

INSPECTION REPORT

UFFCULME SCHOOL

Moseley

Birmingham

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103605

Headteacher: Alexander MacDonald

Reporting inspector: April Dakin
25441

Dates of inspection: 5th – 9th March 2001

Inspection number: 193948

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community Special
Age range of pupils:	3-11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Queensbridge Road Moseley Birmingham
Postcode:	B13 8QB
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Denise Thomas
Date of previous inspection:	June 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities		Aspect responsibilities
25441	April Dakin	<i>Registered inspector</i>	Humanities; Music; Additional special educational needs.	What sort of school is it? How high are standards? The school's results and achievements? How well are pupils taught? How well the school is led and managed?
9052	Helen Barter	<i>Lay inspector</i>		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development. How well the school cares for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents? Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development Finance and Best value.
23972	Margaret Filley	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Design and technology.	
21140	Geoff Kitchen	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics; Physical education; Equality of opportunity.	How good are the curricular and other activities offered to pupils?
16038	Jill Bavin	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Foundation stage; Art.	Assessment and monitoring and evaluation of academic progress.
21860	Terry Dolan	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Science; Information and communication technology; Religious education; English as an additional language.	Staffing, accommodation and resources

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Uffculme School is a special school for 115 pupils' aged between three and 11. The school's population is rising. Most of the children have difficulties associated with autistic spectrum disorder. All pupils have difficulties associated with speech, language, and communication. There is a wide range of needs within the school. Pupils are mainly grouped by age and ability. Twenty-eight pupils are non-verbal and a further 11 pupils have additional complex communication and behavioural difficulties. Seventeen of these pupils are grouped in two special classes that follow an adapted and mainly sensory curriculum, one class at each key stage. Every pupil in the school is the subject of a Statement of Special Educational Need. The ratio of boys to girls is about four to one. The school has a wide socio-economic mix with around a third of the pupils receiving free school meals. There are 33 pupils from different ethnic minority backgrounds and 17 have English as an additional language.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective and improving school. The very good leadership and management of the headteacher and senior managers have ensured that the teaching and learning at the school is very good. This has resulted in high levels of achievement for the vast majority of pupils in English and mathematics and good standards in science. The school provides very good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- The headteacher and senior management team provide a very firm steer to the work of the school.
- Very good teaching in the nursery ensures children make an exceptional start to their education.
- Very good teaching ensures the vast majority of pupils' make very good progress in communication, literacy and mathematics, and good progress in science throughout the school.
- It also ensures all pupils make very good progress in art and physical education.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- The teaching and learning of about 3 per cent of the school population who have complex behavioural and communication needs.
- Teachers' expectations of how pupils present their work, and in particular, pupils' handwriting skills.
- The teaching and learning of almost all pupils in music and religious education.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

When it was last inspected in 1998, Her Majesty’s Inspectors found the school to be much improved and judged it to be a good school. It has made very good improvements since the last inspection. The school has built effectively on its previous communication work in order to develop strategies for the management of pupils with complex communication and associated behavioural difficulties. The majority of these pupils’ needs are now well met. However, there remain a few pupils who are not consistently managed and do not make the same progress as others (3 per cent of whole school population) The school has continued to develop the curriculum for these pupils with complex needs and has made some very good improvements, particularly in English and mathematics. It has developed a sensory and small steps approach to learning. However, these pupils, and a number of others who are lower attaining, do not always have the same opportunities as others to learn about and from religion. There are no opportunities for the lowest attaining pupils to develop communication through music therapy. The school is doing all it can to resolve the extreme safety risks concerning the school’s transport vehicles at the front of the school. As a result of vastly improved teaching and planning, all pupils’ achievements in English, mathematics, science, art and humanities and personal and social development have improved. The school has maintained its high standards in physical education.

STANDARDS

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

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

** IEPs means Individual Education Plans*

All children have very good achievements and now make very good progress overall in the Foundation Stage. The school sets challenging targets for its higher attaining pupils. In statutory tests these pupils often attain standards similar to or above mainstream pupils of the same age in English, mathematics and science. The vast majority of pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language, make very good progress in communication and literacy and in mathematics. Most pupils with more complex needs make good progress in these subjects. All pupils make good progress in science in relation to their prior attainment. Individual educational plans have clearly defined targets for the vast majority of pupils and they make very good progress towards achieving them. However, the communication targets and behaviour targets for pupils with more complex needs in individual educational plans are not always attained within the time set.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Almost all pupils have very good attitudes to their learning and enjoy coming to school. They are interested and enthusiastic about the activities given to them. A very small number of pupils with more complex needs sometimes find it difficult to settle to work and to concentrate in lessons.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good overall. Pupils behave very well in the classrooms and around the school. There were no instances of bullying seen. However, a few pupils with more complex needs at both key stages exhibited challenging behaviour when their communication needs were not met.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils' personal development is good. They are developing an understanding of responsibility and initiative. Relationships with each other and with staff are very good and a strength of the school
Attendance	Most pupils attend school regularly. There is no unauthorised absence.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged up to 5	Aged 5-11
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Very good

