

INSPECTION REPORT

**PARSONS DOWN INFANT AND NURSERY
SCHOOL**

Thatcham

LEA area: West Berkshire

Unique reference number: 109875

Headteacher: Mrs Janice Schofield

Reporting inspector: Mr George Crowther
18814

Dates of inspection: 10th – 13th January 2000

Inspection number: 190869

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 to 7
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Paynesdown Road Thatcham Berkshire
Postcode:	RG19 3TE
Telephone number:	01635 862475
Fax number:	01635 874558
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr David Digby
Date of previous inspection:	November 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
George Crowther	Registered inspector	Science Information technology Physical education Equal opportunities	What sort of school is it? The schools results and achievements. How well are pupils taught? What should the school do to improve further?
Gordon Stockley	Lay inspector		How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Gloria Hamilton-Peach	Team inspector	Mathematics Design and technology Geography Music Special educational needs	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development. How well is the school led and managed?
Monica Mullan	Team inspector	Under fives English Religious education Art History English as an additional language	How good are the curricular opportunities offered to pupils?

The inspection contractor was:

Evenlode Associates Limited
6 Abbey Close
Alcester
Warwickshire
B49 5QW
Tel: 01789 766099

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33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Parsons Down is a medium-sized community infant school for boys and girls 4-7 years old. It has 174 full-time pupils and 52 part-time pupils in its nursery class. Socio-economic data suggest that the circumstances of the families in the area are about the same as national averages, though the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Taken together, however, pupils' attainment on entry is below that found nationally. Thirty pupils have been identified as having special educational needs of which five have a statement. The proportion of pupils needing additional support is about average. There are very few pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and none has English as an additional language.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Parsons Down is an effective school in many ways. Pupils make steady progress within an atmosphere that is very conducive to their learning and development. The teaching is sound overall, with many good features. A steady decline in attainment on entry has caused a consequent fall in the school's national test results in English and mathematics, and current standards are not high enough. The headteacher, governors and staff work together well, but need to focus more clearly on raising standards. The school provides sound value for money.

What the school does well

- Good teaching in science enables pupils to make good progress.
- Good teaching and a rich curriculum in art ensure that pupils reach above average standards.
- The school provides an environment in which pupils' good attitudes and behaviour make a significant contribution to their standards of achievement.
- Relationships between all members of the school community are very good, and this provides positive support for pupils' learning and progress.
- The school provides effective support and guidance for pupils, so that they can approach their work in school confidently.
- The school's aims and values are reflected effectively in its daily life.

What could be improved

- Standards in English, mathematics and information technology are not high enough.
- The school does not monitor the quality of teaching and learning closely enough so that weaknesses can be identified and tackled, and standards raised.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

When it was inspected last in November 1996, Parsons Down was found to provide a sound standard of education, with significant strengths and no major weaknesses. Since then, it has sustained its strengths in the calm, positive environment it provides for pupils' learning, the support it offers for pupils' personal development, and the good teaching that is a feature of many lessons. However, results achieved by its pupils in national tests at the age of seven have fallen since 1997, owing to a fall in the attainment of pupils entering the school. The school has not responded determinedly enough to changed circumstances. Most of the action points from the last inspection have been tackled, but there is still not enough monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning to detect and address weaknesses.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 7 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

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

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

Baseline assessment data show that the attainment of pupils entering the school has fallen sharply during the last few years. As a result, there has been a marked decline in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 3 of attainment and, though most pupils still achieve the expected Level 2, comparisons with other schools are depressed because there are few higher attainers.

By the age of five, most pupils reach the standards expected nationally but few pupils exceed them. Inspection evidence shows attainment in the current Year 2 class to be below average in English and mathematics, and average in science. Pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy are below average throughout the school. Standards in religious education meet those expected by the locally Agreed Syllabus. Standards in information technology are below national expectations because there are weaknesses in pupils' basic skills and in some aspects of the subject, for example word processing. Standards in art are better than those expected for pupils' ages. In all other subjects, standards are close to those expected for pupils' ages.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have good attitudes to school and are keen and interested in their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils behave well in all situations and respond well to the guidance they receive from adults.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between pupils and with teachers are very good. They support pupils' learning and development very well.
Attendance	Close to the national average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years
Lessons seen overall	sound	sound

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 at least sound in 98 per cent of the lessons observed. In 13 per cent of lessons it was very good; in 50 per cent of lessons it was good or better; it was less than satisfactory in 2 per cent. There are a number of strengths in teaching, particularly the good organisation of learning and very good management of pupils. In some lessons, teachers' planning is not precise enough, so the pace of learning is too slow or work is not well matched to pupils' needs. Teaching is sound for English and mathematics, and for literacy and numeracy.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Sound: the school provides a broad and balanced curriculum, with strengths in science and art; aspects of information technology are not covered sufficiently.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good: work is well matched to pupils' needs in lessons and when they are withdrawn for extra support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good: provision for pupils' personal development is within the fabric of the day-to-day life of the school, and is supported effectively by very good relationships; provision for pupils' social development is particularly strong; good provision for moral and cultural development; sound for spiritual development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides good care and support for its pupils through the good relationships it enjoys with families and a range of effective policies and procedures.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	The school has a good partnership with parents, who feel encouraged to play an active part in the life of the school.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Sound: the school achieves many of its aims, particularly those related to providing a secure and caring environment for pupils' learning; there is insufficient focus on raising attainment, which has fallen during the past few years.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body provides good support for the school; governors play a prominent role in forming the school development plan and are clear about its priorities; their role in assisting the school to monitor and raise attainment is less effective.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There is insufficient monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, so that weaknesses can be identified and action taken to seek improvements.
The strategic use of resources	Financial planning and management are good.
The adequacy of staffing, accommodation and learning resources	Staffing and resources for learning are both adequate; the school building provides a very attractive environment for pupils, enhanced by many high quality displays; the school grounds are very spacious.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Their children enjoy going to school and make good progress.• Behaviour in the school is good.• The teaching is good.• The school is approachable if parents have problems.• The school expects children to work hard and achieve their best.• The school helps children to become mature and responsible.• Children get the right amount of work to do at home.• The school works closely with parents.• The school is well led and managed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents raised no significant issues

The great majority of parents are pleased with most aspects of the school's work, and inspectors' judgements support parents' positive views.

At their meeting, some parents expressed the view that the annual reports on pupils are too general and do not give a clear view of pupils' standards of achievement in comparison with other pupils. The quality of reports seen during the inspection was judged to be good. Some parents felt that discussions with teachers came too late in the year to be profitable. The school already has plans to hold discussions with parents earlier in the year.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. When they join the nursery, children's attainment is below average overall compared with what is expected nationally. During their time as under fives, they make steady progress in most areas of learning, because the teaching is sound and the curriculum provides a well-structured set of experiences. The children are very settled in the nursery and they enjoy their work and play. They make good progress in developing their personal and social skills, showing increasing independence, and co-operating successfully when working and playing together. A few of the children have good language skills, but many have a limited vocabulary, and some have speech difficulties. Although they make sound progress in developing their early skills in language and literacy, few begin to read or write independently. In mathematics, though most children can count, recognise shapes and make patterns, few have the skills to match a group of objects to a number, and teaching does not always extend their understanding sufficiently. In all other areas of the curriculum, most of the children have knowledge, skills and understanding that are typical for their ages and they make sound progress. By the age of five, most children reach the standards expected nationally, but few exceed them, and many still have weaknesses in English. Assessments of pupils' attainment made soon after they begin the reception year indicate that overall attainment is below the national average. A significant proportion of these pupils has not attended the nursery.
2. In the end of key stage assessments in 1999, results in reading were well below the national average. Although the proportion of pupils reaching the expected Level 2 of attainment was just below average, very few pupils reached the higher Level 3. In writing, results were below the national average. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected level was close to the national average, but very few pupils reached the higher level. Results, and the pattern of attainment, were similar in mathematics. Compared with similar schools, results in writing were below average, and results in reading and mathematics were well below average. National comparisons, and those made with similar schools, were low because few pupils reached the higher level of attainment and there was a larger proportion of pupils with special educational needs in the year group than is usual for the school. Based on teachers' assessments, attainment in science was close to the national average.
3. Evidence from these national assessments must be considered in the context of a marked fall in pupils' attainment on entry to the school. During the past few years, assessments made soon after pupils start school show that attainment has declined. In 1997, the school's results in the end of key stage tests were above average, and evidence from the last inspection in 1996 confirms this picture. Evidence from the current inspection shows that the quality of teaching is sound, with a number of strong features, so that pupils make sound, often good progress in lessons, and sound progress across the key stage. Once again, this is a similar picture to the last inspection, and the teaching team is largely the same. Therefore, a decline in attainment on entry is the principle reason for falling standards in the end of key stage tests. Nonetheless, standards in English and mathematics are not high enough, and the inspection identifies a number of ways in which the school should improve teaching and learning.
4. Evidence gathered during this inspection shows that standards in the current Year 2 are rather higher than last year, though overall attainment is still below average in English and mathematics because there are few higher attainers. Attainment in science is close to the national average and the school has done well to sustain standards in science despite falling attainment on entry. Pupils' achievements across the key stage are sound overall in most subjects, and good in science and art. In information technology (IT), however, pupils do not make enough progress because they spend too little time on the subject and do not cover all the required aspects thoroughly.
5. Pupils with special education needs make sound progress in relation to their initial attainment because of the good support they receive. Tasks in lessons are generally well matched to their needs and help them to meet the targets on their individual educational plans. In the lessons

where they receive help from a classroom assistant, these pupils make particularly good progress. There are no significant variations in pupils' achievements by gender.

