

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Layston Church of England First School**

Buntingford, Hertfordshire

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117390

Headteacher: Mr A G Davies

Reporting inspector: Mr A Andrews  
6436

Dates of inspection: 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> May 2000

Inspection number: 189411

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	First School
School category:	Voluntary Controlled
Age range of pupils:	4 - 9 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	The Causeway Buntingford Hertfordshire
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr P Townsend
Date of previous inspection:	17 <sup>th</sup> September 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Alan Andrews	Registered inspector	Special educational needs English Art Design and technology Physical education	What sort of school is it? How high are the standards? How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed?
Doug Binfield	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development. How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Martyn Richards	Team inspector	Equal opportunities Science Information and communication technology Religious education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
Lyne Lavender	Team inspector	Under fives Mathematics Geography History Music	How well does the school care for its pupils? (Assessment)

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Layston Church of England First School is situated in a very pleasant rural setting on the eastern edge of Buntingford. It has 157 pupils on roll aged 4 to 9 years, including 30 full-time pupils in a reception class. Essentially, it serves its immediate area and is smaller than most primary schools. It is fully subscribed and has an even number of girls and boys. The pupils come from mainly private housing, but with some local authority houses as well. On entry to school, many pupils have social and linguistic skills above those expected for their age. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of pupils on the school's register for special educational needs is also below the national average. Currently, there are no pupils with statements of special educational need. The school has very few pupils from ethnic minority groups.

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

Layston School is a good school. Pupils in the reception class make a good start and progress well. Overall standards in English at the end of Key Stage 1 and at age 9 are very high. In mathematics and science they are good. This is because teaching is mostly good and pupils work hard. The school supports and cares for its pupils well. It has a very good partnership with parents who think highly of the education it provides. The school gives good value for money.

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

- Provision for the under fives is good and enables pupils to make a positive start to school life.
- Standards in English are very high and in mathematics and science they are good.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good.
- Teaching is mostly good and often very good. This has a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Pupils have really positive attitudes towards work and behave very well. They enjoy coming to school and their attendance is very good.
- The curriculum is rich and varied and captures pupils' interests. The new national initiatives for literacy and numeracy have been introduced well.
- Provision for pupils' welfare is very good and this helps build their confidence.
- Relationships with parents are very good and this does much to enhance pupils' learning.
- Finance is used well in pursuit of the school's priorities. The school gives good value for money.

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

- More time for religious education and information and communication technology. In particular, this would help raise the unsatisfactory achievement in religious education at Key Stage 1.
- The use of assessment to guide what pupils are to learn next. This is particularly relevant to brighter pupils at Key Stage 1 and 2 who are not always sufficiently challenged and extended in mathematics and science.
- Further develop governor skills in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. This would help them gain a clearer understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and enable them to set challenging targets for improvement.
- Clarify the school's approach to homework and ensure its consistent application.
- Make sure the school prospectus and governors' annual report to parents include the national figures for the end of Key Stage 1 assessments.

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

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

The school has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection in 1996. At that time the school was judged to be providing a sound education overall, with good standards in mathematics and science. Standards in English at the end of Key Stage 1 and Year 4 are now well above average. The good standards in mathematics and science have been maintained. Teaching has improved significantly. Almost all of it is now satisfactory and much of it is good or even better. All action points from the previous inspection have been tackled, some more successfully than others. There is now a

satisfactory overall curriculum plan and a full range of policy statements and schemes of work. These help to ensure that pupils' learning progresses well.

Achievement in information and communication technology is satisfactory and resources for the subject are very good. Assessment procedures are now satisfactory, although the information gained is not always used effectively to guide what pupils are to do next. This is particularly so for brighter pupils who are not always sufficiently challenged and extended in mathematics and science. The school's leadership and management have improved. The school development plan has been extended, leadership roles have been more fully defined and areas of responsibility have been appropriately delegated to staff. The length of the school day for Key Stage 2 pupils has been extended to conform to the national recommended minimum. Statutory information is now included in the school prospectus, with the exception of the summary of the national assessment results for Key Stage 1. The staff and governors are determined to do their best for all pupils and the school now gives good value for money. Its capacity to improve still further is good.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 7 year olds based on National Curriculum test results.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
reading	A*	A	A	A
writing	B	B	B	C
mathematics	A	A	A	B

**Key**

well above average      A

above average            B

average                    C

below average            D

well below average      E

\* indicates very high results

This table shows that at the end of Key Stage 1 the school has sustained its high standards in reading, writing and mathematics over the period 1997 to 1999. Compared to all schools, the 1999 results in reading and mathematics were well above the national average and in writing they were above the national average. When compared to similar schools, the results were slightly more variable. In reading they were well above average, in mathematics they were above average and in writing they were average. The school has successfully focused on pupils attaining the expected level 2 at age 7. However, brighter pupils have not always been sufficiently challenged to achieve even higher levels of achievement in writing and mathematics. Observation of lessons and scrutiny of work during the period of the inspection shows a similar picture in science. Current achievement in Year 4 from lessons and scrutiny of work, shows that pupils are performing very well in English and well in mathematics and science, but that the under achievement of some of the brighter pupils has continued in mathematics and science.

Pupils under five are achieving well for their age. At Key Stage 1 and 2, achievements are good in design and technology, art and history. Some history work in Year 2 is of a particularly high standard. Achievements in information and communication technology, geography, music and physical education are in line with those expected for pupils of this age. However, insufficient time is given to information and communication technology and religious education. Many pupils have a wide range of experiences in information and communication technology at home and the school does not build sufficiently well on these. At Key Stage 1, pupils' achievements in religious education are not high enough.

The school has set realistic targets for improvement and its capacity to meet these is good.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils enjoy school and want to do well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. High standards of behaviour are consistent throughout the school, in lessons, the dining hall and the playground.
Personal development and relationships	Good. When given the opportunity, pupils undertake responsibility well. Relationships are very good. Pupils work together well in groups.
Attendance	Very good.

The school provides only limited opportunities for pupils to show initiative and take on responsibilities. Bullying rarely occurs.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years	aged 7-9 years
Lessons seen overall	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.*

Teaching was satisfactory or better in 97.4% of lessons. It was excellent in 7.9%, very good in 23.7%, good in 39.5%, satisfactory in 26.3% and unsatisfactory in 2.6%. This is a significant improvement since 1996 when almost 20% of teaching was unsatisfactory. The high quality teaching is found in the under fives and in Years 2 and 4, with Year 2 being particularly strong. The needs of most pupils are met successfully, including those with special educational needs. However, a strong emphasis has been placed on enabling pupils to reach the expected levels at age seven and nine. As a result, the brighter pupils at Key Stage 1 and 2 are not always challenged and extended enough, particularly in mathematics and science. Pupils aged under five learn quickly and benefit from teachers who have a good understanding of the needs of pupils of this age. At Key Stage 1 and 2, the teaching of English is satisfactory in Year 3 and good or better in Years 1, 2 and 4. The teaching of mathematics is often of a high standard, with the exception of Year 3 where, in the one lesson observed it was unsatisfactory. Overall, the literacy and numeracy initiatives have been introduced well. Pupils have benefited from the structure of the lessons, particularly in literacy. Throughout the school, the good teaching stems from positive relationships with pupils and thorough planning of what they are to learn. Activities often capture pupils' interest and they acquire basic skills quickly. In the best lessons, time is used very well and teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do. The weaknesses in teaching occur mainly through a lack of teachers' confidence in the subject and the over use of work sheets. In addition, assessment is not used enough to guide what pupils are to learn next, particularly the brighter ones.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Pupils experience a broad and interesting curriculum with a strong emphasis on practical and first hand experience.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils' individual education plans are constructed well. They are supported effectively by teachers and support staff. Their self esteem is maintained successfully.
Provision for pupils'	Good personal development. Satisfactory, spiritual, moral, social and

personal, spiritual, moral, social, cultural development	cultural development promoted through lessons, assemblies and general school activities.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good procedures are in place to support pupils' welfare. A high level of pastoral care is provided.