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

The quality of teaching is very good overall. It is good or better in 80 per cent of lessons and very good in 38 per cent. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. It is very good overall for pupils' aged between three and five. It is also very good overall in English, mathematics, physical education and art. Personal and social education is taught effectively during well-established routines. The teaching of science is consistently good for all pupils, whatever their prior attainment. The planning to meet individual needs is particularly strong in mixed ability classes. Almost all lessons have a communication and literacy focus. This helps pupils to make progress towards the targets set within their individual educational plans. This has a positive effect on learning and behaviour and attitudes to work. Teachers use a range of additional methods, including signing, pictures, photographs and symbols and whole-word sentence building, to help pupils to develop communication and literacy skills. Good demonstrations and short instructions help pupils to learn new skills in practical subjects. Where teaching is otherwise satisfactory, there is inconsistency in the management of pupils with more complex communication and behavioural needs. Not all teachers have the same subject knowledge or confidence to teach music and religious education. Consequently some pupils have better opportunities to learn about these subjects than others.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school offers a broad and relevant range of good quality learning opportunities. The literacy and numeracy strategies are very well implemented. Planning for information communication technology is satisfactory overall. However, there is more emphasis on communication than the control and modelling aspect of the subject. A better partnership with other educational institutions would further improve the learning opportunities provided.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Teachers take good care to ensure pupils who speak English in addition to their home language make the same progress as their peers. Bilingual support is very effective. It is available in the classroom to provide explanations of difficult concepts in the child's mother tongue and to help with writing.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall. Planning for moral and social development is strong. Pupils are helped to understand the difference between right and wrong and staff provide very good role models. There are good opportunities for pupils' spiritual and cultural development in many lessons and through visits outside the school. However, music and religious education could contribute more to these aspects of pupils' education.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The pastoral care is very good overall. There are good procedures for promoting and monitoring the majority of pupils' behaviour and attendance. Thorough assessment procedures are used to identify pupils' individual needs and to monitor their progress. However, the management of a small number of pupils with complex needs is not well enough thought out or consistently managed.

The school works effectively with parents. Information for parents is good overall. The quality of newsletters and annual and term-by-term review information about priority needs is very good. However, the school could further improve the quality of end of year reports, home school agreements and the governors' report to parents. The school liaises well with parents who speak English as an additional language, calling in interpreters, if required.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership and management of the headteacher and senior management team are very good. This has led to better teaching and learning in the subjects of English, mathematics, and science and for pupils with additional needs. The school is now in a position to strengthen the role of other subject managers.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Good. The governing body is effective in fulfilling its responsibilities. It has a good grasp of the strengths of the school and of areas planned for development.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school evaluates its performance carefully. Assessments and individual educational plans are ensuring the school knows how well it is doing and the value it gives.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Staff are deployed effectively in lessons and are well informed. The good resources are mostly used skilfully in lessons. However, the resources for religious education and information technology, and the instrumental resources for music, could be used better to further raise standards in these subjects.

The school seeks the best price for goods and services, and evaluates satisfactorily the cost effectiveness of its spending decisions. It seeks the views of the school community before investing in any developments. Good use is made of specific grants to improve its pupils' attainment.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's leadership and management. • The ease with which they can approach the school with concerns. • The quality of teaching. • Their children like coming to school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework. • The range of activities provided outside of lessons.

The team agrees strongly with pupils positive views of the school. It also agrees that the school could be more proactive in giving homework and explaining to parents the nature of homework at the school. The team feels the range of extra-curricular activities is good when visits, residential opportunities and the summer play scheme are taken into account.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. All children have very good achievements and now make very good progress overall in the Foundation Stage. This reflects the very good teaching these children now receive. Children aged between three and five make very good progress in language and literacy, mathematical development, knowledge and understanding of the world, and personal, social and emotional development and physical development. They make good progress in creative development. This is a very good improvement since the last inspection when pupils' achievements by the time they were five were sound. Parents of four-year-old children, at the meeting held for the inspection, reported an immediate improvement in communication and behaviour in the short time they had been in the school. This view was supported by the school's analysis of assessments to show the value added by the Foundation Stage.

2. All pupils' achievements are improving in English and mathematics and science by the ages of seven and eleven. Higher attaining and lower attaining pupils make very good progress in English and mathematics in mixed ability classes. This is a good improvement since the last inspection when pupils' achievements were judged to be good overall. Those pupils who speak English as an additional language do equally well. This is because of the informed support they receive from a bilingual support assistant, who is deployed throughout the school. There is no significant difference between the achievements of boys and girls in any subject. Pupils with more complex needs are making good progress in English, mathematics and personal and social education overall. A small number of pupils with the most complex communication and behavioural difficulties could make better progress if their needs were more consistently met.