6. In Year 2, pupils' listening skills are of a satisfactory standard because they are taught to listen carefully and they use their skills in a variety of situations. Standards in speaking, however, are below average because too few opportunities are routinely provided to enable pupils to express themselves at length. In reading, standards are below average. Many pupils recognise the most common vocabulary and can put together simple letter combinations to help themselves with some less familiar words. However, too few read fluently at their own level or with much confidence. In writing, overall standards are below average, but have not declined as much as in reading. Year 2 pupils write for a range of purposes, extending the length of their writing as they make simple records of events that are of importance to them. They are able to repeat some of a story in writing or set one in simple sequence. They learn to write instructions, such as for making a sandwich, and to construct rhyming poems. Some are able to produce relatively longer stories and pieces. Standards of spelling and handwriting, however, are below average. Although pupils' literacy skills are generally below average, they are used and developed effectively in other subjects of the curriculum.
7. Attainment in mathematics is below national expectations. In Year 2, pupils can count in twos and fives to thirty. They use this knowledge successfully to work out the answer to three fives and match their answer to fifteen. Higher attainers can work out practically what are seven lots of four. There was little evidence, however, of pupils working with higher numbers to 100 or ordering two digit numbers, and pupils are not quick enough at mental recall of number facts. Pupils are developing appropriate skills in gathering information, for example about colour of hair and shoes, and displaying it as block graphs or pie charts, using the computer. Pupils know and can recognise a range of plane shapes, but are less confident with three-dimensional shapes. Pupils in Year 2 can estimate lengths such as a centimetre or metre, and draw accurate lines to given measures. Numeracy is used satisfactorily in other areas of the curriculum, for instance to count dinner numbers and absences each morning and also when performing practical activities using sets in science and graphs in geography. Across the key stage, pupils' work shows sound progress being made.
8. Attainment in science is close to national expectations. In their current work about sounds, most pupils in Year 2 understand that sound is made when something vibrates. They observe experiments closely and listen carefully, explaining their ideas using an appropriate range of scientific vocabulary. All of the pupils can classify musical instruments according to the method by which the sound is made. A few higher-attaining pupils can explain how the ear collects sounds and that the brain interprets them. The quality of pupils' recording is weaker than their oral work. Year 2 pupils' past work shows that they can, for example, make simple electrical circuits and correct faults, and their diagrams are clear. Pupils' work shows that they are making good progress across the key stage and gathering a good range of knowledge and understanding. A growing emphasis on experimental and investigative work enables pupils to develop their curiosity and knowledge effectively. Higher attainers, however, are generally given the same work as other pupils and are not always challenged sufficiently.
9. In information technology, pupils make unsatisfactory progress and attainment is below national expectations. Although pupils have used a number of programs, their basic keyboard skills are weak and they have had little experience of word processing or using the computer for control. Pupils have too little experience in the subject to make progress and there is no systematic approach to developing pupils' skills as they move through the school. Standards in religious education are in line with those expected by the locally Agreed Syllabus, and pupils make sound progress across the key stage, building up their knowledge of Christianity, and developing some awareness of the principle features of other faiths.
10. In art, pupils make good progress across the key stage because they experience a wide range of work and teachers are particularly confident and skilled in this subject. In geography, imaginative topics capture pupils' interest; they build their skills well, and reach standards that are better than those expected for their ages. Pupils make sound progress in design and technology, working with a range of materials and making a variety of products. In history,

pupils build their understanding of times past steadily, often through first-hand research and, by Year 2, attainment is close to that expected for pupils' ages. Pupils make sound progress in music and physical education.

11. Most pupils start school with below average attainment, and overall attainment on entry to the school has fallen. Attainment is generally below average at the end of Key Stage 1. This represents sound achievement overall and, because there is an increasing proportion of pupils who need more support with their learning, good teaching is needed to ensure these pupils achieve as well as possible. Pupils made at least sound progress, overall, in all but one of the lessons observed, though in a number of these lessons more progress could have been made if teachers had focused more closely of the achievements of individual pupils. Pupils made good progress in about half of the lessons observed, because tasks were more challenging and the teaching moved at pace.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

12. Pupils have good attitudes to learning, behave well and develop very good relationships with adults and other pupils. This is a significant strength that has been sustained since the last inspection. Pupils are keen to learn and they enjoy coming to school. They show interest in their lessons and maintain good levels of concentration for their ages. They ask and answer questions confidently and work well both independently and in groups. Their positive attitudes and growing self-confidence give them secure foundations for future learning.
13. Pupils' behaviour is good in lessons, around school and in the playground. Pupils know and understand the school rules that are displayed in every classroom, and are happy to comply with them. They play together happily at break times and are helpful and co-operative with each other in class. Lunchtimes are calm occasions where pupils relate well to one another and show respect for the dinner supervisors who care for them. Parents are pleased with the standard of behaviour at the school. There are no reported incidences of bullying, and no inappropriate behaviour was observed during the inspection. There have been no exclusions at the school during the past year.
14. Pupils with special educational needs also have positive attitudes to learning. They work well in class and when they are withdrawn for extra help. They enjoy the special relationships that they have with the learning support assistants and are keen to make progress in their work. Their behaviour is good.
15. Pupils' personal development is good and they make the most of opportunities provided for responsibility and independence. They enjoy a range of small tasks and responsibilities such as returning the register to the office, leading the class in to assembly, or giving out equipment. Pupils particularly enjoy reading out their own work to the rest of the class and this enhances their self-esteem. All these activities are effective in enabling pupils to develop their own feelings of self worth.
16. Pupils' rate of attendance is satisfactory. In the most recent year, attendance was 95 per cent, which is slightly above the national average. Unauthorised absences were below the national average. Pupils are punctual, registers are filled in appropriately and efficiently at the beginning of each session, and lessons begin promptly. Pupils' good attendance and punctuality have a positive effect on their learning.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

17. The quality of teaching is sound overall, with a number of strong features. In the nursery, teaching is sound for children aged under five, and learning is well organised through a good range of activities. As a result, children are very settled, work with interest, and make steady progress towards the standards expected by the age of five. However, too little is expected of some of the older children who, in many other schools, would already be in the reception year. Teaching in Key Stage 1 has many strengths, particularly in the good organisation of learning and

the teachers' effective management of pupils' behaviour. Pupils learn within a very calm, secure and encouraging environment and this helps them to make progress. Teaching was of very good quality in 13 per cent of the lessons observed, good in 50 per cent, and sound in 48 per cent. In only one lesson of the 52 observed was teaching judged to be less than satisfactory. Teaching of science, art and geography is good, and literacy and numeracy are both taught soundly. The overall quality of teaching is similar to that found at the last inspection. However, the teaching of information technology is unsatisfactory because planning does not give pupils sufficient time to spend on IT, nor provide a balanced programme of work to cover the National Curriculum.