The school provides a happy, caring and peaceful environment for its pupils. It works very well in partnership with parents and this has a really positive impact on pupils' learning. Parents are welcomed into school and many help in classrooms and with other activities. There is an active parent teacher association that raises substantial sums of money to help the school improve its resources. The school's curriculum offers pupils a good range of learning opportunities, although not enough time is given to religious education and information and communication technology. Good use is made of visits to places of historical and cultural interest to widen pupils' experiences. However, few extra-curricular activities are offered and there is not a consistent approach to the use of homework.

### HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school is satisfactorily led and managed. Subject co-ordinators undertake their responsibilities with enthusiasm. Day to day administration is good and enables everyone to get on with their tasks.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are keen to raise standards further, but are still at an early stage in learning how to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has identified areas for development accurately, but needs to use assessment information more effectively to guide curriculum planning.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Resources are accessible and used well in lessons.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources are good. Governors have a good oversight of patterns of spending and are keen to apply the principles of best value. Communication with parents is good, although the school prospectus and governors' annual report do not include national figures for end of Key Stage 1 assessments.

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

What pleases parents most	What some parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils' standards of achievement.</li> <li>• Good quality teaching.</li> <li>• The attitudes and values promoted.</li> <li>• High standards of behaviour.</li> <li>• Very good relationships with parents.</li> <li>• Parents are well informed about their child's progress.</li> <li>• The way the school is managed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearer arrangements for homework.</li> <li>• More activities outside lessons.</li> <li>• More information about induction and longer notice about forthcoming events.</li> <li>• A lower number of pupils in the Year 1 class (34 at the time).</li> </ul>

Inspection evidence supports parents' positive views. Inspectors agree with the comments about

homework and activities outside lessons. Information about induction and events is satisfactory. The school's intake is to be reduced from 36 to 30 from 2001. The number of pupils in Class 1 has recently dropped to 31.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and achievements**

- 1 Standards in the under fives are good. Formal assessment soon after pupils begin school shows that most have social and linguistic skills above those expected for their age. Pupils in the reception class make good progress in their learning and develop their literacy and numeracy skills quickly. This is because they are taught consistently well and given tasks which challenge them. A strong emphasis is placed on practical work and this enables pupils to think for themselves. Teachers check pupils' work regularly and ensure that they know how to improve. Brighter pupils are able to read and write at levels expected in the early stages of the National Curriculum, while almost all others are on course to meet the nationally expected learning outcomes by the time they leave the reception class.
- 2 National test results show that pupils reach high standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1. There is clear evidence that the number of pupils reaching the expected levels in the reading and writing tests has increased since the previous inspection. In mathematics, the results in recent years have risen and then fallen slightly, but are still above the national average. Compared to similar schools, the 1999 results were well above average in reading, above average in mathematics and broadly in line with the average in writing. The overall picture from the tests is of a school concentrating on ensuring that pupils reach the expected levels for their age. As a result, brighter pupils have not always been extended enough. The 1999 test results show that fewer pupils than might be expected reached the higher levels in both writing and mathematics.
- 3 Observation of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work at Key Stage 1 and 2, shows that standards in English are very good. Brighter pupils are now being challenged and extended enough in all aspects of the subject, including writing. Standards in mathematics and science are good, but brighter pupils could do better still. Sometimes the tasks set for them are not hard enough and on other occasions they repeat work they already know. In all three subjects there is no significant difference in the achievements of girls and boys.
- 4 The school rightly gives emphasis to literacy and numeracy. The national initiatives for these areas of the curriculum have been introduced well and pupils have responded positively. Basic skills are taught successfully, particularly in reading where standards are now high. Good examples were seen of opportunities for pupils to use some of their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum, for example in science and history. This is good practice because it reinforces and extends pupils' skills.
- 5 The school sets realistic targets for improvement and is well placed to meet these. Each class sets yearly targets for English, mathematics and science and these help to raise standards. The introduction of personal targets for pupils has helped to motivate them to do their best. However, pupils' progress in mathematics is not always checked systematically against these targets and brighter pupils do not always achieve the levels of which they are capable in both mathematics and science.

- 6 Standards in speaking and listening are very good at the end of Key Stage 1 and Year 4. Pupils listen attentively and are always ready and willing to make contributions in class and group discussions. Standards in reading and writing are also very good. Many pupils read confidently and with really good expression. They write for a range of audiences and purposes and by the age of nine many of them are able to produce interesting, grammatically correct pieces of writing. Standards in all aspects of mathematics and science are good. In mathematics, a particular emphasis is rightly placed on the development of numeracy skills through mental and oral calculations and problem solving activities. These help to improve pupils' speed of work. In science, pupils carry out a range of investigations and experiments. They record their findings accurately. Their achievements are enhanced through the use of the school grounds to provide first hand experiences in their understanding of how living and non-living things differ.
- 7 Overall standards in information and communication technology are satisfactory and this is an improvement since the previous inspection. A new scheme of work has been introduced and resources for the subject are now very good. However, many pupils have a wide range of information and communication technology experiences at home and do not build on these enough at school. This is because too little time is allocated to the subject to allow pupils' skills to be developed beyond the average.
- 8 Across the school as a whole, too little time is set aside for religious education to enable the subject to be taught in sufficient depth and detail. As a result, pupils' achievements at the end of Key Stage 1 are unsatisfactory and this represents a fall since the previous inspection. Pupils' knowledge of Christianity is underdeveloped and they are not given enough time to discuss and think about the ideas presented to them. Pupils make better progress at Key Stage 2, although the time given to the subject is limited. By the end of Year 4, pupils' achievements are satisfactory, although the work is still not challenging enough and pupils could achieve more.
- 9 Pupils' achievements in design and technology, art and history, at both Key Stages 1 and 2 are good. Pupils are achieving levels above that expected for their age. In Year 2, there are some high quality examples of puppet making and of history work on the early part of the last century. Pupils are achieving levels expected for their age in geography, music and physical education. The school's achievements in music are regarded well by parents. Pupils sing very clearly and with obvious enjoyment. Specialist teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to play the recorder in Key Stage 1 and the violin playing at Key Stage 2. The school environment is used effectively to help pupils develop skills in history and geography. Some good geography work has involved the study of Africa and Kenya in particular. Considerable time is set aside for physical education with a strong emphasis on swimming. The result is that the majority of pupils can swim twenty-five metres by the end of Year 4.
- 10 Pupils with special educational needs achieve good standards in relation to their abilities. This is because targets set in their individual education plans are thoughtfully constructed and appropriately matched to their needs. Teachers' planning takes account of the targets and pupils are given good on-going support in lessons.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

- 11 Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good and this helps pupils learn at a good rate. They are keen to come to school and show an enthusiastic interest in all activities. During lessons, pupils listen attentively and respond well to questions. They work hard on written and practical tasks. A good example of this was seen in a Year 4 mathematics lesson. Pupils worked quickly and accurately. A high level of learning was sustained throughout, culminating in a challenging exercise relating to distances between major cities in the world.

- 12 Pupils' behaviour is excellent. High standards are a consistent feature in lessons and other activities. They are courteous, trustworthy and show respect for property. In the dining hall, table manners are exemplary. Bullying rarely arises and there were no exclusions last year.
- 13 Relationships and the provision for personal development are good. The friendly, helpful and co-operative approach shown by staff provides a very good model for the pupils to follow. Pupils respond well and show respect for others. They are polite, helpful to one another and to visitors. Personal development is enhanced successfully by participation in local events, educational visits, fund raising to help charities and a field study trip for older pupils to south west Wales. However, some parents would like to see more activities provided outside lessons. Opportunities for showing initiative and taking on responsibilities are limited, especially for pupils in Years 3 and 4.
- 14 Attendance is very good. There is no unauthorised absence and attendance levels are well above the national average. Nearly all pupils arrive punctually and a prompt start is made to lessons throughout the day. A similar picture was reported in the previous inspection.
- 15 Parents are impressed with pupils' attitudes and the very high standards of behaviour and attendance. Such features have a very positive influence on pupils' level of achievement.