3. Exemplary assessment is now used to help teachers to plan work to meet individual priority needs. There was intensive training in the run up to the implementation of adapted literacy and numeracy frameworks. Rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning by the literacy and numeracy coordinators and the communication manager followed this. All these factors have significantly improved standards in English and mathematics for the vast majority of pupils. Higher attaining pupils, by the time they are seven and 11, are reaching levels in line with or above those expected of their mainstream peers in speaking and listening, reading, most aspects of writing and mathematics. However, their handwriting and presentation skills vary considerably. A few pupils write in a fluent joined script, but others still print by the age of 11.

4. Higher attaining pupils read fluently for their age and often with expression. They write for a variety of purposes and present work in a structured format. The highest attaining pupils by the age of 11 use a wide range of imaginative words in their writing, in poetry, for example. They have a very good range of methods to solve mathematical problems. They apply them to everyday situations involving money, time and measurement, and to other areas of learning.

5. The school has worked hard to improve the standards of achievement in English and mathematics for the lowest attaining pupils, and has been for the most part successful. Thorough testing and analysis of results have helped the school establish which communication methods work best for individual pupils. Most of the youngest and the lower attaining older pupils now use symbols to help them to communicate. The school has also developed an innovative 'whole word and symbol' sentence-building programme, that is related to the each pupil's level of communication. This is used in English lessons and in other subjects and has improved standards in literacy. Teaching and learning in mathematics for the lowest attaining pupils are also assessment led. Teachers and the communication manager identify the words to be taught in mathematics and are skilful in ensuring that they are used consistently, both in mathematics lessons and in other subjects. Practical approaches are used effectively for lower attaining pupils. By the age of 11, lower attaining pupils have made good gains in their understanding of the measurement of time and money in relation to their prior attainment, and have developed their understanding and use of number.

6. A basic vocabulary of symbols has been developed for those pupils with the most complex communication and behavioural needs. It includes symbols such as 'wait', 'stop', 'sit down', 'work' and 'finished'. The school's policy is to use these symbols alongside well-established routines. These involve pupils working on their individual programmes of work at individual workstations with varying degrees of support. However, there remains a small number of pupils at both key stages that are not responding to these methods. Routines do not always follow a similar pattern each day and symbols are not used consistently enough by all members of staff. The school has not yet analysed the behaviour of these pupils well enough to understand why they are not fully cooperating. Consequently, these pupils are not always involved or learning, and make less progress than others, particularly in English and mathematics. Their behaviour occasionally impacts on the learning of others.

7. The vast majority of pupils achieve good standards in science. This is an improvement since the last inspection, when achievements were satisfactory. Higher attaining pupils aged seven and 11 achieve standards in line with or above those of their mainstream peers. There is, however, a variation in the teaching and progress of pupils as they move through the school. The best progress is made up to the age of seven and then again at the end of their time in school. These differences are directly related to the quality of teaching and use of assessment in the subject. The school has already identified the differences in planning by individual teachers for pupils at different ages through its desktop monitoring of planning. It already has plans to monitor the teaching of science rigorously in the coming months, when science becomes a priority on the school development plan.

8. All pupils, whatever their age and prior attainment, make very good progress in art and physical education throughout the school. Progress in art has improved since the last inspection when it was found to be satisfactory. The high achievements in physical education have been maintained since the last inspection. These high achievements and the very good progress made by pupils are directly related to the high quality of teaching pupils receive in these subjects. Many teachers have qualifications in art and find this subject a joy to teach. Good practice is effectively shared with colleagues and the improved scheme of

work helps those with less artistic knowledge and understanding to plan effectively for a range of needs. Consequently, all pupils have very good opportunities to extend their artistic abilities as they move through the school. A specialist, who has a very good knowledge of all areas of physical education, teaches all pupils. This ensures pupils are making very good progress in the subject.

9. Pupils who are higher or lower attaining in mixed ability classes make good progress in humanities. All pupils in mixed ability classes make satisfactory progress overall in music. Progress in this subject is not as good as at the last inspection. This is because specialist teaching is no longer provided and teachers are not confident in the teaching of this subject, or in the interpretation of the good scheme of work. There is not enough evidence to make a judgement about the achievements and progress of pupils with more complex needs in music and humanities.

10. Higher attaining pupils make good and sometimes very good progress in religious education by the time they are 11. However, pupils with complex needs and those in the mixed ability class in Year 1, and the lower attaining pupils in Years 4 and 5, do not have the same opportunities as others to make progress in the subject. This is because of the way it is planned and taught. Work is not always matched to individual needs or to the 'Agreed Syllabus' for these pupils. The school needs to make better use of its good resources for religious education in order to make the learning of these pupils more meaningful.