18. The quality of teaching of pupils with special educational needs is sound. Teachers meet the special needs of pupils well in lessons, providing appropriate activities and good support. Classroom assistants also play a vital role in ensuring that pupils with special educational needs benefit from activities and make good progress. There are high expectations of the potential of these pupils within a caring approach that enables them to feel secure and valued.
19. Teachers' knowledge is sound in most subjects of the curriculum, and good in many, and this is reflected in their teaching. For example, in an art lesson, the teacher introduced the pupils to the use of texture to capture the form of three-dimensional objects in their drawings. She encouraged them to observe carefully, demonstrated a variety of techniques, and introduced a good range of vocabulary. As a result, the pupils worked with interest and concentration and improved the quality of their drawing considerably. In many of the lessons observed, teachers used their good subject knowledge to explain new ideas clearly, to extend pupils' understanding, and to capture their interest. For example, a number of lessons for Year 2 pupils about life in Ghana generated particular enthusiasm.
20. Competent teaching of basic skills is a good feature of many lessons. In literacy sessions, clear teaching of phonics strengthens pupils' ability in reading and writing, and good use of texts introduces pupils to new vocabulary and the structure of writing. For example, reception pupils gained much when they read 'Jack in the box' with their teacher, listening carefully, extending their vocabulary and discussing letter sounds. Pupils in Year 1 made good gains in understanding the use of capital letters and full stops to denote sentences during their reading of 'Stellaluna'. In mathematics, the teaching of basic skills is generally secure, as was seen when pupils in Year 2 were carefully introduced to multiplication as repeated addition. In a few lessons, however, teachers were not fully aware of the basic understanding required before pupils could move on to more difficult concepts, and so the work set was too difficult.
21. There are weaknesses in teachers' planning of some lessons. In general, teachers rely on a fairly brief plan of the main learning objectives and the activities that pupils will complete. In many cases, this is adequate because the teacher has a very clear idea of how the lesson will develop. In a number of lessons observed, however, plans did not identify the pacing of the lesson and, as a result, introductions lasted too long and pupils' interest began to wane. In others, plans did not identify work for pupils of differing prior attainment, and higher attainers, in particular, were not always challenged sufficiently. In a geography lesson, the teacher had not checked the main ideas the pupils needed to understand, so misleading statements were made. It is a strength that teachers evaluate their lessons carefully and often detect weaknesses. Nonetheless, planning is not always precise enough to ensure that pupils work at a good pace and make appropriate gains in their knowledge and skills.
22. In the better lessons, teachers extend pupils' understanding by setting challenging tasks. For example, reception pupils were introduced to a range of tape recorders and encouraged to use them to develop their understanding of technology. Pupils in Year 2 explored 'sound' in science through a variety of experiments with musical instruments, and the teachers' astute questioning developed their understanding very well. High expectations of pupils' capabilities in art lessons produced good results. Challenging work about African drum rhythms in music encouraged pupils to make very good progress. In all these lessons, pupils showed a high level of effort, worked with interest, and made good gains in understanding. In a few lessons, however, particularly in literacy and numeracy, the work was too hard for some pupils or too easy for others and did not provide appropriate challenge.

23. Teachers are well organised and they use a good range of methods and groupings. In whole class sessions, teachers provide lively explanations, which hold pupils' interest. For example, in a geography lesson, the teacher took on the role of a 'Mrs Mohama', a Ghanaian woman, answering questions and teaching the pupils about her country. This ensured the pupils' concentration, and they learned a great deal from the lesson. Teachers read books expressively and explain concepts and tasks clearly. Teachers' open-ended questioning, involving all pupils, is particularly effective. For part of most lessons, pupils work individually or in groups, and this is always well organised. Teachers monitor pupils' progress well and intervene by asking questions or encouraging pupils to explain their thinking. In literacy lessons, however, where teachers plan to work with a 'focus' group, they do not always ensure that other pupils work effectively independently, so activities such as guided reading do not receive full attention. Teachers are very skilled in taking incidental opportunities to teach skills in literacy and numeracy across all subjects of the curriculum.
24. Teachers have established very positive relationships with their pupils, which underpin very good management of behaviour. They offer considerable praise and encouragement for good work and conduct, and pupils respond by listening well, concentrating on their work and behaving well in all situations. Teachers establish a calm, productive working atmosphere in most lessons, which supports pupils' learning and progress. The interesting tasks that are provided for pupils also encourage them to concentrate and behave well.
25. In most lessons, teachers use the time available effectively. Teaching and learning move at a good pace. For example, in a physical education lesson, pupils practised and improved a range of balances and the teacher persistently introduced new challenges to keep them active and interested. In most lessons, pupils are encouraged to work as quickly as they can, but teachers are sensitive to the varying needs of individuals. In a few lessons, however, the whole class introduction lasts too long, pupils become restless, and too little time remains for individual work. In some physical education lessons, too much time was wasted giving out equipment. Teachers generally make sound use of resources to support pupils' learning, and the artefacts from Ghana are particularly good example. Support staff and volunteer helpers are generally used effectively when pupils are working in groups, and their contribution has a marked impact on pupils' progress. For example, in an art lesson, two assistants and a parent enabled pupils to produce their best work. In a number of lessons, however, support staff listen to long introductions by the teacher and are not used as productively as they could be.
26. Teachers use good, informal strategies to assess pupils' understanding and to ensure that work is well matched to their prior attainment. They encourage pupils to explain what they are doing, and monitor their progress effectively. In a number of lessons, teachers adjusted tasks, based on their assessments, to better meet pupils' needs. Teachers do not generally identify assessment opportunities in their lesson plans, which sometimes lack focus in this respect. Pupils' work is marked thoroughly and often annotated to indicate attainment and progress. The school sets little formal homework. All pupils are expected to read at home and, though many do, for a significant proportion this is inconsistent. Older pupils learn spelling. Pupils also pursue topic work at home and often bring items of interest to school, which contribute to their learning.

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

27. The curriculum for children under the age of five is satisfactory. It takes appropriate account of the Desirable Learning Outcomes for children of that age. In Key Stage 1, all subjects of the National Curriculum are taught. Religious education is taught in line with the current locally Agreed Syllabus.
28. The curriculum is sufficiently broad and balanced to meet the needs of all pupils, with the exception of information technology where there are some weaknesses in provision. It is satisfactorily structured to ensure pupils make steady progress and are prepared for the next stage of their education at junior school.

29. Suitable emphasis is placed on the teaching of English and mathematics and these subjects are allocated the most time. The National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy Project have recently been correctly introduced. These initiatives are generally effective, and pupils' specific skills are developed appropriately across most subjects of the curriculum.
30. There are appropriate policies for all subjects and relevant schemes of work are in place, which the school calls 'key stage plans'. Curriculum planning for pupils aged under five and in Key Stage 1, whilst satisfactory overall, nevertheless contains some weaknesses. Medium-term plans are not always effectively translated into good quality weekly plans. There is insufficient detail in current lesson plans to identify more rigorously the specific learning needs of the more able or mature pupils. At present, planning is not sufficiently focussed on the necessary learning required to raise attainment in the school. This lack of clarity in the learning objectives of short-term planning, identified at the previous inspection, has not been fully addressed.
31. All pupils have equal opportunity to take part in the curriculum provided. No pupils are disappplied from National Curriculum requirements. An average number of pupils are identified as having special educational needs. Provision for these pupils is good and the Code of Practice is carefully followed. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported in class with well-matched tasks in English and mathematics. They are withdrawn for more concentrated work on targets in the individual education plans. These withdrawal sessions are well planned and managed, the teacher has a good rapport with pupils, and ensures that they know precisely what is to be achieved.
32. Assemblies and acts of collective worship take place regularly and meet statutory requirements. Provision for pupils' personal development is good overall. There is no specific planning for the cultivation of spiritual awareness, but provision is satisfactorily made in an incidental way. It arises in lessons, for example in art and sometimes in science. Moral development is well catered for by the good example set by teachers and its strong promotion in regular assemblies. Plenty of opportunities are provided for pupils' very good social development throughout the school day. They are well organised in working groups and given many little responsibilities, which they carry out very well. Provision for the appreciation of cultural traditions is well promoted through art and music, and most successfully through some colourful and prominent work on Ghana.
33. There is organised time for pupils' personal, social and health education. The school gives some priority to these aspects, mainly through 'circle time'. The governors have also met their responsibilities as regards sex education, but have not yet drawn up a policy for drugs awareness.
34. Pupils' learning is enriched by the sound provision of school trips and outside speakers. School visits are regularly organised, particularly to places of local interest. Visitors are invited to the school to widen pupils' experiences. These include a visit from representatives of the astronomical society, as well as the regular visits made by the local Methodist minister. At present there are no extra-curricular clubs provided by the school, which would enrich provision for subjects such as music and physical education.
35. Satisfactory links with other educational establishments in the community have been developed. The school is also appropriately involved with students from the local colleges of higher and further education.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

36. The school provides good care and support for its pupils through the good relationships it enjoys with families and a range of effective policies and procedures. The caring approach of the staff is a particularly strong feature of this provision. Good care and support plays a significant part in enabling pupils to achieve as well as they can. The school has maintained the many strengths identified in the last inspection.
37. The school's procedures for ensuring pupils' welfare, health and safety are good. Health and safety matters have a high priority and, as a result, the school is a safe and caring place. All staff

have had training in first aid procedures and any injuries to children are quickly and effectively dealt with. The governors are currently in the process of reviewing the health and safety policy. There are good procedures for dealing with child protection issues and staff are fully aware of their responsibilities in this area.