## **HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?**

- 16 Pupils are mostly taught well and this enables them to learn quickly and with a sense of enjoyment. The overall quality of teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection, when almost one in five lessons were unsatisfactory. Nearly all lessons are now at least satisfactory and almost three quarters of them are good or even better. Teaching of the under fives is consistently good and this enables pupils to make a really positive start to school life. This is continued into Key Stage 1, where the teaching in Year 2 is particularly strong and has a major impact on pupils' learning. Teaching in Key Stage 2 is more variable, especially in Year 3. However, teaching in Year 4 is mostly good or better and this has a positive effect on pupils' overall progress within the key stage. In all classes, teachers often make lessons exciting through good use of the local environment and visits to places of interest.
- 17 Teaching of the under fives promotes high standards, particularly in numeracy, music and physical education. The teachers have a secure knowledge and understanding of the learning needs of pupils of this age. A very positive climate for learning is created and this helps pupils feel confident and secure at all times. Activities are planned carefully and matched well to the needs of pupils. This motivates them to want to learn. Class routines are established well and good use is made of resources to make the curriculum as practical as possible. Examples of this were seen in the use of mathematical games to develop an understanding of number bonds and in the use of a wide range of solid and flexible materials to make pictures. Teachers encourage pupils to work hard and to behave well. Work is checked regularly as lessons progress and pupils are given effective guidance about how to improve. Pupils with special educational needs are supported well and enabled to play a full part in all elements of the lessons.
- 18 At both Key Stage 1 and 2, teachers' lesson plans are mostly good. They set out clearly what pupils are to learn and how. This is usually explained to the pupils at the beginning of a lesson and set into the context of their previous work. This helps build their confidence and ensures that skills, knowledge and understanding are acquired systematically over time. However, the plans for science lessons do not include details of how the work of brighter pupils is to be accelerated and this hinders their progress. In all classes, teachers' relationships with pupils are positive and this helps create a good working atmosphere. Teachers have secure subject knowledge which helps them to teach basic skills, such as the use of letter sounds to read new

words, effectively. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is carried out well and is making a positive impact on pupils' progress, particularly in reading.

- 19 The good teaching includes clear explanations and directions as well as the use of questions which clarify points and deepen pupils' understanding and knowledge. Pupils are managed well and teachers ensure that they know how to improve their work. Activities capture pupils' interest and ensure consistently good levels of concentration. Good opportunities enable them to demonstrate what they can do and this helps them to evaluate their own progress. Good examples of this were seen in literacy, art and physical education lessons. The best teaching includes the efficient organisation of resources, including support staff, and the use of a range of teaching strategies to help move learning forward successfully. An example of this was seen in a Year 2 history lesson which included whole class discussions, the showing of a video as well as group work on practical tasks to show life in Victorian Times. Such lessons have a sense of purpose and encourage pupils to use their imagination and also to think for themselves. In all activities, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve in the time available. As a result, pupils work quickly and make rapid progress.
- 20 Weaknesses in teaching occur when there is an over reliance on the completion of worksheets so that tasks are dull and unexciting. As a result, pupils sometimes find it difficult to do their best consistently. Examples of this were seen in mathematics and science. Throughout the school, information gained from assessment is not used sufficiently to help decide what pupils need to do next and to target a faster rate of progress. This is particularly so with the brighter pupils, who are not always challenged and extended enough in mathematics. In addition, opportunities are missed across the curriculum to enrich pupils' learning through the use of information and communication technology.
- 21 Homework is used across the school to enhance pupils' learning by reinforcing and extending classroom work. For example, reading books are taken home regularly and teachers and parents record pupils' progress in reading record books. However, the school's overall approach to homework is not clear and its general use is inconsistent. As a result, it is not as effective as it could be in enabling pupils to make rapid progress.
- 22 Teaching of pupils with special educational needs is generally good. This is in line with the findings of the previous report. Their individual learning programmes are drawn up with considerable care and are of good quality. This helps pupils make good progress in their learning. The special educational needs co-ordinator is a full-time class teacher, but liaises closely with colleagues to ensure that pupils are supported effectively. Good use of praise and encouragement enables pupils to take a full part in lessons. They enjoy the tasks presented to them and their self-esteem is maintained well. Support staff make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. They show sensitivity and skill in helping pupils to develop their work.

## **HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS?**

- 23 At the time of the last inspection, weaknesses were found in the structure of the curriculum. There was no clear plan for the curriculum as a whole, and schemes of work in the different subjects were not precise enough to ensure that pupils' learning progressed smoothly. It became a key issue for the school to improve these aspects of its provision. There is now a clear framework for the curriculum, and schemes of work direct teaching effectively in all subjects. These key issues have been satisfactorily addressed.
- 24 The school now offers a broad and interesting curriculum with a strong emphasis on practical and first hand experiences. Visits to places of cultural and historical interest particularly enrich the programmes of work. These make learning real for the pupils. The school has successfully sustained this broad curriculum while also giving due emphasis to literacy and numeracy. The recent national initiatives to improve standards in these areas have been introduced well and are

- having a significant influence on the improving standards of teaching as observed during the present inspection. Health education receives good attention in science lessons. Although there is no programme for sex or drugs education, pupils' questions are dealt with appropriately as they arise, often within science lessons.
- 25 Despite the commendable breadth and relevance of the curriculum, there are weaknesses in the provision of information and communication technology and in religious education. This is because the time allowed for them is insufficient. This in turn affects the standards achieved in these subjects. As a result the curriculum overall lacks balance.
- 26 A good curriculum is provided for pupils under five with a strong emphasis, rightly, on practical activities. Tasks are challenging and constructed well to promote pupils' independence. Pupils are clear about what they are doing and learning. Bright children begin working successfully towards Level 1 of the National Curriculum in English and mathematics. Good opportunities for learning allow other children to meet nationally expected learning outcomes by the time they leave the reception class.
- 27 The curriculum for pupils with special educational needs is good. Their individual education plans are drawn up carefully and meet their needs well. Clear and attainable targets are set for them and these are reviewed and updated regularly. Parents are kept fully informed about progress and are pleased with the support provided. Most lesson planning takes account of the abilities of pupils with special educational needs and they are enabled to share the full programme of work. Teachers are particularly skilled in ensuring that they join in class discussions.
- 28 The school ensures that all pupils enjoy the same opportunities to benefit from the activities offered. In much of the work, however, brighter pupils are not sufficiently challenged, and consequently do not progress as quickly as they should. This was a key issue at the time of the last inspection, and remains an area of weakness.
- 29 While several after-school and weekend activities are available to the pupils, only country dancing and maypole dancing are offered by the school itself. Parents see this as a limited provision.
- 30 The school's close links with its local community enrich the curriculum. Parents make a major contribution to pupils' learning. Many parents help teachers in the classroom, and in curriculum areas such as reading and information and communication technology. They support the home reading programme, and accompany school visits. Pupils often use the immediate local environment and the town of Buntingford successfully for their studies. The school participates well in community events and festivals. Good links have been established with the local middle school to maximise curriculum continuity and the school also benefits from its membership of a local consortium of schools.
- 31 Provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Opportunities for reflection on beliefs and values arise regularly in assemblies and in religious education lessons. Sometimes, lessons encourage pupils to think about the beauty and fragility of creation. Insects that they discovered on a science trip fascinated Key Stage 1 pupils. They handled them with great sensitivity and were most concerned to ensure that they were returned unharmed to their habitats.
- 32 Parents are right to feel that the school promotes good moral and social attitudes. Teachers emphasise honesty and fairness in their day to day exchanges with pupils. They make the principles that distinguish right from wrong clear at all times. In activities such as Millennium Resolutions, pupils thought about the importance of generosity, kindness and justice. In assemblies and some lessons, pupils are encouraged to organise themselves well, to take simple decisions about their work and to develop a sense of responsibility. They are expected to be kind to each other and to help without being asked. The annual Year 4 residential study trip to Wales gives the pupils a valuable experience of social living away from home. Wider

social responsibilities are acknowledged through the school's commitment to supporting local and national charities.