11. By the age of seven, all pupils make satisfactory progress in design and technology. There is insufficient evidence to make a secure judgement about the progress older pupils are making in the subject. Standards are being maintained at present as it has low priority on the school development plan. The majority of pupils make satisfactory progress in information communication technology. (ICT). The school has already identified that pupils could make better progress. It has carefully budgeted in order to improve resources and teachers' knowledge of the subject. There are good plans in place to further improve standards once technical difficulties in the ICT suite have been addressed. This includes further training and rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure teachers' carry out their medium-term planning.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

12. The overall quality of pupils' attitudes, values and personal development has been strengthened since the last inspection. Pupils have very good attitudes to school and the activities provided for them. They behave very well in the classroom and around the school. There is little evidence of any anti-social behaviour or bullying. Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school, get on well with their teachers and have lots of friends. The quality of relationships between pupils and between pupils and adults is a particular strength of the school. It has a significant impact on the quality of pupils' learning and their personal development.

13. Parents are very happy with the standards of behaviour promoted by the school. Nearly all parents who responded to the questionnaire said that behaviour is good. Individual parents commented that their child's behaviour has improved since coming to the school. Parents are pleased that their children are taught to be polite and respectful. They report that their children are showing a growing awareness of and ability to get on with others. All parents who responded to the questionnaire said that their child likes coming to school.

14. Overall, pupils' attendance at school is good. Most pupils come to school regularly. They are only away from school when they are unwell or attending medical appointments. There is no unauthorised absence because the school is careful to follow up any unexplained absences. Parents are clear about telling the school when their child is unable to attend. Most pupils arrive on time, although this is dependent upon the prompt arrival of buses, some of which travel long distances.

15. Pupils are very interested in all aspects of their work. They take a pride in what they do and they are pleased with their results. With only a few exceptions, they listen carefully when things are being explained, demonstrated or discussed. As a result, pupils work hard and join in the activities provided. Pupils respond particularly well to imaginative and lively teaching. For example, in physical education lessons, they have enormous fun dancing to rock and roll music. They take part with great enthusiasm and are completely engrossed in what they are doing, whether working individually or in pairs and groups. In lessons, most pupils concentrate well. They work for long periods on their writing, art, number work or gymnastics. They are enthusiastic and keen to participate in extra activities such as horse riding and swimming sessions outside school.

16. Pupils' behaviour is very good. Since the last inspection, the school has improved the overall standard of behaviour, despite a changing population of pupils. There has been one exclusion in the past year, relating to a pupil who was awaiting a permanent residential placement. In classes, most pupils do as they are asked with little fuss. Pupils show very good attention and behaviour because the activities provided are well planned and adults working in the classroom give high levels of support. They respond well to the expectations set for them in class and to school rules. Most pupils understand what is acceptable behaviour. They show good respect for the school's resources and treat materials, such as musical instruments, with care. Their behaviour outside the classroom is also of a high standard. They move around and between the school buildings in an orderly fashion and are well behaved when being escorted to buses at the end of the day. In the playground, they get on well with each other and some enjoy playing together on the large slide while understanding that they must take turns. At lunchtimes, pupils are developing good social manners. They queue patiently to collect their food and are well behaved and polite at the table. Older pupils set a good example to younger ones in this respect.

17. Although pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good overall, there are some lapses amongst a small number of lower-attaining pupils who have complex educational and behavioural needs. These less satisfactory examples occur when staff do not use satisfactory methods to manage their behaviour. Pupils become distracted or disturbed when it is not

made clear enough that they are required to move from one activity to another. The inconsistent use of symbols and clear signs means that these pupils are not always sure what they are supposed to be doing and, as a result, their behaviour gets worse. This small group of pupils is very reliant on prompts and support from staff to help them work and to cope with changes of activities during the school day.

18. Overall, pupils are making good progress in their personal development. They are learning to get on with others, to work in groups and pairs. Many pupils work independently with a minimum of supervision. Pupils respond well to opportunities for taking responsibility. In all classes they are responsible for small tasks, such as changing the calendar, tidying books, putting trays away and washing up. Pupils quickly and sensibly take the register to the school office each morning and afternoon. In the dining room, pupils choose and collect their own food and put their cutlery, trays and cups in the right place to be cleared away. Lower attaining pupils are beginning to show initiative when they use communication boards to ask for resources.