38. The school has a good behaviour policy, which sets out clear and positive approaches to encourage good behaviour. There is a consistency of approach by all staff, ensuring that behaviour is very good at all times. The procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are good. Parents are reminded frequently about the importance of good attendance and punctuality, and the school involves the education welfare officer where appropriate.
39. There are weaknesses in the school's assessment procedures and the use of assessment to improve pupils' learning. The school has not yet established a systematic pattern of assessing pupils' existing skills, setting targets and tracking progress towards those targets. In the nursery there is a useful assessment process which relates well to the six areas of learning for children aged under five. However, many pupils are well past the age of five when they transfer from the nursery and few other assessments of their basic skills are carried out.
40. Although assessments are made in English, mathematics and science, and the information is recorded in a profile of pupils' achievements, they are not used effectively to plan future work for individuals and groups of pupils. This can lead to a mis-match of work in some lessons, either with higher-attaining pupils not being challenged sufficiently, or work that is too difficult being set for lower attainers. Pupils' reading progress is not checked regularly by testing and individual targets are not set. However, pupils with special educational needs have good quality individual education plans which contain clear, achievable targets and success criteria, and these pupils are monitored and tracked well.
41. There are good formal and informal procedures for monitoring pupils' personal development. Teachers know pupils and their families very well and they use this personal knowledge to provide very good educational and personal support and guidance for their pupils. For example, a teacher was able to provide good support for a pupil who was upset in the classroom because she was aware that circumstances at home were difficult at that time. Pupils' achievements, both academic and social, are recognised and rewarded by teachers and this has a positive effect on pupils' attitudes and behaviour.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

42. The school has sustained its good partnership with parents noted at the last inspection. Parents have a very positive view of the school. They are very satisfied with what the school provides and strongly support the attitudes and values that it promotes. Parents feel welcome in the school at any time and know that their concerns or suggestions will be listened to and, where appropriate, acted upon. An example of this is the school's decision to change the parents' consultation meeting from the summer term to the spring term, at the suggestion of parents. Some parents consider that the annual reports on pupils are too general and do not give a clear view of their children's standards of achievement. However, the quality of reports seen during the inspection was judged to be good.
43. The school has effective links with parents. There is an informative prospectus for the main school and a good nursery prospectus. Regular newsletters keep parents well informed about what is happening in school and information about the curriculum during the current term is displayed around the school for parents to see.
44. Prior to children entering the nursery, school staff visit their homes and discuss the child's progress and development. The prospectus contains useful practical information for parents and emphasises the concept of partnership between home and school. A booklet for parents contains some useful and helpful ideas, strategies and activities. Teachers value what parents know about their own children's learning and incorporate this information into their assessments of pupils.

The headteacher and class teachers are always willing to discuss a child's progress or problems with parents, either at the beginning or end of the school day, or at a formal appointment.

45. At the end of the summer term, parents receive a good written report on their child's achievements during the year, which gives clear information about what the child has achieved and some targets for improvement. Parents have an opportunity to discuss the written report with the class teacher and there is space on the report for parents' comments. In order to help parents to understand what is taught, the school organises regular curriculum evenings, but these are not usually well attended.
46. Parents' contribution to their children's education is satisfactory overall. Many parents have effective links with the school in ways such as helping their child to learn at home, having regular informal discussions with teachers as they take their child to and from school. A number of parents assist in school on a regular basis, providing valuable support to teachers, for example by baking with the children or working in the library. There is a parent-teacher association, though only a small number of parents are actively involved. The school issued new home-school agreement documents to parents last year, but the majority have not been returned. A significant proportion of pupils does not read at home regularly with parents.
47. The school tries very hard to establish and maintain effective links with parents and its achievements are satisfactory. However there is a mixed response from parents, which limits the impact on some pupils' learning.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

48. The headteacher, staff and governors share a common purpose in providing a good foundation for the education of pupils in the school and, in many respects, they have achieved this. The staff have successfully established a caring, supportive environment that ensures there is equal opportunity for all pupils to succeed. This enables pupils to feel valued and confident. This is one important way in which the school achieves most of its aims, and it is a strength of the school. There is also a shared commitment to improving aspects of the school's work, which is evident in the school development plan, though there is not enough emphasis on promoting high standards of attainment. Given a clearer focus on raising standards, the school has a sound capacity for further improvement.
49. Staff and governors know the strengths of the school and understand its weaknesses. However, although there is considerable concern about the decline in standards over recent years, there is no precise plan of action to deal with it. There is no rigorous analysis of results, and insufficient whole-school monitoring of pupils' progress to enable the staff to identify strengths and weaknesses in pupils' performance. Consequently, the means by which attainment can be raised have yet to be identified. This is a weakness in the school.
50. The headteacher has monitored teaching informally, but this is insufficiently rigorous to identify what does or does not work well in classes, and has done little to improve the proportion of pupils attaining the higher levels in the National Curriculum tests. The headteacher has established an effective structure for the management of the school. This provides for effective delegation and a good basis for regular discussion and decision making, which is a strength of the school. The senior management team meet regularly, and the year group teams meet each week to plan together for the following week and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in the lessons of the preceding week. There are satisfactory procedures in place for the induction of new and supply staff in the school to ensure they are well informed of the schools' procedures.
51. The governing body provides good support to the school in all its activities. Governors play a prominent role in forming the school development plan. Although they have identified a number of appropriate priorities for improvement, important issues about raising attainment in English, mathematics and IT are not expressed clearly enough. In many ways, this is because the governors' role in helping the school to monitor standards is not as effective as it should be. Governors assist the staff in reviewing policies. Each governor is attached to a particular class

and most governors visit the school each term. Governors fulfil all their statutory responsibilities including that of appraisal of staff.

52. The school is dealing with a declining pupil roll and an associated decline in funding. The governing body has made prudent financial decisions to take account of these facts. Funding for specific grants has been correctly targeted to those areas. For instance, grants towards the purchase of information technology have addressed the need to network computers in Year 2, and capital grants have been allocated to improving and maintaining the building. Pupils with special educational needs have their appropriate support in class. Needs are prioritised and careful purchasing ensures best value for money.

53. The school is adequately staffed with appropriately qualified teachers and suitable experienced support staff to meet the needs of the curriculum. However, the support staff frequently sit in on parts of lessons and this is not the most effective use of their time. Although funding is restricted for resources this year, resources for learning are at present adequate. They are carefully stored, accessible to staff and pupils and are well maintained.

54. The school building provides a very attractive environment for pupils. It is enhanced by the many high quality displays of work around the school and also by the interesting features for imaginative play in the playground. The caretaker and cleaners take great pride in maintaining the school to a high standard and this provides a very pleasant working environment for pupils and staff.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

55. Pupils make sound progress during their time at this school within an atmosphere that is very conducive to their learning and development. The teaching is sound overall, with many good features. A steady decline in attainment on entry has caused a consequent fall in the school's results in English and mathematics at the end of the key stage. In this context, and to improve the standards of work and the pupils' learning, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- raise standards in English and mathematics by:
 - improving the planning of lessons to ensure appropriate challenge for all pupils;
 - providing, where appropriate, more opportunities for focused teaching of early skills in English and mathematics for the older children in the nursery;
 - assessing pupils' existing skills more systematically and setting realistic but challenging targets for groups and individuals;
 - using assessment information more systematically to identify aspects of the curriculum and teaching that can be improved;
 - ensuring, as planned, that the school's literacy and numeracy strategies meet the needs of all pupils and are implemented flexibly;
 - ensuring that maximum use is made of learning support assistants to work with pupils;
 - enabling all teachers to share existing good practice.

(paragraphs 1-3, 6-7, 17, 21-22, 59-60, 71, 77)

- raise standards in information technology, as planned, by:
 - teaching a curriculum that meets the requirements of the National Curriculum;
 - making full use of the existing scheme of work to ensure that pupils build their skills and understanding steadily;
 - increasing the amount of time pupils spend on computers;
 - using and developing pupils' IT skills more effectively across the curriculum.

(paragraphs 4, 9, 28, 103-106)

- increase the focus on monitoring standards of attainment and the quality of teaching and learning, as planned, by:
 - the headteacher taking a firmer lead in more rigorous monitoring;
 - involving subject co-ordinators more fully in monitoring the quality of lessons and pupils' work;
 - involving governors in the monitoring process;
so that strengths and weaknesses are identified, and action taken to improve standards.