- 33 The school promotes cultural development especially through the rich and discriminating visual environment in which the pupils work. Paintings and prints, as well as good music are strongly in evidence throughout the working day. Literature is valued and enjoyed and theatre groups visit the school regularly. The school's close involvement with its local community helps the pupils learn about their local culture, its traditions and history. However, there are only limited opportunities for pupils to develop an awareness of the multicultural diversity of contemporary society.

### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?**

- 34 The school has very good procedures in place for supporting pupils' welfare and provides a high level of pastoral care. Parents indicate that their children are happy at school.
- 35 Pupils joining the reception class settle in quickly. Class teachers are very supportive and quick to recognise any individual needs. Staff with first aid training deal with any illness and injuries that arise. Health education is included in the curriculum and there are appropriate systems in place for dealing with health and safety issues.
- 36 The effective arrangements for dealing with any child protection issues that arise identified at the time of the last inspection have been sustained. The school has an effective system for promoting high attendance. Registration work is carried out efficiently and there is good liaison with the education welfare service. The behaviour policy is implemented in a consistent manner and this contributes to the high standards achieved.
- 37 Procedures for assessing pupils' achievements and progress are satisfactory, although assessment is not used sufficiently to guide teachers' planning. There has been some improvement since the previous inspection, when it was a key issue for action. The school now uses a satisfactory range of annual tests to check pupils' progress and help set targets. There is some good practice in their use to raise standards in English. The results of national tests are analysed, but action is not always taken where needed as, for example, in the case of the brighter pupils.
- 38 Records of academic achievement, for example in reading, are maintained and samples of work are kept in individual portfolios passed on from year to year. Individual education plans for pupils with special needs contain targets, which are regularly checked. Marking of work is satisfactory and includes constructive comments, which inform pupils about their strengths and weaknesses, and what they have to do to improve.

### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

- 39 The high quality of relationships between parents and the school brings significant benefits to pupils' education. Parents feel this is a very successful school. They commend the attitudes and values promoted and the high standards of behaviour. Parents are pleased with the standards of achievement, the good quality of the teaching and the way the school is managed. Inspection evidence supports these positive views.
- 40 A few parents suggest some aspects of the school could be improved. They would like clearer

arrangements for homework, more activities for pupils outside lessons and better information about forthcoming events and the arrangements for pupils starting school. In addition, there is a concern about the high number of pupils in the Year 1 class. Inspectors agree with the comments about homework, but found the information about pupils starting school and forthcoming events to be satisfactory. The number of pupils in Year 1 has recently reduced to 31 and the admission number for the school's intake is to be reduced to 30 from 2001. The school provides few activities outside of normal school time.

- 41 The school has very good links with parents. Parents are well-informed about pupils' achievements and personal development. This includes the advice given at termly consultation meetings with teachers and in the annual reports. Parents are invited to meetings and receive good written advice about induction into the reception class and on the transfer to middle schools. Relevant details about school events are included in the newsletters. The prospectus and the governors' annual report contain very helpful information about the school. However, they do not fully meet legal requirements. This is because they do not include the latest national comparative results in the National Curriculum tests for pupils aged seven.
- 42 Parents' involvement in the work of the school is very good. A similar judgement was made in the previous inspection. Several help with reading, cookery, art, school visits and walking with pupils to swimming lessons. Pupils receive a high level of support for the work they undertake at home, especially in reading. There is, however, a need for parents to be given clearer advice about the amount of homework to be undertaken. This would help to promote a more consistent approach that is needed, particularly in Years 3 and 4. The Fund Raising Committee organises a very successful programme of events. This enables substantial donations to be made for equipment and other materials that help to enrich pupils' learning.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

- 43 Overall, the leadership provided by the headteacher and senior staff is satisfactory. A clear sense of educational direction linked to raising standards is evident. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. Issues for development have been identified accurately and the school's capacity to improve further is good. Day to day management and administration is also good and enables everyone to get on with their tasks. The school's aims are reflected successfully in its daily life and contribute to high standards. At the meeting before the inspection, parents spoke highly of the headteacher and staff. Considerable importance is rightly placed on relationships and the school works together well as a community. While the school is successful in meeting the learning needs of most of its pupils, including those with special educational needs, the brighter children at Key Stage 1 and 2 are not always extended enough in some important subjects.
- 44 Since the previous inspection the headteacher has placed greater emphasis on the importance of monitoring, evaluating and developing the quality of teaching. He carries out observations of lessons and gives oral feedback to teachers, although agreed actions and strategies for support do not include specific targets related to pupils' improvement. The management role of senior staff has been defined more clearly and the delegation of management responsibilities has improved. Co-ordinators are enthusiastic about their responsibilities and keen to develop their curriculum areas further. Emphasis has rightly been placed recently on the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. The co-ordinators concerned have organised training for colleagues and have monitored the work in classes with feedback to teachers. This has been received positively.
- 45 The school has a good number of teachers and support staff. Many of the teachers are long serving members of the school. Pupils benefit from the stability this offers. Collectively they have sufficient experience and expertise to deliver the curriculum well. Support staff are deployed effectively and make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning.

- 46 There is a satisfactory programme of staff development, including the induction of the recently appointed newly qualified teacher. However, the timetable of staff appraisal has fallen behind schedule.
- 47 The school accommodation is good and used effectively. It is maintained well and enhances the environment in which the pupils work. However, the main building has no access points for wheelchairs. A further consideration is that there is a series of steep steps in the corridor that leads to several classrooms. The lack of such facilities is recognised as a potential problem by governors and is mentioned in their annual report. Resources for learning are mostly good and easily accessible. They are very good for history and information and communication technology. The overall range of resources available makes a positive contribution to pupils' learning.
- 48 The school's development plan sets out the main priorities for the use of resources over the next three years. The plans are brief, but realistically costed, and with sensible targets defined in terms of the anticipated gains for the pupils. It is this plan by which the governors determine how the budget is to be spent. The large carry forward figures reported in the previous inspection have been reduced. The budget itself is in surplus, with a prudent sum of money held over to cater for unexpected circumstances. Parents raise substantial sums of money and this has helped the school improve its provision of books and computers.
- 49 The governors' finance committee meets regularly and has a good oversight of patterns of spending during the year. The small sums the school receives for special purposes, such as the education of pupils with special educational needs, are correctly applied. The school makes good use of new technology to manage the budget, and subject leaders handle the small annual sums they receive for their subjects well. Overall the standard of financial management and administration is good.
- 50 The governors are concerned to ensure that the school gets the best value it can from its resources, and they regularly seek good value through competitive tendering. However, they are still at an early stage in using the data available to them to evaluate the school's performance and to compare it with other similar schools. This means that, while they are keen to promote rising standards in the school, it is difficult for them to devise well-targeted strategies for doing so. While they communicate regularly with parents through the Annual Parents Meeting, there is as yet no system for consulting groups, such as parents, about the initiatives the governors are considering.
- 51 In the light of its intake, the standards achieved, the school's costs and the quality of teaching provided, the school gives good value for money. This represents a marked improvement over the previous inspection.

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

52 In order to improve the school further, governors, headteacher and staff should:

1. ensure more time is given to religious education and information and communication technology. This will help raise unsatisfactory achievement in religious education at Key Stage 1 and extend the skills in information and communication technology which many pupils bring from home;
2. make better use of information gained from assessment to guide what pupils are to learn next. This is particularly relevant to brighter pupils at Key Stage 1 and 2, who are not always challenged and extended enough in mathematics and science;
3. develop further governor skills in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. This will help them gain a clearer understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and enable them to set challenging targets for improvement.