19. Pupils relate extremely well to all adults working in the school and to each other. They are learning to listen to each other and to value each other's ideas and beliefs. They take part in discussions and are learning to take turns and to share ideas. Pupils taking part in a rehearsal for 'Snow White and the Eight Dwarfs' listened carefully and waited patiently until it was their turn to speak. They appreciated each other's performances and were understanding of those who were shy. In school assemblies, pupils demonstrate that they appreciate others when they listen carefully and applaud the award of certificates. They are learning to value their own achievements and are pleased to accept their individual and whole-class awards. There is a strongly positive and supportive atmosphere when pupils and adults all join in together to sing and dance during assemblies. Pupils show enjoyment and pride in their school.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

20. The quality of teaching is very good overall. The school's staged programme for professional development, and its rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning, have been very successful in improving teaching. Since the last inspection in 1998 teaching has improved overall, and significantly in English, mathematics, science, humanities and art. The high quality of teaching in physical education has been maintained. It is now good or better in 80 per cent of lessons and very good in 38 per cent. It is satisfactory in the rest. However, the quality of teaching in music and religious education, although satisfactory overall, is not as good as at the last inspection. There have been significant improvements in the quality of teaching for the youngest pupils in the school. There have also been significant improvements in the teaching of pupils with complex needs, mainly due to the work of the communication manager and literacy and numeracy co-ordinators. They have supported the teachers in their planning for these pupils in specialist classes and in mixed-ability classes. However, although the teaching in these classes is now good overall, there are still some weaknesses in the management of those with the most complex needs.

21. Teachers and support staff in most classes know their pupils well. They understand the difficulties pupils with autistic spectrum disorder have in communication, social interaction, imagination and flexibility of thinking. They are very well informed about how language is acquired and about the alternative communication methods that can be used by pupils who have little or no speech. This, and the strong assessment in the school, which teachers use effectively to plan work, ensure pupils are learning to communicate better as they move through the school. In addition, their knowledge of subjects, such as English, mathematics, science, humanities, art and physical education, is at least good and often very good. They use this wealth of knowledge to plan work to meet a wide range of needs. Objectives for lessons are very clear and linked to pupils' individual educational plans. Consequently, the vast majority of pupils are learning the right things in lessons and are involved throughout.

22. In the vast majority of lessons, teachers plan work very effectively to meet pupils' priority need of communication and personal and social development. Consequently, as pupils' communication improves, so does their social and moral development. Teachers are well supported in this by the communication manager. She analyses the detailed assessments of pupils very effectively, both to establish the most useful methods of communication for individual pupils and to provide detailed programmes of work for them. The literacy co-ordinator supports teachers to write individual literacy targets and programmes, which are closely linked with those for communication. The vast majority of teachers skilfully link these programmes to lessons in English and in other subjects. Symbols, pictures and photographs are used to help the youngest and the vast majority of lower attaining pupils to communicate very effectively with the teachers and support staff. Consequently, the vast majority of pupils behave very well and respond quickly to instructions. This particularly helps most pupils to move from one activity to another and to feel safe and secure in the school. However, the management of a few pupils with complex needs is less secure. Although the communication manager has assessed these pupils and has provided communication aids, such as basic symbols on cue cards, these are not always consistently used in lessons. Sometimes when they are used, pupils still do not respond positively. As a result, a few pupils with complex needs do not make the same progress as others as they take longer to settle to work. Further observational assessment is needed to find out why this happens.

23. Technical words to be learnt by individuals and groups of pupils are identified in lesson planning for all subjects. These terms are often skilfully explained and exemplified and reviewed at the beginning of lessons. The best teachers plan questions to meet individual needs. They encourage pupils to use the new language they have learnt. As a result, as they get older, higher attaining pupils begin to reason why things happen, ask their own questions and make generalisations. Average pupils learn to communicate what is happening and lower attaining pupils learn to use or identify objects and materials and some describe them in lessons. The lowest attaining pupils communicate their likes and dislikes, wants and needs using symbols. However, in lessons that are otherwise sound, planning is better than the teaching. Teachers occasionally talk too much in lessons and the planning is not fully carried out. For example, lower attaining pupils in Year 4 listened to stories well in English and in history, but opportunities were missed for them to develop their own questions or to answer open-ended questions. Consequently, these pupils had fewer opportunities to use new key language that was identified in planning.

24. There is an expectation that pupils will record and read about their new understanding in a form that suits their literacy needs. High attaining pupils have good opportunities to write for a range of purposes because of this, although they could be expected to write more in science, for example. Teachers and support staff could give better role models for handwriting and raise their expectations of how well pupils present their work. Work is often untidily presented and many of the highest attaining pupils still print their letters instead of joining them. Average attaining pupils learn to write simple sentences about their work, using a sentence builder system that has whole words provided by the teacher. In the best lessons, lower attaining pupils and those with the most complex needs have their practical work recorded by digital camera so they can review it at a later date. This method could be used more for the lowest attaining pupils. This constant focus on language and literacy has a positive effect on learning in most subjects. This in turn has a positive effect on behaviour and attitudes to work, because pupils' priority needs, including the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language, are being constantly met.