(paragraphs 48-51, 72, 79, 84)

It was the judgement of the inspection team that there were no other significant issues that should be considered for inclusion in the action plan.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	52
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	21

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
	13	37	48	2		

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 – Y2
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)		200
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals		15

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

	Nursery	YR – Y1
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	5
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	0	30

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	1

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.96
National comparative data	5.6

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	1999	53	55	108

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	42	47	47
	Girls	39	49	46
	Total	81	96	93
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	75 (74)	89 (80)	86 (87)
	National	82 (80)	83 (81)	87 (85)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	42	48	50
	Girls	46	46	50
	Total	88	94	100
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	81 (81)	87 (92)	93 (93)
	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	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	193
Any other minority ethnic group	7

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 – Y2**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	9.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21
Average class size	26

Education support staff: YR – Y2

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	144

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	26

Total number of education support staff	1
Total aggregate hours worked per week	30

Number of pupils per FTE adult	13
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1998-99
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	£
Total income	415145.00
Total expenditure	389496.00
Expenditure per pupil	1487.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	10930.00
Balance carried forward to next year	36579.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	210
Number of questionnaires returned	32

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	81	19	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	63	34	3	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	44	53	3	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	68	0	7	0
The teaching is good.	66	34	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	47	41	0	13	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	72	25	0	3	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	34	6	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	38	53	0	9	0
The school is well led and managed.	59	41	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	53	41	3	3	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	30	37	17	10	7

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

Areas of learning for children under five

56. The school admits children into the nursery class, on a part-time basis, at the beginning of the term following their fourth birthday. Some of them have already had pre-school experience in local playgroups. Children normally spend three terms in the nursery. They transfer to the main school, usually into the reception class, at the beginning of the term following their fifth birthday. About 30 per cent of the pupils joining the reception class have attended other nurseries and pre-schools. At the time of the inspection, there were no children under five in the reception class.
57. Several of the children were just beginning their nursery education. Good induction procedures ensure a smooth start is made. The school makes separate provision for children under the age of five, and planning takes appropriate account of the specific learning requirements for children of this age. Standards on entry are below average, particularly in general use of language. However, children in the nursery make sound progress and, though spoken language is still below average, by the age of five most children reach the standards expected nationally and are appropriately prepared to start work on the National Curriculum. The quality of education provided in the nursery is broadly the same as at the last inspection, but standards are lower, owing to a fall in attainment on entry.
58. Good progress is made in **personal and social development**. Most children settle well into the structured routines of the nursery. From the beginning, good practice in encouraging the development of listening skills is effective in establishing good standards of co-operation and behaviour. Teaching in this area of development is good. Experienced management in the nursery ensures that children are well supported and successful in becoming sufficiently confident to benefit from the activities provided. Through properly organised group and play activities, pupils learn to work well with others. They learn to sit quietly when required to, such as in early literacy sessions or when listening to stories. They are able to respond politely to the adults around them. They take appropriate care of classroom equipment and become quite independent in moving around the various activities set out.
59. Although standards remain below average, sound progress is made in all aspects of **language and literacy**. Good progress is made in the development of listening skills. Children develop their speaking skills through a range of structured and incidental opportunities, such as the imaginative play situations provided in the 'Post Office'. They enjoy partaking in whole-class story telling, where they become completely involved in the development of a familiar text. They enjoy looking at books and know that the print, as well as the pictures, carries the story. They know a number of initial sounds and can sometimes recognise them in text. A few are able to write their names and some copy letters or attempt to 'write' their own ideas by themselves. The teaching of literacy is never less than satisfactory and has many strong features. Story telling, in particular, is enlivened by the well-honed skills of the teacher, who is able to dramatise a story well so that it captures the children's enthusiasm. For the older and higher-attaining children, however, there is not enough focused teaching to advance their early literacy skills.
60. Teaching provides sound opportunities for **mathematical development**. Children learn to count objects around the class and are beginning to recognise written figures. They become familiar with names of numbers through rhymes and jingles. They develop concepts of capacity through activities such as well-structured water and sand play. Ideas of mathematical shape are introduced, and some children are able to recognise and name simple shapes. Some make appropriate use of equipment to experiment with shapes for themselves. They also use an extensive range of suitable equipment to match and fit numbers and explore shape in three dimensions. Children develop appropriate mathematical language to indicate relative size and distance. The quality of teaching is satisfactory in this aspect of the children's development. Nevertheless, planning is not always sufficiently detailed to allow for further challenge to be built into some of the activities as pupils make progress.

61. Children's **knowledge and understanding of the world** is satisfactorily developed through a rolling programme of topics, though this is not always recorded in planning in much detail. They begin to become more aware of times past through looking at old artefacts and through topics such as those which include a medieval castle. Knowledge of their immediate environment is improved through looking at a map of the locality and seeing where their homes are located. They are aware of the five basic senses and know the function of these in human beings. They can describe features of the weather and, at appropriate times of year, plant bulbs and appreciate their growth. An introduction to the computer is made, and children are developing elementary skills in using the keyboard. Teaching is sound overall, but more could be done to provide specific learning experiences, particularly for the older children.
62. There are satisfactory opportunities for **physical development**. Children use pencils, crayons, brushes and other small tools with confidence. They learn to cut, paste and join materials, developing hand and eye co-ordination effectively. They use a range of construction kits, which promote the refining of their manipulative skills. Teaching of physical skills is satisfactory. Clear demonstration by adults enables children to copy how things can best be done, so they can practise and improve. In physical education lessons, they are able to take advantage of the space and equipment provided in the main school hall. There is also good provision for development using the large and small outdoor equipment, which is available immediately outside the nursery. For example, children enjoy exploring safely the physical and imaginative possibilities offered by tricycles and other toys.
63. In the areas of **creative development**, sound progress is made as children explore their own ideas through drawing and painting. They know the names of most colours and can use paint effectively to produce a good range of artwork. They engage in appropriate large collage work, such as an underwater scene, and learn to use a variety of materials to good effect. They work with malleable materials to produce three-dimensional objects of their own design. Children enjoy listening to music, including a modern selection. They are familiar with musical vocabulary, including the term 'conductor', and make satisfactory responses to the music they enjoy. They have an appropriate repertoire of rhymes and songs, and can generally sing in tune. They are able to perform rhythmically and can follow the simple musical signals provided by the teacher. Teaching is satisfactory with some strengths in organising activities and in the ready spontaneity with which children's requirements are met.

English

64. Overall, standards in English are below national expectations for pupils in Key Stage 1. Results of the national assessments for seven-year-olds in 1999 show that the proportion of pupils achieving the expected Level 2 in reading was below average, and the proportion reaching the higher Level 3 was well below. In writing, the proportion reaching Level 2 was close to the national average, but very few pupils gained the higher level. Although the great majority of pupils reached the level expected for their age in reading and writing, few attained the higher level, which depressed comparisons with schools nationally and those in similar social circumstances. The year group contained a larger proportion of pupils with special educational needs than is usual for the school.
65. There has been an overall downward trend in standards since the last inspection, particularly in reading. Evidence gained during the current inspection confirms the picture of attainment painted by national test results, which to a large extent reflects the falling levels of attainment on entry to the school.
66. Pupils' listening skills are of a satisfactory standard. Throughout the key stage, they are taught to listen carefully and this has a beneficial effect on their general learning and behaviour. From the very beginning, they learn to pay careful attention to the spoken communications of the adults around them. Standards in speaking, however, are below average. This is partly because less emphasis is placed on the development of this aspect of language. Teachers provide good opportunities for questions and answers, but too few opportunities to enable pupils to express themselves in a more sustained way.