53 In addition to the issues above, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

1. clarify the school's approach to homework and ensure its consistent application;
2. make sure the school's prospectus and governors' annual report to parents includes national figures for the end of Key Stage 1 assessments.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	38
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	20

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7.9	23.7	39.5	26.3	2.6	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	Nursery	YR – Y4
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	0	157
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	0	7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y4
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	0	19

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	5
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.4
National comparative data	5.4

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	0.5

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

### **Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1**

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	16	16	32

<b>National Curriculum Test/Task Results</b>		<b>Reading</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	16	15	16
	Girls	16	16	16
	Total	32	31	32
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (98)	97 (97)	100 (97)
	National	82 (80)	83 (81)	87 (84)

<b>Teachers' Assessments</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	16	16	16
	Girls	16	16	16
	Total	32	32	32
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	82 (81)	86 (85)	87 (86)

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

### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	127
Any other minority ethnic group	0

*This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.*

### ***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 of pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.*

### ***Teachers and classes***

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y4**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	6.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	22.7
Average class size	30.4

#### **Education support staff: YR– Y4**

Total number of education support staff	5.6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	37

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	1999
	£
Total income	302,052
Total expenditure	300,088
Expenditure per pupil	1,955
Balance brought forward from previous year	14,029
Balance carried forward to next year	15,993

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	152
Number of questionnaires returned	63

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	75	24	0	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	59	41	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	54	38	3	0	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	33	49	16	0	2
The teaching is good.	57	41	0	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	43	49	5	2	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	78	22	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	67	29	0	0	5
The school works closely with parents.	38	40	14	2	6
The school is well led and managed.	62	37	2	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	57	37	0	0	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	14	37	30	6	13

### Other issues raised by parents

Learning in an infant class is hampered by the high number of pupils (34). Parents would like more information on induction and longer notice about forthcoming events.

## **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**

- 54 There was no requirement to report separately on this area at the time of the previous inspection.
- 55 Provision in the areas of learning for children under five is very good. Formal assessments soon after children enter school shows that the majority has good social skills and that linguistically they are above average. All children make a confident start to their education and rapidly develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Bright children immediately start working towards level 1 of the National Curriculum in English and mathematics whilst others are on course to meet nationally expected learning outcomes before the end of their reception year.

### **Personal and social development**

- 56 Children settle most happily into school life and show very good personal and social skills. Their behaviour is always very good. They have mature attitudes to their learning and can be trusted to work independently of the teacher and classroom assistant from a very early stage. Relationships are excellent and all children are kind and caring towards each other. They have very positive attitudes to everything they do and share equipment with a good spirit. They take turns very sensibly. Children's efforts are valued and this gives them confidence in their own ability to carry out tasks successfully. They are keen to try out their skills in front of the class, for example, in literacy they willingly volunteer to read parts of the text of books, such as "The Three Bears", out loud. Children settle very quickly to work and often concentrate for long periods of time and are proud of what they achieve. All children are extremely attentive during whole school assemblies and join in where they can.

### **Language and literacy**

- 57 Language and literacy are taught well through daily literacy lessons and at other times. Speaking and listening skills are very good and well developed. Children are encouraged to give their opinions, respond to questions and form their thoughts aloud. They listen attentively to stories and particularly enjoy sharing big books with their teacher. Children have a good vocabulary and can explain what they mean very clearly. To improve the high standard of reading, a good selection of books is offered to read at home and this enables children to make choices and develop reading tastes. Older children are confident to write the words they need without adult help. They write their 'news' using well-punctuated sentences. Children with special educational needs are taught in small groups by support staff so that they make good progress.

### **Mathematics**

- 58 Mathematics is skilfully taught and older children are already achieving level 1 of the National Curriculum. They can count to one hundred in units and tens and sort even from odd numbers. Mental calculation skills are well developed for their age and many no longer need to use fingers when adding up and subtracting simple sums. In mathematical games, children use their good knowledge of number bonds effectively, especially when playing dominoes and matching numbers. They recall number facts quickly and the brighter children use these effectively to develop their mathematical competence. Most of this term's intake has already begun to show ability in numeracy and those with special educational needs are well supported by adults during practical work to develop their counting skills.

## **Knowledge and understanding of the world**

- 59 Children enter school with a good knowledge of the world around them and this is successfully built upon during their time in the reception class. The local environment is used effectively to develop this knowledge. For example, children made a three dimensional picture from a selection of different kinds of wood they had found nearby. There are many good opportunities for children to carry out simple experiments, such as finding out which solid shapes will roll on flat and sloping surfaces. Starting with their own lives from when they were born, they develop a sense of the past and their place in it, as well as of the changes in the course of their own development. Children are taught well about health and safety issues, for instance, the dangers of electricity.

## **Physical development**

- 60 Children's physical development is good. They use small tools very accurately for cutting and pasting pictures or numbers. For example, they cut out numbers to make sequences of even and odd numbers very carefully. Physical education lessons are popular with the class. Children show good body control in moving around the hall and travelling across a mat, successfully inventing different ways of doing so. They listen to instructions carefully and carry them out to the best of their ability, interpreting them with imagination whenever asked to do so. Most readily change for these lessons without the need for adult help.

## **Creative development**

- 61 Children's creative development is well advanced as a result of the wide range of opportunities provided by the teacher. In art, they paint large pictures making sensible choices about the colours to use. They create simple, imaginative designs when making kites and painting abstract pictures. Many have used wool and material in weaving on sticks to make attractive patterns and have completed paper weaving patterns successfully. In music they can name and play different percussion instruments, making sensible choices when it is their turn. All are very good at following instructions, with the result that words, sound effects and music effectively accompany poems and stories. Children use resources provided for their creative work with great skill and confidence.

## **Other factors relating to the quality of education**

- 62 Staff who work with the under fives all use their various talents to help provide an imaginative curriculum for the children. They show a good example in all they do and children get a very good start to their schooling because of the high quality provision.
- 63 The quality of teaching is very good in numeracy, music and physical education and good in all other subjects. Teachers have a secure knowledge of what they are teaching and a good understanding of the learning needs of children of this age. Teachers create a very positive climate for learning in which children respond very well to the high expectations that they will work hard and behave well. Class routines are well established and enable all children, including the youngest children to start working independently within a few days of beginning school. The needs of brighter children are well met and teachers' plans include activities to challenge them. Teachers know their children well and the levels of achievement they are working towards. They use a range of resources to good effect in making the curriculum as practical and meaningful as possible.
- 64 Children's personal and social development receives high priority. This means children have

high self esteem and work in a secure and caring environment. As a result children are confident in their ability to learn well. Effective praise and clear guidance on how children can improve their work promotes confidence and speeds up learning. Formal assessment of individual progress is used to set targets for future achievement, but these are not always followed up systematically.