25. The majority of teachers manage pupils effectively through well-established routines, short instructions and praise and encouragement. Teachers have high expectation of how pupils should behave and have very good relationships with them. The best lessons are challenging and enthusiastically taught. The structure of lessons almost always follows the pattern of clear introduction and review of previous work, followed by group work or group discussions, and then a section at the end where teachers assess learning. Support staff are very well informed and make a significant contribution to pupils' learning. Resources in the classroom and in the community are used effectively in many subjects to bring learning alive and to help pupils make sense of their world. However, they could be used more effectively in religious education and music.

26. Teachers demonstrate new learning or skills effectively in art and physical education. They critically review pupils' work to move them on. Many teachers have qualifications in art, and a specialist physical education teacher teaches all pupils. Teachers are very confident and enthusiastic about teaching these subjects, which provide good opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils in turn are enthusiastic artists and physical performers. They are becoming reflective about their work as well as learning good skills and techniques as they move through the school. In contrast, teachers' knowledge of music and religious education is not so secure and many pupils do not have the same opportunities as others to learn about these subjects. This was shown in planning for lessons, where too little emphasis was placed on group performance in music and where work in religious education was not set in a religious context. Learning in these subjects, although satisfactory overall, could be better.

27. Sensory approaches are used well for pupils with more complex needs, in science, design technology and art, for example. As a result these pupils learn to tolerate different tastes and textures and learn how materials change in colour, size and shape when they manipulate them. They also learn to give a personal response to objects used in lessons. These methods could be extended in religious education, where the school has not considered a sensory approach for pupils. The teachers of pupils with more complex needs use a structured, individual approach in lessons, with work set to meet targets within individual educational plans. Older pupils are beginning to recognise when it is time for work and when work is finished, through cue cards and the use of workstations. This works well for the majority of pupils.

28. Homework is mainly given at the request of parents. Teachers could be more proactive in planning homework to consolidate and extend learning done in the school. Symbol work is well explained to parents and many parents use symbols at home with pupils; this supports their communication very well. The new initiative of providing reading cards for helping parents to read with their children at home is having a good effect on pupils' reading gains. The school could extend these areas of home school co-operation so that parents are more involved, and more aware of the gains their children make in school.

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

29. Since the last inspection the school has made good progress in developing a highly relevant and well-balanced curriculum. Overall the curriculum of the school is good and meets statutory requirements. The vast majority of pupils enjoy a broad spectrum of activities related to the National Curriculum. At the Foundation Stage, and in English, mathematics, art and science, development has been very good. Physical education has maintained its high quality. The sharp focus on improving literacy and numeracy by fully embracing the national strategies has been very effective and is improving standards of achievement for all pupils in English and mathematics.

30. Planned improvements in information communication technology have been delayed by technical difficulties, but the school is well placed to make significant improvements. At present, the planning for the control and modelling aspect of the subject is less secure than that for communication. In music, although the scheme is detailed, it is not supporting the teachers who are insecure in the subject. This is because the teachers do not have enough understanding of how the subject should be taught.

31. The overall provision for pupils with additional needs is sound overall. The school has ensured all needs identified within statements are well met for the vast majority of pupils. Planning for priority needs is clearly identified and set out in individual educational plans. Targets within these plans are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time related. They are of a consistently high quality across the school. These are effectively linked to teachers' daily planning and ensure the vast majority of pupils make very good progress towards them in lessons. These plans also support all pupils' access to the curriculum opportunities offered, including pupils with complex needs and those who speak English as an additional language. The school has developed the religious education and humanities curriculum and higher attaining pupils are making good progress in these subjects. However, both humanities and religious education need further development to ensure pupils with more complex needs have the same opportunities to learn about the subjects as others. There is a good emphasis on becoming self-aware and on developing an understanding of the passage of time during the school day for pupils with more complex needs. Key vocabulary associated with answering questions about places is also being developed. However, the rationale for teaching these subjects to pupils with more complex needs is based on a rather narrow interpretation of the National Curriculum programmes of study. The school must ensure these activities take place in age appropriate contexts and that resources are used more effectively to provide a sensory approach to learning.

32. The curriculum at the Foundation Stage is very good. The nursery and reception classes offer high quality provision to children. The very detailed planning is highly relevant and individualised. It provides a broad and balanced range of activities and experiences, which are linked to the area of learning. The co-ordinator is developing children's creative opportunities because planning for this area is not cohesive, currently. This means that opportunities for children to choose activities are limited. Activities that promote the children's imaginative thought and sensory explorations are not planned with the same attention to detail as other aspects of the curriculum.