67. In reading, pupils build steadily on a sound foundation of early skills. They are introduced to a core of basic words, which enables them to manage simple text with a measure of independence. They work through structured schemes, which gradually increase their capabilities in tackling reading. Many can recognise the most common vocabulary and can put together simple letter combinations to help themselves with some less familiar words. However, too few read fluently at their own level or with much confidence. Opportunities for reading provided within literacy lessons do not focus enough on the development of each child's skills. All pupils take books home regularly to practise what they have achieved at school, but a significant proportion do not receive the required support from parents.
68. Standards in writing have remained steadier than in reading. This is mostly due to an increased emphasis placed on more varied writing. However, overall attainment generally reflects the below average standards in reading. The writing of pupils in the reception class is beginning to emerge as they make sound attempts to convey their ideas in such activities as writing 'speech bubbles'. Pupils in Year 1 can also copy simple words and sentences, and gradually begin to express themselves with a suitable measure of independence. They write about their experiences at home and cover topics that are of personal interest to them. In Year 2, the range of writing opportunities increases satisfactorily. Pupils extend the length of their writing as they make simple records of events that are of importance to them. They are able to repeat some of a story in writing or set one in simple sequence. They learn to write instructions, such as for making a sandwich, and to construct rhyming poems. Some are able to produce relatively longer stories and pieces. However, teachers do not encourage pupils, particularly the higher attainers, to write at sufficient length to bring about a rise in standards. Word processing is not used enough to extend pupils' writing skills.
69. Standards of spelling and presentation of work are below average. Pupils learn to form their letters correctly at an early stage, but do not receive enough practice subsequently. Expectations of the presentation of work vary between classes and, as a result, standards are not as high as they could be.
70. Pupils with special educational needs make sound progress for their abilities. They are well supported in the classroom and acquire generally improving standards of literacy as they move through the school.
71. The quality of teaching in English is always at least satisfactory and frequently good. It is occasionally very good. As a result, pupils display good attitudes towards the subject, generally seek to do their best, and make sound progress. Teachers have got to grips with the demands of the National Literacy Strategy, though there is sometimes too little flexibility in meeting the needs of particular classes and pupils. Nonetheless, most teachers use the system appropriately and maintain pupils' interest in the topics covered. Most pupils are attentive in the preliminary oral part of a literacy session and co-operate well with the teacher. They usually settle well to the tasks that are set for them and try hard to finish their work. Where teaching is particularly effective, very good relationships are fully exploited to encourage pupils to think carefully and produce their best work. Teachers use their good skills in telling stories to capture pupils' attention and imagination. They use a range of different teaching approaches to match the learning requirements of pupils. For example, pupils are encouraged to work well with each other, sharing ideas and offering support. Where teaching is less effective, there is sometimes a lack of urgency to complete tasks of a sufficiently demanding character. Very successful elements of drama, language development and use of imaginative resources enriched the very good teaching observed. In addition, pupils' thinking skills and powers of interpreting were well exercised.
72. The subject manager provides good leadership and has been successful in implementing the many recent changes in the subject. Some assessment of pupils' progress is carried out satisfactorily. However, there is generally insufficient rigour in the measurement of pupils' progress in reading. At present, there is too little focus on identifying individual needs, analysing current achievement and planning for general improvement.

Mathematics

73. Standards of attainment at the end of the key stage are below national expectations. In the 1999 National Curriculum assessments and tests for seven-year-olds, pupils' results were well below average both in comparison with all schools and similar schools. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected Level 2, however, was close to the national average, and comparisons with other schools were depressed because very few pupils reached the higher Level 3. The year group contained a larger proportion of pupils with special educational needs than is usual for the school.
74. In the previous inspection in 1996, standards were judged to be average, and higher than they are now. Over the past two years, there has been a gradual decline in attainment in mathematics, and this is directly related to a fall in pupils' attainment on entry. Inspection evidence shows that attainment in the current Year 2 is still below average, but is higher than that shown by last years' results.
75. A significant minority of pupils starts school with below average skills in numeracy and, though their skills in counting, ordering and understanding numbers develop well, nevertheless, standards in numeracy by the end of the key stage are below average.
76. In the reception class, pupils count to ten, but lower attainers lack confidence in their counting. Higher attainers are able to make patterns of six with coloured beads, but most pupils find the task of patterning with three too difficult. In Year 1, the majority of pupils can count forwards and backwards to 20 and are developing satisfactory skills in addition by counting on. They can perform simple addition and subtraction sums to 10 in their written work, but are unsure when working mentally. In Year 2, pupils count in twos and fives to thirty. They use this knowledge successfully to work out the answer to three fives, and match their answer to fifteen. Higher attainers can work out practically what are seven lots of four. There was little evidence of pupils working with higher numbers to 100 or ordering two digit numbers, and pupils are not quick enough at mental recall of number facts. Pupils are developing appropriate skills in collecting information, for example about colour of hair and shoes, and they can display data in block graphs or pie charts, using the computer. Pupils know and can recognise a range of plane shapes, but are less confident with three-dimensional shapes. Pupils in Year 2 can estimate a metre accurately. Pupils could say roughly how long one centimetre was and many are able to draw accurate lines to given measures less than 10 centimetres. Numeracy is used satisfactorily in other areas of the curriculum, for instance to count dinner numbers and absences each morning and also when performing practical activities using sets in science and graphs in geography.
77. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Lessons are well organised and teachers have considerable strengths in managing pupils' behaviour, which ensure quiet, calm, orderly classes where pupils can learn. The school's numeracy strategy is in its first year of implementation and underpins all lessons in Year 1, whilst teachers in Year 2 are beginning to use some of the materials. Lesson planning is based on national guidance, which supports teachers' knowledge of the subject well. Teachers pose questions carefully and this enables pupils to learn a variety of mental strategies for calculating. Teachers' good skills in setting appropriate activities, which are well suited to the needs of different pupils, ensure proper progression in their learning. However, the pace at the start of lessons, where pupils are practising their mental skills, is often too slow and this hinders the development of pupils' quick mental recall. From the scrutiny of previous work, there was evidence of an over-reliance on photocopiable worksheets. During the inspection, however, lessons were more imaginative and gave pupils opportunities to devise their own calculations. For instance, in Year 2, pupils used large sheets of paper to plot increasing groups of three and four, and this enabled them to make good progress. Teachers have a sound knowledge of where their pupils are and what they need to learn next. Although this information is recorded in pupils' records of achievement, teachers do not set targets for improvement for individuals or groups of pupils and, consequently, higher attainers are not always sufficiently stretched.
78. Pupils work well and show good levels of concentration in almost all lessons. They respond enthusiastically to questions about their work. In their group activities they share equipment,

work together well when required and are often well motivated. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, have very positive attitudes to learning in mathematics and enjoy their lessons.

79. Teachers plan together in their year groups each week and this provides effective support for all the staff. The co-ordinator gives good support to the staff in organising training and resources, but there is no system for monitoring standards across the school or setting targets for individual pupils. This is a weakness in the schools' efforts to raise standards. The co-ordinator monitors planning and visits classes informally, but no time has been allocated for monitoring the quality of teaching and this limits the co-ordinators' role.

Science

80. The 1999 end of Key Stage 1 teacher assessments showed pupils' attainment to be close to the national average, and average when compared with schools in similar social circumstances. Over the past four years, the school has sustained the proportion of pupils reaching the expected Level 2 of attainment, despite the fact that attainment on entry to the school has declined markedly. Good teaching and a well-structured curriculum have enabled most pupils to reach the expected standard, though the proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 3 has fallen. Attainment overall is lower than at the last inspection because there are fewer high attainers.
81. Attainment in the current Year 2 is close to national expectations. In their work about sounds, most pupils understand that sound is made when something vibrates, and they observe closely and listen carefully during a series of experiments with various musical instruments. Most of the pupils can explain their ideas using an appropriate range of scientific vocabulary, though a few lower attainers find this difficult. All of the pupils can classify instruments according to the method by which the sound is made. A few higher-attaining pupils can explain how the ear collects sounds and that the brain interprets them. Most pupils select an appropriate way to record their classification of instruments, in a table, chart or Venn diagram, though the quality of much of this recording is below that expected for Year 2. These pupils' past work shows that they can, for example, make simple electrical circuits and correct faults, and their diagrams are clear. They know about the relationship between earth, sun and moon, and can explain day and night though, once again, diagrams are of variable quality. They know that light travels from a range of sources and that shadows are created when the light is blocked. The great majority of these pupils are on track to reach the expected standard by the end of the key stage.
82. Pupils start Key Stage 1 with a knowledge and understanding of the world that is, overall, below average. Pupils' work shows that they are making good progress across the key stage. They gather a good range of knowledge and understanding. The growing emphasis on experimental and investigative work is enabling pupils to develop their curiosity and skills, but the school has recognised that pupils' recording is relatively weak and needs to improve. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, because they find the work interesting and they are well supported by teachers, classroom assistants and other pupils. Higher-attainers are generally given the same work as other pupils and are not always challenged sufficiently.
83. The quality of teaching is good overall, and has a number of strengths that support pupils' learning. As a result, pupils are interested in science, offer ideas readily, and particularly enjoy practical activities. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject, which is reflected in their astute questioning of pupils and their clear explanation of concepts. This helps pupils to understand new ideas and to learn new scientific vocabulary. For example, in a lesson for reception pupils, who had only recently started school, the teacher's description of a blackbird that would feed out of a person's hand fascinated the pupils. They sustained their interest and involvement well as they helped to prepare food to feed birds visiting the school wildlife area just outside their classroom. In most lessons, pupils listen carefully to the teachers' explanations, and to the views of other pupils. Teachers also encourage pupils to explain their thinking, which helps to clarify their understanding. When carrying out experiments, teachers encourage pupils to observe carefully. For example, in a Year 2 lesson, the teacher asked the pupils to listen to a note made by a triangle until the sound had died completely. This led to a fascinating discussion about

loud and soft sounds, which the teacher used to introduce the idea of varying sound waves. Teachers use a good range of resources, which capture and hold pupils' interest. The best teaching moves at a brisk pace but, in one lesson seen, the whole class session lasted too long and pupils' interest waned as the initial momentum was lost. Where teachers planned in more detail for the pacing and organisation of the lesson, the pupils learning was enhanced.