## ENGLISH

- 65 The previous inspection found pupils' achievements in English at the end of Key Stage 1 and Year 4 to be in line with national expectations for the age. Observation of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work in the current inspection show that there has been a significant improvement and that achievement is now well above expectations at the end of both Key Stage 1 and Year 4. A similar picture emerged in the school's 1999 National Assessment results in reading for pupils aged seven, which were well above the national average. In writing, they were above the national average, although the number of pupils reaching the higher levels was only close to the average. The results in writing reflect the school's concentration on ensuring that pupils reach average levels. It is aware of the need to challenge and extend the brighter pupils and, during the current year, is successfully doing this.
- 66 The national initiative on literacy has been introduced well. Pupils respond positively to the structures and routines of the literacy hour. Teachers are enthusiastic about its impact and feel that it is making an important contribution to the rise in standards. Good links are made with literacy across the curriculum. An example of this was seen in a Year 2 history lesson in which pupils discussed what life was like when their grandparents were children. They were encouraged to put forward ideas and to use appropriate vocabulary when doing so. Pupils' learning over time and in lessons is good in Year 1 and very good in Years 2 and 4. It is satisfactory in Year 3. The learning of pupils with special educational needs is good. They are given on-going support and their work is linked appropriately to the targets set in their individual education plans.
- 67 At Key Stage 1, pupils' speaking and listening skills are very good. They listen attentively and understand the need to take turns in speaking. They talk clearly and confidently in a variety of situations, in groups, in class and in assemblies. They discuss matters that interest them, propose ideas readily and are able to add detail, showing that they listen carefully to the teacher. Pupils enjoy listening to stories and show an understanding of the characters and of the sequence of events. They take books home to read each evening and their reading record diaries are up to date with some comments about how to improve. By the age of seven, most pupils' skills in reading are very well developed. They persevere with difficult texts and use letter sounds well to tackle new words. Many pupils read confidently and with a growing awareness of the need for expression. They use information books and dictionaries correctly to help them with their work. Writing skills are also very good. Pupils show an increasing understanding of sentence structure, including full stops and capital letters. Brighter pupils often use speech marks, exclamation marks and question marks correctly. Pupils write for a range of purposes and ideas are developed well. Examples of this were seen in short plays to accompany the use of puppets and in stories about a train journey and a magic brush. Meaning is communicated clearly and with imaginative vocabulary. Handwriting and general presentation is good.
- 68 At Key Stage 2, pupils build systematically on their previous learning. They make steady progress in Year 3, but this accelerates quickly in Year 4. By the age of nine, their speaking and listening skills are of a high standard. They are eager to discuss their work and do so sensibly. They offer comments and ask thoughtful questions, showing that they think about what they have heard. An example of this was observed in a Year 4 lesson, in which pupils discussed an African story. They used their earlier experiences in reading to help them put forward ideas and comments. Pupils continue to enjoy reading and to take books home regularly. Many read aloud with fluency and very good expression. They read a wide range of literature and have a growing awareness of different authors and why they like some more than others. Pupils' writing is often lively and thoughtful. Meaning is conveyed clearly in a range of forms, including stories, diaries, reviews and letters. Spelling is usually very good and work is

presented neatly.

- 69 The overall quality of teaching is good, but varies from year to year. In Year 3 it is satisfactory, in Years 1 and 4 it is good and in Year 2 it is very good. All teachers have secure subject knowledge and a good understanding of the new literacy initiative which they use well when planning their lessons. Relationships are good and teachers give clear explanations of the work to be done. Pupils have very good attitudes towards the subject and behave really well which has a positive impact on their progress. They sustain their interest and are pleased with the outcomes. The good teaching stems from the presentation of challenging work that makes pupils think hard and builds successfully on what they already know. For example, in a Year 1 literacy, lesson pupils identified a range of rhyming words, considered their meanings and thought about letter sounds. Group work is organised well and tasks are matched appropriately to pupils' needs and abilities, including those with special educational needs. Praise and encouragement is used effectively and skilful questioning keeps pupils involved and helps to move their learning forward. In the best teaching, there is a sense of real purpose, time is used very effectively and, as a result, pupils complete substantial amounts of work. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and use on-going feedback to ensure that they know how to improve. Pupils' ideas are taken up and used effectively to reinforce learning. For example, in a Year 2 literacy lesson, pupils identified alliteration and the use of an apostrophe in the class text. The teacher used their observations skilfully to consolidate earlier learning.
- 70 Weaknesses in teaching occur when there is an over use of worksheets which pupils find rather tedious. In addition, information gained from assessment is not always used to guide what pupils need to do next and homework is not set consistently enough.

## **MATHEMATICS**

- 71 Standards of achievement in mathematics are above average at the end of Key Stage 1. In the 1999 National Tests, the number of pupils reaching the expected level of achievement was well above average for those achieving the expected level 2 and close to the national average for those achieving the higher level. In the previous 1996 inspection, standards were found to be above average and they have been maintained since then.
- 72 The school rightly places emphasis on developing numeracy skills through mental and oral calculations and problem-solving activities. This means that pupils at Key Stage 1 have a thorough knowledge of number bonds, can count to well beyond one hundred and exchange money in shopping activities. They are beginning to learn their multiplication tables and understand simple place value in writing addition and subtraction sums. Pupils recognise and draw accurately the common two-dimensional shapes, both regular and irregular ones, such as pentagons and hexagons and understand their different properties. In handling data, they create simple bar charts on favourite topics, but this work is not developed enough into information and communication technology. Extension work is provided for brighter pupils, but does not sufficiently challenge them to use and extend their mathematical skills in investigations.
- 73 By the end of Year 4, pupils reach a high standard both in mental and written work and most are on course to reach or exceed the nationally expected levels by the time they are eleven. They show increasing speed and accuracy in exercises using the four rules of number and can apply their skills in investigations. They have a good knowledge of mathematical terms and use the correct words in talking about their work, for instance to do with square numbers. Knowledge of the multiplication tables is good and they generally have these facts at their fingertips and use them accurately in their work. In work on shape and measurement, pupils show a good understanding of area, perimeter and volume and know about lines of symmetry, for example, in

the letters of the alphabet. They can collect data and represent it accurately as bar and pie charts, but this is not developed sufficiently using computers. Those with special educational needs reach average levels of achievement through the effective additional support they receive.

- 74 Teaching is good overall and pupils respond well to lessons. In Years 2 and 4, teaching is of a very high standard. Mostly teachers are confident and have good knowledge of the subject, lessons are well planned and pupils know what is expected of them. In a Year 4 class, for instance, the objective is written on the board before the start of the lesson so that all are clear about what is to be learned. Teachers effectively use a commercial scheme based on the National Numeracy Strategy to plan lessons, taking account of different abilities and what has been taught previously. There are occasions at Key Stage 1 when the workbooks from the scheme are not used effectively enough to extend the bright pupils. Given challenging investigations, they rise to the occasion and often surprise themselves how well they do. In Year 4 particularly, work is well presented and neatly set out. Occasionally, teaching lacks confidence and expectations are not high enough so that pupils do not progress fast enough.
- 75 Targets are set in the reception class for each pupil to reach appropriate National Curriculum levels in following years. Progress is not checked systematically against these targets so that the brighter pupils do not always achieve the higher levels of which they are capable. Those with special educational needs are particularly well supported and reach average standards. Homework is given but it is not set consistently and some parents are concerned about this.

## SCIENCE

- 76 The school has sustained the good standards of science reported in the last inspection. Most of the pupils, including those with special educational needs, learn at a steady rate in their lessons, and as they move through the school. By the end of Key Stage 1, and Year 4, nearly all reach the nationally expected levels for their age. Evidence from the National Testing and Assessment Programme confirms that the school's results are well above those in most schools, and also much better than in schools with a comparable intake of pupils. However, despite so many pupils reaching the average standard for their age, fewer than expected exceed it. This is because the work is often not hard enough to extend the brighter pupils fully. This issue was identified in the last inspection, and is one to which the school still needs to give attention.
- 77 The science programme is a lively and interesting one. Practical work is generally emphasised, and many of the lessons provide imaginative and motivating work for the pupils. The study of animal and plant life is a particularly strong feature of the science curriculum.
- 78 By the age of seven, most pupils have a thorough understanding of how living and non-living things differ. They know the main characteristics which distinguish animals from plants, and can classify animals into family groups. They grow and study plants, and can explain how different habitats suit different plant and animal species. They have also learned about the properties of materials in common use. They classify materials according to their main properties, and know the effects of heating and cooling on everyday materials. They understand that some materials cannot be returned to their original form after heating, while others can. In their work on forces, they have learned about the actions of pushing and pulling in daily life, and how forces acting on them can change the shape of materials.
- 79 Pupils' understanding of science develops steadily into Key Stage 2, so that by the end of Year 4 they know about animal and plant life-cycles and about food chains. They have studied the properties and uses of wood and stone. Most know how to make an electric circuit, and some can build in a switch in order to make a simple burglar alarm.