33. Fourteen per cent of the pupils in the school live in homes where English is not the mother tongue. The school is very aware of this; teachers take this into account when planning lessons and extra support is given in class to ensure that these children are making the same progress as their peers. Bilingual support is very effective and is available in the classroom to provide explanations of difficult concepts in the child's mother tongue and to help with writing. Such interventions are very successful. Pupils who speak English as an additional language have the same access to curricular opportunities as is enjoyed by other children in the school. The school liaises well with parents, calling in interpreters, if required, to assist in the setting and reviewing of pupils' individual education plans. Parents are also offered extra help where necessary. For example, parents are offered appropriate guidance and children are given work when they leave the country on holiday with parents during term time.

34. The schools' relationships with partner institutions are sound overall. Educational and social inclusion within the school is strong. Pupils in mixed ability classes have their needs very effectively met. Inspectors were impressed by the way most lessons were planned in great detail to ensure the involvement of all pupils, including those who speak English as a second language. This is reflected in the very good progress of these pupils. They have good opportunities to socialise with higher attaining pupils in the school. However, inclusion for all pupils beyond the school is much less effective. This is mainly because parents do not want their children to take part in inclusion activities as their children have often already failed in mainstream provision. The school is aware of this and is tackling the issue by beginning to offer training for teachers and support staff in mainstream schools. Before pupils undertake inclusion, the school encourages the receiving school to send support staff to see how pupils are managed. This works well. However, these moves are at an early stage and as yet there has not been a significant increase in pupils' opportunities to share regular curriculum experiences with pupils in local mainstream schools. Good links have been made with primary schools during the training for, and implementation of, the literacy and numeracy strategies. These links have helped to improve the quality of teaching, particularly for higher attaining pupils. The school could however, make better use of expertise in special schools to improve the provision for pupils with more complex needs.

35. Pupils are given good opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities, including sports and creative and visual arts, as an extension to the school day. Staff run a very successful summer holiday play-scheme, which has been financed by money raised by parents. Pupils take part in residential opportunities as part of the outdoor and adventurous activities programme in physical education.

36. The school has good links with the community. The city of Birmingham makes a good contribution to the curriculum in many ways. Pupils have regular opportunities to use facilities such as swimming pools and libraries, and to go trampolining and horse riding. Global and environmental issues are addressed using a local environment centre. History, geography, art and religious education are greatly enriched by visits into the community and by visitors who add another dimension to the pupils' learning. For example, the pupils worked with an artist to learn mask-making skills, and visited a number of religious places of worship, as well as enjoying a visit from a local resident who talked about her life in the city during the war.

37. The local education authority has produced some useful guidance for pupils with special educational needs moving from primary to secondary education. The school has incorporated this into its planning and transfer from Uffculme is managed successfully for pupils at the end of their time at the school.

38. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, overall, is very good. The development of pupils' moral and social awareness is particularly strong. Provision has improved since the time of the last inspection in 1998. Parents are exceptionally pleased with the attitudes and values promoted by the school. They feel that staff promote the concepts of right and wrong and they appreciate the awards that are given to encourage good behaviour. Parents say that the school places good emphasis on social behaviour and rules, for example in the dining room. They say that their children learn about different cultures through their visits to places of worship, in literature, music and art. One parent was delighted when their child came home saying that he was a 'goodwill ambassador' for the school.

39. The provision for pupils' spiritual development is good. Twice weekly whole-school assemblies promote a strong sense of community and appreciation of achievement. There is good use of music, played by members of staff. Pupils join together in singing and express happiness through dance and movement. There are very good opportunities for pupils to express their feelings and develop spirituality through the use of music in physical education lessons, although there are fewer opportunities in music lessons. In discussions and at the end part of lessons, pupils are given many opportunities to reflect on their behaviour, their experiences and the work that they have done. Discussions and reviews of class targets help pupils to understand what they have achieved and become more aware of their own development. All pupils are helped to reflect on what they have learned and to communicate so that they all contribute. There are good opportunities for most pupils to develop an understanding of others' beliefs, for example when visiting different places of worship in the community. However, religious education could contribute more to lower attaining pupils' spiritual development.

40. The provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good. The emphasis on knowing what is expected of them for work and behaviour is begun in the nursery and reception classes and developed through the school. Teachers help pupils to consider how to improve their behaviour and give clear signals about what is acceptable through the consistent use of merits, stickers and awards. Good use of praise throughout the school day reinforces to pupils what is expected of them and helps them to learn the difference between

right and wrong. For example, staff thank pupils consistently for small courtesies such as holding the door open. The social use of language programme takes place in a positive atmosphere and encourages pupils to work in co-operation with one another, as when playing a game and taking turns with a spinner. At lunchtimes, the organisation and positive interaction with staff help pupils to learn manners and to share their meals together in a sociable setting.

41. All staff set exemplary role models for pupils to follow and to help them modify their behaviour. They offer many opportunities for pupils to work together in pairs, small groups or as a whole class. Pupils are offered a good range of experiences outside school, such as visits to the library, shops and cinema and a residential visit, to help them learn to behave well and to gain a better understanding of the wider world. A school council meets from time to time to negotiate rules, such as those for the playground, although the council has not met recently.