84. The school organises the science curriculum well through a comprehensive Key Stage Plan. Teams of teachers in each year group plan topics and lessons in detail, and this sharing of ideas and expertise is a great strength. Year 2 pupils used IT to display the results of their work about their own bodies, for example graphs of hair colour, but IT is not used enough to support and enrich scientific work. Teachers assess pupils' attainment informally and record progress in a profile document. Whilst this system is satisfactory for assessing pupils' growing knowledge, it lacks a focus on pupils' developing skills in the experimental and investigative aspects of science, which would help teachers to target areas for development. Co-ordination of the subject across the school is satisfactory. At present, though planning is evaluated both by the co-ordinator and by teaching teams, there has been little monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning to share strengths and identify weaknesses. Plans to raise standards are not based firmly enough on such information. Given more careful evaluation, the school is well placed to raise standards.

Art

85. Pupils of all abilities make good progress in art and achieve standards that are above those expected for their ages. This represents a generally improving situation in standards since the previous inspection.
86. Pupils in all classes have a rich diet of artistic opportunities. They are experienced in working with a good range of differing media to produce an uncommonly wide variety of pieces of work. From an early stage, they make productive use of personal sketch books in which to record a steady progression of skill development. Close and careful observations are properly translated into drawings, using pencil, charcoal and other media. They are able to use viewfinders appropriately, for example focusing on the various textures of a range of mainly natural objects. They are then able to transfer these observations to a broad spectrum of good individual representations.
87. Painting and printing techniques are similarly well developed and used effectively to create a range of pictures and patterns. Many pieces of large collage work, using a mixture of materials and approaches, demonstrate pupils' growing achievements. An unusual amount of successful work has been undertaken which has been inspired by the work of established artists. Pupils have produced a range of interesting pictures following the creations of such artists as Matisse, Van Gogh, L.S. Lowry and Rennie Mackintosh. They also use clay, as well as paper materials, to construct pieces in three dimensions. Following the ideas of Mondrian, an impressive display of towers and spheres has been produced which makes very good use of primary colours contrasted with black and white.
88. The quality of teaching in art is generally good with several noticeable strengths. Teachers clearly have high expectations of pupils' performance. They have a good knowledge of art teaching, and the requirements of the subject have been well understood in schemes of work and medium-term planning. Teachers have a good understanding of the specific skills needed by pupils and, as a result, pupils make measurable improvement in their standards. Sometimes useful board demonstration is given, which helps pupils to grasp ideas and discover the power of control they have over their own designs. Classes are always well managed and this leads to ready co-operation from pupils who make efforts to complete the tasks in the allotted time. Teachers show an enthusiasm for the subject, which encourages all pupils to have confidence in their own artistic abilities.
89. Pupils generally enjoy art. They always work hard, concentrate on the task in hand and try to succeed. They work well together in groups and are willing to share materials and artefacts. They are ready to discuss their work with others and sometimes offer critical evaluation.

Design and technology

90. Due to timetable arrangements during the inspection, there were no lessons to observe in design and technology. However, evidence of pupils' past work shows that they make sound progress and reach standards close to those expected for their ages. Standards have been maintained since the last inspection.
91. There is a broad curriculum planned in design and technology that maximises all opportunities connected with topic work across the school. Activities ensure that pupils have appropriate experience of designing their own products and working in a variety of materials. Pupils learn how to make structures strong, for example using rolled paper, and to use a range of techniques for joining and fixing. They use card to make rocking toys and greeting cards with a moving mechanism. Photographs of past work show that pupils have designed their own party hat for the Christmas party and then compiled a list of materials for making it. On another occasion, they designed and made their own slippers to size from a variety of fabric and paper.
92. Although no teaching was observed, evidence from planning indicates that the quality of teaching is sound. Teachers plan for the term from a helpful scheme of work and they follow this up with a weekly meeting to plan ahead for the following week.

Geography

93. Standards in geography are above those that would be expected for pupils' ages. In the previous inspection, no judgement was made on pupils' attainment, owing to a lack of opportunity to observe lessons.
94. Pupils make good progress in developing a range of skills, and in extending their understanding of their own and contrasting localities. Pupils in Year 2 can draw a route to St Mary's Church, and they can draw a plan of their route to school and plot it on a map of Thatcham. They use grid references correctly to plot a boat, fish and insects on a pond. From their study of hot and cold places, pupils successfully draw comparisons between contrasting localities and Thatcham. They understand the need for different clothing in different climates, and notice and comment upon the different building materials for homes. They make good comparisons between a rain forest with their own locality. The directional compass marked on the playground is used effectively to reinforce their understanding of North, South, East and West, and the majority of pupils are quite confident in this knowledge. Pupils use geographical terms accurately when they describe the position of countries such as Ghana. For example, they use phrases such as 'to the West' and 'near the ocean'. They recognise Africa by its shape and can point to it on a globe or world map, and similarly they can locate Britain. Pupils, including those with special needs, make good progress across the key stage in acquiring skills and knowledge in geography. Computers are used effectively to build a town on the screen when contrasting village life in another locality with their own.
95. The overall quality of teaching is good. Lessons begin sensibly by referring to previous work and reinforcing skills already learned. Teachers use open-ended questions successfully, for example to lead discussion about Africa and its climate, and this extends pupils' knowledge and skills well. Lessons generally have a good pace that maintains pupils' interest in their work. In a very good lesson observed, the teacher took on the role of a lady from one of the villages in Ghana and discussed her way of life with the pupils. This interesting style had a positive impact on pupils and consequently they were keen to ask questions about family life and local transport. Teachers' planning is sometimes too brief but, at its best, it takes account of developing pupils' skills, ideas and knowledge, and this has a positive impact on pupils' learning.
96. Pupils are keen and eager to learn in geography. They listen intently to their teachers and show sustained interest in the topic being studied. They ask questions confidently about pictures and artefacts and show respect for different ways of life. Pupils' behaviour is very good.

97. There is a comprehensive scheme of work that takes good account of the requirements of the National Curriculum and effectively supports teachers' work in the subject across the school. There is a good range of resources that are carefully documented and provide good starting points for teachers and pupils in their lessons. The co-ordinator is very enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the subject and provides effective leadership.

History

98. Pupils of all abilities make satisfactory progress throughout the key stage and most reach standards that match those expected for their ages. This is a similar finding to the last inspection report.
99. The youngest pupils are aware of the patterns of daily life and that things can occur regularly over a period of time. In Years 1 and 2, pupils have looked at growth and development in families and are able to sequence a series of pictures from babyhood to old age correctly. They are beginning to understand something of the passage of time and that it is marked in families by such occurrences as birthdays. They have learned that we know something of the times before they were born and that certain events can be recorded on a time line. They have recorded the approximate periods of both parents and grandparent's births and have some understanding of the concept of a generation.
100. Pupils have also been introduced to figures from more distant periods, such as Mary Seacole and Guy Fawkes. They know something of the lives of the Victorians, and have been able to make appropriate comparisons between a schoolroom of that time and their own experience of a modern one. They have identified certain similarities, such as the use of rulers and the playing of a piano. Pupils have looked carefully at Victorian baby carriages and constructed suitable models of their own. Research skills are developing steadily as pupils seek to discover evidence of the past through conducting interviews with older people. Relevant questionnaires have been constructed and appropriately used to evaluate some of the different experiences in people's childhoods.
101. The overall quality and impact of teaching is satisfactory. In the one lesson observed it was good. In this lesson, good questioning was employed to extend thinking and encourage the development of ideas. Good use was made of mime to engage pupils' interest and assist the recall of events. As a result, the pupils showed a lively interest in what they were doing and gave good attention to the teacher. They participated in the mime activity very well to the fascination of other pupils.
102. Scrutiny of teachers' planning shows that the subject is not at present sufficiently well represented in the wider curriculum. The lack of clarity in learning objectives identified in the previous inspection report remains.

