of work based securely on the National Curriculum so that all pupils can gain their full entitlement to the programmes of study. There is also a very good range of extra curricular activities, some out of school time, including snooker, darts, badminton, golf, athletics as well as football matches with local special and mainstream schools. This gives all pupils the opportunity for a rich PE experience. The recording and assessment of each pupil's achievements is being developed. The current system gives end of term judgements but the co-ordinator is considering ways of recording main achievements in lessons so that pupils can be encouraged to improve on their 'personal best' and a record of these personal achievements is built up over the year. The co-ordinator works effectively and has the co-operation of class teachers and support assistants. He has a clear vision, with an appropriate action plan, as to how the subject should be developed. The level of resources is good
172. The good standards reported in the previous inspection have been maintained and there is now a good foundation for further improvement.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

173. Achievements in religious education are good and often very good. The subject has developed well since the last inspection. The co-ordination of the subject is very effective, and has provided a thoughtful interpretation of the Agreed Syllabus to match the needs of pupils. This includes a very helpful planning framework, enabling class teachers to include a good balance of religious topics either in cross-curricular work or discrete religious education lessons. The stock of learning resources has also been improved, particularly in the number of religious artefacts available.
174. Teaching is good overall and makes good use of these artefacts to stimulate pupils' interest. In a lesson for higher-attaining junior pupils, for example, a prayer mat containing a compass fascinated the children and provided a very good focus for their work on the practice of praying in Islam. These pupils were familiar with words and names such as mosque, Mohammed and Mecca and the teacher's high expectations led to a good discussion of the derivation of the word "breakfast". Pupils with more complex learning difficulties are also making good progress in their understanding of religious concepts. A group of mainly Year 8 pupils with specific communication needs, for example, made an excellent contribution to a lesson on "special places". They chose their own special places and were encouraged to explore their feelings about them. Excellent teaching, supported by very effective signing, meant that this lesson provided an outstanding contribution to the spiritual development of these pupils. The religious education folders of Upper School pupils, both higher-attainers and those with more complex learning difficulties, include work on symbols to do with The Creation, on festivals such as Diwali, on a visit to Worcester Cathedral and on relationships and rules for behaviour in the classroom, devised by pupils. This range of work, the very good display of religious material around the school and the good stock of books in the library on all of the major religions, reflect the importance given to the subject. Religious education makes a very positive contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.

PSHE and Citizenship

175. The curriculum for pupils' personal, social and health education is well embedded across all areas of school life. Although there are discrete lessons during the week, there is often a helpful focus in other subjects, and pupils' personal targets are worked on systematically.
176. The newly established school council is helping pupils further to express their views and to influence decisions made that affect their lives. These responsibilities have been taken on most willingly by pupils of all ages. Pupils as they move through the school develop a growing understanding of citizenship, including more sensitive issues around physical impairment, and the struggles some people have to face in daily life with the attitudes of others.
177. The teaching is good overall, with examples of very good and excellent teaching at times. Teachers are sensitive to the needs and ages of the pupils. In a lesson for older pupils, where they were learning to groom and take care of their appearance, staff were careful to offer choices of gel, lotion, perfume and hair braiding where appropriate. Pupils gained an obvious sense of self esteem as their hair was styled to their own choice, and the perfume sprayed liberally to good effect for themselves and others to appreciate. Pupils often achieve very well in their personal and social development throughout the school. Pupils make very good progress in their personal development as they learn to handle daily challenges. Children in the nursery learn quickly the school routines, and grow to acquire new, yet realistic levels of independence. Pupils develop self confidence, as they move through the school, showing humour, resilience and patience towards others. Pupils make good progress towards meeting their personal targets in individual education plans. Many teachers have a very thorough knowledge of the pupils' individual needs, preferences and circumstances. This makes a very valuable contribution to the quality of the pupils' achievements in this area, as their responses are noticed, and slight changes in their moods, attitudes or demeanour are given appropriate attention.

178. The subject is coordinated enthusiastically and energetically. Documentation and planning for the subject is suitably detailed and takes into account the wide ranging and differing needs of the pupils. There have been suitable improvements since the previous inspection.

Provision for students post 16

179. The students move on appropriately when they reach the age of sixteen. There is separate and distinct provision in a nearby building known as the "Round Table Centre". It is designed specifically for older students, and helps them gain further independence and maturity by physically moving away from the main school. There remain close and effective links between the school and post sixteen provision. Students achieve well at this stage, particularly in their social development and growing maturity.
180. The post sixteen curriculum is satisfactory and further opportunities are currently being explored to link with nearby colleges. The staff are also establishing more activities that link to the world of work, for example in costing, producing and selling items for profit such as hanging baskets for the garden. In addition, the school creates opportunities within its own organisation for some students to gain work experience. Some higher attaining students help younger pupils, and if appropriate assist in other work around the school. The opportunity for students to study for nationally recognised awards is currently underdeveloped, and the school is working hard to establish more courses for such purposes.
181. There is good quality advice and guidance for students and their families, in preparation for their future life. The local education business partnership makes a useful contribution to work related education. Students plan, organise and run a most impressive coffee shop every week. They use a wide variety of academic and social skills in the process. Careful attention is paid to health and hygiene matters, and the quality of food and drinks monitored by students themselves. The timetable is organised effectively to enable quality social opportunities throughout the week, for example over coffee, snack times and lunch. There is an appropriate balance between supporting the students and enabling them to make choices, take responsibility and become confident, young adults in the process. Students have good opportunities to use the local area and its services as they become more independent, for example in travelling to the nearby shops and facilities.
182. The quality of teaching is good overall. Teachers have a thorough knowledge of the students and build on the high quality relationships, established over many years. There are well chosen activities that achieve a good balance between teaching the students, and helping them become independent adults wherever possible. The building includes useful areas where students can make simple snacks and drinks, thus helping their social and independent living skills further. The areas surrounding the Round Table Centre are maintained carefully and add to the students' learning. The garden area for example was further developed by students to include herbs and a scented area, green house and seating. It is an obvious place of relaxation and enjoyment during break times, and sets an appropriately adult environment for the students, in contrast to the playground area in the main school. These and other features add to the students' sense of growing up and moving on from school.
183. The day to day management of the students is good. Routines are well established and followed willingly by the students. There is a calm and positive atmosphere where students are helped effectively to prepare for the future. The post sixteen provision has undergone major changes in the leadership and management since the previous inspection, with different staff now responsible for its direction. Improvements are satisfactory overall, and there are suitable plans for further development and expansion of the provision.