- 80 Attention is also given to developing pupils' skills in investigation and experimentation. The younger pupils learn how to predict the result of a simple experiment, such as the fate of sunflower seeds sown under different conditions. They observe carefully, and record their results in a variety of ways. By the age of nine, they can conduct more complex experiments, predicting, measuring and recording results with greater accuracy.
- 81 This well-balanced programme makes very good use of the school's attractive grounds, and of visits to places of interest further afield. Such first hand experiences enrich the work and make learning come alive for the pupils.
- 82 Most pupils respond very positively to their work in science. They quickly become absorbed in the lessons, and are confident in trying out their own ideas. They work especially responsibly when they have practical tasks to do, requiring some initiative and independence from them. When lessons are pedestrian in approach, and too much emphasis is given to filling in missing words on worksheets, their concentration fades, and progress slows down. Even then, however, their behaviour remains very good.
- 83 Three science lessons were seen during the inspection. All were satisfactory, and one lesson in Year 2 was excellent. The main strength of the teaching is its careful planning and the imaginative selection of tasks set for the pupils. The work captures their interest and they commit a lot of effort to it. In the excellent lesson, pupils were learning about living things, using the school grounds as a focus for study. Some marked out square metres of ground in different locations and catalogued the insects and plants they found. Later they plan to compare how different environments suit different creatures. Others in the class studied one of the mature trees, while a further group recorded the growth of sunflowers they had grown from seed. Pupils were very engrossed in the work and high levels of discussion about animal habitats took place. A great deal was learned in a short time.
- 84 There are, however, weaknesses in the teaching. Some teachers give insufficient attention to the practical and investigative nature of the subject. Filling worksheets becomes a dull routine, and the magic of the subject is lost. Teachers sometimes miss opportunities to use information and communication technology as a tool to extend and enrich work in science. There is little provision in teachers' planning to accelerate the learning of bright pupils who acquire scientific skills and concepts easily. In terms of its science content, the work of brighter pupils hardly differs from that of their classmates.
- 85 Overall, the science programme is well-constructed, taught imaginatively and results in good standards of learning.

## **ART AND DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

- 86 Only two lessons were seen during the period of the inspection. Judgements were informed by an examination of teachers' planning, scrutiny of pupils' work and displays around the school. The programme is suitably broad and balanced. At both key stages, pupils reach levels of achievement above that expected for their age. This is in line with the findings of the last inspection.
- 87 Pupils' learning, including those with special educational needs, is good in lessons and over time. They generate ideas and plan the design and making of products effectively. Most show a willingness to adapt and refine what they do in order to bring about improvements. They work with an increasing range of materials and are gaining skills in cutting, measuring, gluing and

joining, which they carry out with increasing accuracy as they move up through the school.

- 88 Much of the work is linked effectively with other areas of the curriculum. For example, Year 2 pupils have written plays as part of their literacy work and then designed and made puppets of a high quality to use for each of the characters. In another example, Year 1 pupils made cuboids with card as part of their mathematics work. Pupils have also successfully constructed Anglo-Saxon homes and made models of local buildings such as the old lock-up.
- 89 Pupils at both key stages show good skills in drawing, painting and printing, as well as in handling mouldable materials including clay. This often helps them illustrate work across the curriculum, for example in history, geography and religious education. As they move up through the school, pupils' creative and observational development is good. They show increasing ability to use colour, texture, pattern and shape, to represent what they see and feel successfully through pictures. The work of well-known artists receives appropriate attention and pupils copy their styles effectively. For example, Year 2 pupils have painted very pleasing pictures of sunflowers in the style of Vincent Van Gogh.
- 90 The teaching observed was good. Lessons are planned carefully and teachers are clear about what pupils are to learn and how. This information is shared with pupils at the beginning of lessons and helps to build their confidence. Tasks are chosen well and build on previous experiences. This ensures that pupils make good progress. Relationships are good and pupils are encouraged to do their best. Teaching points are reinforced at critical moments and this helps move pupils' learning forward. Resources are organised well and teachers have suitably high expectations of what pupils can do in the time available. Good use is made of pupils' achievements to demonstrate high quality work and to encourage progress in lessons. An example of this was seen in a Year 4 lesson in which pupils were designing patterns for tiles. Pupils have good attitudes towards the subject and behave very well. They are proud of their efforts and this has a positive impact on their learning.
- 91 Displays of work in classrooms and shared areas are mostly of a very high standard and assist pupils' visual awareness and creative development.

## **GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY**

- 92 Only a small number of lessons were seen during the inspection. It is clear from these, a close examination of previous work and imaginative displays, that learning develops steadily in geography and history as pupils move through the school. They easily reach the expected levels in both subjects.
- 93 The school has retained its broad programme of work in geography and history alongside the implementation of new initiatives in literacy and numeracy. In both subjects, pupils' learning is at the same level as at the time of the last inspection, with history having particular strengths.
- 94 The school locality and visits further afield are used effectively to develop skills in geography and history. A recent visit by Year 2 to Buntingford High Street, for instance, provided evidence for map work and observation of historical buildings. Further map work is undertaken to broaden pupils' perspectives as they get older. Maps of the British Isles, Europe and the world are studied and pupils become familiar with place names and countries. Other good work has involved the study of Africa and Kenya in particular. Displays of man-made objects, such as a large goatskin drum brought in by the class teacher, makes learning more meaningful.

- 95 History is taught through first hand experience wherever possible. Visits, to places like West Stow and a Celtic village, help pupils to understand more about life in other times. In school they wrote about what they had seen, created a large three-dimensional mural of an ancient home and made smaller cardboard models of these. They learned about Anglo-Saxon runes and decorated the display with examples of these. Pupils become historical characters and in this way they develop enquiry skills as they find out more about the past. In Year 2, pupils dressed up in period costume and learned to do the washing in a sink using a scrubbing board, soap and brush as in a Victorian kitchen. This made learning real for them. Through the legend of Daedulus and Icarus pupils are learning more about the history of flight and the progress made by man to the present day. A time line on display covers two millennia and starts with the birth of Jesus. It includes writing about significant events and paintings of personalities such as King Alfred, Elizabeth I and Guy Fawkes.
- 96 Teaching in geography and history is good overall. In Year 2 it is of a very high quality. Wherever possible, teachers use their talents to make learning rich and varied. They skilfully use a range of teaching methods to capture pupils' interest and attention. Resources such as videos, photographs, worksheets and computer programs are used effectively. Much of the work is practical in nature and pupils are stimulated by the well-chosen activities. They become enthralled by what they are doing and learn quickly such as in the Victorian kitchen, where they see that life was much harder than today. Teachers have a very enthusiastic approach which pupils like. It encourages them to explore in depth, for example, using the Internet as a further source of information on Kenya.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

- 97 At the time of the last inspection, pupils' achievements in information and communication technology was below average, and they made unsatisfactory progress in the subject. This was the case in both key stages. Pupils lacked knowledge and skills in several important aspects of the subject. There was no scheme of work, and little checking of how well the pupils were learning. While the school's equipment for information and communication technology was satisfactory, there were weaknesses in some of the teaching observed. The subject became a key issue for the school's action plan to address.
- 98 Staff, governors and parents have worked together to improve information and communication technology provision and to raise achievement. Resources for the subject have been improved and are now very good. Parents with information and communication technology skills give time to work alongside individual pupils and small groups during lessons. Financial help from parents has been an important factor in the marked improvement of hardware for information and communication technology since the last inspection. The new scheme of work covers all the main areas of the subject and improved records are kept of pupils' progress. Pupils' learning now builds up in a more systematic way from year to year and their achievements, by the ages of seven and nine, are now in line with national expectations. This is a major improvement since the last inspection.
- 99 By the age of seven, most pupils can use a computer keyboard and peripherals confidently. They can word-process and edit their own work, saving and printing it as appropriate. They know how to use a range of software, including graphics programmes to design an Easter card for example. They can organise simple numerical data, input it, and generate simple graphs and charts, although they do not have enough opportunities to do this. By the end of Year 4,

they have learned to use a good range of software independently, and to read tables of data, and spreadsheets intelligently. They know about how information and communication technology is used in the wider world, can download information from the Internet, and are looking for a partner school to e-mail. Pupils with special educational needs also learn well when working at the computer.