Information technology (IT)

103. Standards are below national expectations at the end of the key stage. Many pupils in Year 2 do not know how to switch the computer on, how to print or save their work, or the function of simple keys, such as 'return' and 'shift' on the keyboard. Their 'mouse' control is rather better because many of the programs they have used rely on this skill rather than the keyboard. For example, pupils using a simple simulation program 'Make a town' were able to select, drag and position a range of symbols to create a street. Higher attainers can load programs from the main menu but, if difficulties arise, they are not able to overcome them. Pupils have used a simple graphics program to make an illustration for a calendar, and examples of this work are of sound quality. Pupils have also used a program to display graphs of data gathered as part of their science work on 'Ourselves', showing information about attributes such as hair colour and shoe size. Few pupils can recall having used the computer for writing and, when asked to use a simple program to write their names, their skills are very weak. For example, if a mistake is made, they delete the whole of their work as far as the error rather than using the arrow keys or the mouse to move the cursor to make the deletion. They use the 'caps lock' key to obtain a capital letter at the

beginning of their name, rather than the 'shift' key. Pupils' basic skills are weaker than at the time of the last inspection, and there is still limited use of word processing.

104. Pupils have too little experience in the subject to make satisfactory progress in their learning, and aspects such as word processing and control have hardly been covered at all. There was very little evidence in the scrutiny of work to show effective use of computers, or other aspects of IT. Very little use is made of IT to support work in other subjects. Aspects of IT are covered at certain times during the year, and these are usefully linked to topics. There is, however, no systematic approach to developing pupils' skills as they move through the school.
105. Very little teaching was observed during the inspection. In reception, very good teaching introduced pupils to a variety of tape recorders, and they quickly developed their understanding of the controls. The teacher's very effective explanation and questioning, combined with good use of a range of resources, held the pupils' interest and enabled them to learn quickly. In Year 2, a whole class was taught how to use the 'Make a town' program and, though the teacher's instructions were clear, the fact that the whole class was gathered around one small screen restricted their attention and progress. The overall quality of teaching across the school is unsatisfactory, because planning does not give pupils sufficient time to spend on IT, nor does it provide a balanced programme of work to cover the National Curriculum. Where pupils were observed using IT, they were enthusiastic, worked well together and used their initiative to try to overcome any problems they met.
106. The policy and key stage plan provide a sound framework for planning the curriculum but are not implemented fully. For example, the key stage plan makes clear the necessity to reinforce regularly basic skills such as saving a piece of work, yet few pupils in Year 2 have this skill. Resources are adequate but, during the inspection, not enough use was made of computers. This is in direct contrast to the last inspection when computers were in use for the majority of the day. The school recognises the challenge of integrating IT activities within the new pattern of literacy and numeracy lessons. Co-ordination of the subject across the school is unsatisfactory, though the co-ordinator is knowledgeable and provides good advice for colleagues. An action plan sets out developments such as access to the Internet and purchasing new hardware, but there is not enough emphasis on improving pupils' attainment. There has been little monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning to identify areas for improvement.

Music

107. Standards of attainment in music match expectations for pupils of this age. In the previous inspection, standards in music were found to be similar to those in most other schools.
108. Pupils in the reception class are aware of the sounds that they can make with their bodies and use these to accompany singing and marching. In Year 1, pupils recognise loud and quiet sounds. They devise their own symbols for conducting small groups of pupils in their playing of untuned percussion instruments. This activity is reinforced in a whole year group singing lesson with teachers using symbols for loud and quiet. Pupils understand the need for a conductor to co-ordinate the singing. Pupils successfully respond to the signs and display good control over their voices and dynamics when singing. Pupils in Year 2 build well on previous knowledge by creating their own rhythm for knee slapping, imitate a rhythm and successfully maintain the pulse. Pupils show good understanding when they perform more complex rhythms. They internalise the rhythm as they play as a whole class. Pupils recognise how different instruments can create different effects. They read a set of musical symbols and correctly clap together, building well on earlier skills. Throughout the school, the standard of singing is sound.
109. The overall quality of teaching in music is satisfactory. Lessons often start with a lively approach to a singing rhyme, or 'follow my leader', and this provides good interest for pupils. Teachers have very good management skills and this enables pupils to listen and watch with minimum interruption. Consequently this enhances their learning. Lessons move along at a good pace and this helps to motivate pupils. In the main, planning is satisfactory, and teachers select activities

that are appropriate for pupils' stage of development. All aspects of the curriculum are planned for over the key stage.

110. Pupils listen carefully. This was particularly noticeable when one class appraised an excerpt of African drum music. Pupils watch their teachers carefully in singing lessons and enjoy the singing of simple rounds. They are enthusiastic about class music particularly when playing instruments. They are keen to devise their own symbols and eager to discuss their ideas. They respond well when asked to work as a group.
111. There is a good scheme of work for the subject, which offers effective guidance for teachers. It also suggests a wide range of activities that can be used, and indicates appropriate resources. This helps teachers who are less confident with the subject and ensures proper progression through the key stage. The school takes part in singing concerts with other schools that enhance musical opportunities for all pupils.

Physical Education

112. Pupils' attainment is close to that expected for their ages, with some higher attainment in gymnastics. In games, most Year 1 pupils can send and receive a large ball, in a variety of ways, with reasonable accuracy. All the pupils work well with a partner, practising and improving their skills. There are few lower attainers. In gymnastics, most Year 2 pupils can balance on a range of body parts, holding the shape for a count of five. A few pupils show high attainment, extending their bodies, making challenging shapes, and holding balances very still. All the pupils develop their work on large apparatus, planning their route and the places they will choose to balance. In dance, Year 2 pupils respond expressively to the tempo and rhythm of the music. Attainment is similar to that found at the last inspection, and the school has sustained the strengths mentioned in the last report.
113. The quality of teaching is sound overall, with a number of strengths. Teachers organise lessons very well, including a warm up, the development of skills, and a variety of suitable activities. This enables pupils to improve their skills systematically. Teachers dress appropriately for physical activity and provide useful demonstrations that help pupils to understand what is required. They give clear instructions, expect pupils to respond promptly, and are vigilant in matters of safety. The better teaching encourages pupils to work at pace. Tasks are challenging, pupils put a lot of effort in to their work, and they are kept active for most of the time. In a few lessons, however, the organisation of equipment takes too long, or too much time is used in giving instructions, so that pupils do not have enough opportunities to perform, practise and improve their skills. The better teaching draws on examples of pupils' performance to stimulate others, but this approach was not used enough in the lessons seen. All teachers have sound expertise in the subject. Pupils clearly enjoy their physical education lessons. They channel their enthusiasm well, work sensibly, and try hard to improve their performances. They work particularly well in pairs, helping each other to improve their skills.
114. The school provides a varied physical education curriculum, covering a broad and balanced range of activities, and including swimming for the oldest pupils. There are no extra-curricular sporting activities, which would enrich the curriculum still further. Co-ordination of the subject across the school is sound and there are now plans to monitor the quality of lessons. The key stage plan sets out a clear programme of activities for each year group, and shared planning provides consistency.

Religious Education

115. Pupils of all abilities make sound progress through the school and, at the end of the key stage, attainment is broadly in line with the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus. Attainment is broadly the same as at the last inspection.

116. Pupils in Year 1 are beginning to appreciate the importance of applying, within the family and school circle, such virtues as care and consideration for others. They understand the main messages of a story such as 'The Good Samaritan', though many do not realise that it comes from the Bible. They are familiar with other stories from both the Old and the New Testaments, for example 'Moses in the bulrushes' and 'The feeding of the five thousand'. Year 2 pupils extend their knowledge and are developing a sense of belonging to a wider world family. They are encouraged to appreciate their own uniqueness. They know something of the importance of living by moral rules in a society, and the religious beliefs that help shape this idea. Pupils are developing an awareness of some of the internal features of a Christian church. They know something of the ceremony of baptism and the sacraments used. Their knowledge of the Bible is broadened and includes study of the Creation and the principal events connected with Easter.
117. The quality of the teaching is satisfactory overall, and was sometimes good in the lessons observed. Planning has several strong features. There are strengths in the breadth of the topics presented and the systematic way in which they are covered. Teachers have improved their own skills in addressing the subject quite well, though there are still some examples of insecurities in subject knowledge. Lessons are frequently well linked to planned assemblies. Teachers are able to take good advantage of properly prepared opportunities that capture pupils' interest, as for example in the very good dramatisation of 'The Good Samaritan'. In lessons, teachers tell pupils clearly what it is that is to be achieved. Pupils are given appropriate time to review their learning and put forward their own ideas and findings.
118. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are usually good. The good relationships which have been built up between pupils and adults greatly assist in supporting the main messages of the religious education programme. Pupils pay proper attention and answer questions politely. They show genuine interest in the stories they hear and make efforts to contribute to discussion. The subject makes a sound contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and social development.
119. The subject is well managed by the co-ordinator. She has a good grasp of the present syllabus requirements, which results in effective organisation of the subject. Staff are well supported and teachers' confidence has clearly increased. The reflective aspects of the subject are now more securely in place and the subject is well placed to develop further.