- 100 Many of the pupils bring considerable information and communication technology experiences from home and should be achieving more in school. Their skills are not being extended beyond the average level because too little time is allocated to allow the full range of the subject to be taught in sufficient depth.
- 101 Throughout the school, pupils' attitudes to information and communication technology are very positive. They are confident in handling the equipment and work well together in pairs, or independently.
- 102 Much of the school's information and communication technology teaching is to individuals and small groups of pupils, working alongside the rest of the class which is engaged on other work. When teachers, classroom assistants or parent helpers work with the pupils, they usually progress well. Sometimes, however, they receive little attention because the teacher is busy with the rest of the class. Even where these lessons are well taught, the pupils still have too little information and communication technology time each term to make the progress they are capable of.
- 103 Teaching is satisfactory. Since the last inspection, teachers' skills and confidence in the subject have improved through additional training. They, together with classroom assistants and parent helpers, give good support to the pupils working on the computers. In some classes information and communication technology is used effectively as a tool to extend learning in other subjects. Year 4 pupils, for example, extended their work in geography through the use of a programme of population statistics. The headteacher, who acts as subject leader for information and communication technology, taught this group of pupils very effectively. Too often, however, work across the curriculum does not take enough account of the contribution information and communication technology could make. This is particularly so in mathematics, science, history and geography.

## MUSIC

- 104 Since the last inspection, the school has undergone a significant change in staffing for music. Whereas one teacher taught all classes previously, teachers now teach their own class music using commercial schemes. To compensate for the lack of an instrumentalist, a range of audio-tapes and CD-Roms has been purchased. Pupils have quickly adapted to singing hymns in assemblies to taped music. Although only one lesson was seen during the present inspection, evidence from teachers' planning, hymn practices, video recordings and discussions with the co-ordinator, show that learning develops steadily as pupils move through the school.
- 105 Planning shows that pupils learn to play percussion from reception onwards, developing their understanding of musical notation as they go along. Many opportunities for pupils to receive specialist teaching in recorder and violin enable them to play well. In the one music lesson seen, teaching was excellent. The teacher was lively and enthusiastic, passing on a traditional repertoire of songs and stories to her pupils who enjoyed singing their favourite tunes from memory. On their way to and from assemblies, pupils listen to classical music written by different composers. This helps to create a calm atmosphere in preparation for worship.
- 106 The school has a very strong musical tradition for which it is well known among parents and the

local community. At Christmas time the whole school entertains parents at a concert. In one such, "Pinocchio"; pupils sang many songs which they had learnt by heart and danced energetically to different types of music. Maypole and country dancing clubs are held and teams perform at local festivals.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- 107 Gymnastics, games, dance and swimming lessons were observed during the period of the inspection. The school records show that athletics also takes place. Considerable time is given to physical education. This is because each week throughout the year every class has two on-site lessons in the subject as well as walking to a nearby pool for a swimming lesson. At both key stages, pupils' reach levels of achievement expected for their age. This is in line with the findings of the previous inspection.
- 108 In lessons, pupils' learning overall is satisfactory, including those with special educational needs. They wear appropriate clothing for lessons, use equipment sensibly and are mindful of safety factors. Sensible routines have been established and pupils move to and from lessons quickly and quietly.
- 109 At Key Stage 1, pupils show awareness of space and each other. They sustain activity well, often out of breath through effort. Their actions show increasing co-ordination and control. In gymnastics, they balance on different body parts and are beginning to understand the need to finish movements with a sense of poise. An example of this was seen in a Year 2 lesson in which pupils built up a sequence of movements successfully, including changes of speed, direction and shape. In dance, pupils listen carefully to music and show an increasing ability to create simple movements depicting particular moods or themes. They work effectively together and identify ways to improve. Key Stage 2 pupils build satisfactorily on their previous learning. In games, they show growing skill in positioning hands and feet when throwing and catching. They work well in teams and are willing to adapt what they do in the light of experience. They understand the need for rules and the importance of fairness when competing with others. At both key stages, pupils enjoy swimming. They work hard to practise, refine and improve their performance. Many pupils are confident in the water and can swim well, before they leave the school. A similar judgement was made in the previous inspection report.
- 110 All teachers are confident about their ability to teach the subject satisfactorily and this is an improvement since the last inspection. In lessons observed, teaching at both key stages was never less than satisfactory and sometimes good or very good. It is enhanced further through the use of qualified instructors to assist in the teaching of swimming. Lesson planning is good and teachers are clear what pupils are to learn. This helps ensure that work moves forward at an appropriate pace. Teachers have secure subject knowledge which is shared effectively with pupils, often by demonstrating particular skills. This helps build pupils' confidence. An example of this was seen in a Year 1 dance lesson. The teacher joined in the movements with enthusiasm and showed the children how they might interpret the music. Activities and resources are organised well, so that pupils do not waste time awaiting their turn. This is an improvement from the previous inspection. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do in the time available. Pupils are encouraged to evaluate their efforts and to try to improve. This has a positive impact on their progress. Emphasis is rightly placed on building skills systematically and all pupils are motivated to work hard. They have very good attitudes towards the activities and their behaviour is of a high standard. This too has a positive impact on their progress.
- 111 The school has a good range of outside climbing apparatus which is used regularly by pupils and helps build their confidence and agility.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- 112 Pupils' achievements in religious education at the end of Key Stage 1 are below average in relation to the expectations of the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus. Achievement improves in Key Stage 2, and by the end of Year 4 is in line with the expectations of the syllabus. This represents a fall in achievement since the last inspection. Many of the pupils are bright and articulate. Their performance in other subjects shows that, at both key stages, they could be doing much better in religious education.
- 113 While the pupils learn steadily in their religious education lessons, the work is not challenging enough or interesting enough to extend them fully. This is especially the case for the brighter pupils. Lessons are sometimes rushed, with little opportunity for pupils to discuss and reflect on the ideas presented. Across the school as a whole, too little time is given to the subject to enable it to be taught in appropriate depth and detail.
- 114 By the end of Key Stage 1 most of the pupils, including those with special educational needs, understand that people form themselves into groups for common purposes, and that most groups have explicit or tacit rules. They recognise the family and the school as examples of such groups. Some pupils also understand that many people group themselves together for reasons of belief and faith. While they know a little about the life and miracles of Jesus, their knowledge of Christianity is underdeveloped. They have been taught a little about Judaism, but their knowledge is muddled and fragmentary. By the end of Year 4, they know more about Judaism, and some pupils recognise its links – through Moses for example – with Christianity. Most of them can explain the significance of some of the religious festivals of Judaism and Christianity.
- 115 Only one religious education lesson was seen during the inspection. The pupils were very responsive despite the lesson taking place at the end of a hot afternoon. Pupils enjoy putting forward their own ideas and are confident in doing so. They listen well and courteously to each other and show a clear interest in the issues being discussed. The Year 2 lesson seen was about communities, in which people share common beliefs and practices. It was a satisfactory lesson, well planned, and made a good link between the pupils' families and Jesus' family. The pupils were keen to contribute in the discussion, but the lesson was too hurried to allow ideas to be properly explored. Pupils' oral contributions were cut short and their learning consequently held back.
- 116 The school is preparing to implement the new Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus, and it has improved its stock of equipment and materials for religious education teaching since the last inspection. If these initiatives are to have a significant impact on achievement of learning, the time allowed for religious education will have to be reviewed.