42. The provision for pupils' cultural development is good. There is a wide range of opportunities for pupils to learn about their own culture, for instance in history, dance and drama. In geography, pupils undertake studies of the local area of King's Heath and have looked at the uses of buildings in the area around the school. Their opportunities to experience the multi-cultural aspects of society are also good. For example, in English pupils compose Haiku poems and read the Australian story of Tiddalik the frog. Also, in art and design and technology, pupils have made cards, masks and dragons to celebrate the Chinese New Year. The use of music is good in physical education, where there are plenty of opportunities for pupil's cultural development. However, music could play a better part in this area. Around the school and in classrooms, there are some high quality displays of pupils' work, particularly in art. These make a good contribution to the school environment and demonstrate the value placed by staff on pupils' work.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

43. The school makes very good provision for pupils' educational and personal support and guidance. There is a caring and supportive atmosphere in the school, which is promoted by all staff. This helps pupils to learn better and to have positive attitudes towards school life. Parents feel that the school helps their children to become mature and responsible and that they are well supported when they have any concerns. They commented favourably at the pre-inspection meeting about the star charts used between home and school. These are an effective way of helping parents to continue with the school's strategies for rewarding behaviour. Parents particularly praised the role of the transport 'guides' in supporting their children on some of the long journeys to and from school.

44. The school has a satisfactory range of policies for health and safety and procedures. These have been confirmed as being suitable in a recent audit by the local authority. The school is acutely aware of the continuing problem relating to the collection of pupils by buses at the end of the school day. Staff are very vigilant about ensuring the safety of those pupils who use buses that are still parked out on the roadside. The school continues to seek a satisfactory resolution to the key issue raised at the previous inspection in 1998. The headteacher hopes to have this situation fully resolved by Easter. The deputy headteacher

has recently undertaken the role of health and safety co-ordinator and is working with members of the governing body to ensure that regular checks and risk assessments are made of the school premises. Since the last inspection, the school has adopted the local authority guidelines on the use of physical restraint and is hoping to identify appropriate training for all staff.

45. There are good arrangements in place to care for pupils' health and welfare. The part-time school nurse offers effective support to the school, its pupils and families. There are clear procedures in place for dealing with pupils' illnesses and medication, and pupils are provided with a good standard of personal care. However, the medical room is badly situated and is too small to care properly for pupils who become ill during the school day and who cannot go home immediately. A satisfactory number of staff are trained in first aid. The school nurse and staff have good links with a range of outside health, social and welfare agencies, and use these effectively to ensure that the welfare of individual pupils is secure. Arrangements for reporting and recording child protection concerns are good. Staff are all aware of the need to report concerns directly to the designated teacher and to maintain confidentiality. The school has identified a need to update all staff in their awareness of current child-protection procedures.

46. Through 'the social use of language programme' and the very good relationships between pupils and staff, pupils learn about their own personal safety and how to behave appropriately with others. Parents are encouraged to buy their children a hot meal each day so that pupils can make progress in eating skills and table manners and the communication of their needs and wants. Religious and cultural diets are respected and provided. Teachers know and support pupils well in an atmosphere of mutual care and respect. The school makes good use of 'P' scales to monitor pupils' progress in areas such as independence, interaction, organisation and behaviour. Pupils' records of achievement contain certificates that show where pupils have made progress in these areas as well as in their learning. However, the use of photographic evidence in the classroom could be further developed to support the pupils' records. Home-school books are used effectively and regularly to inform parents about the progress that their children are making and to encourage parents to continue the programmes of support and guidance set up by the school.

47. As a result of the school's good procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance, pupils come to school regularly and have good attendance records. The school is quick to follow up any absences and the effective liaison between home and school, often through the 'guides', ensures that there is no unauthorised absence. The school is careful to monitor the transport provision to ensure that no groups of pupils are disadvantaged by any frequent patterns of unpunctuality.

48. At the time of the last inspection in 1998, it was reported that behaviour management strategies, together with the development of the curriculum and teaching, were helping pupils to improve their behaviour. On the whole, this is still the case. The school continues to employ a good range of strategies to promote positive standards of behaviour and to deal with any anti-social behaviour or bullying. Staff place good emphasis on the consistent encouragement of positive attitudes and behaviour and most pupils respond well to this. Good use is made of praise, awards and certificates to reinforce pupils' achievements and improvement, and staff set good role models for pupils to follow.

49. The draft behaviour policy, which is currently under review, is satisfactory in terms of the emphasis that it places on the positive promotion of behaviour. However, it is not explicit enough about how the needs of a very small number of pupils who have more complex learning and behavioural difficulties are to be met. Although all pupils' individual education plans have targets set for personal and social development, there are no specific individual behaviour plans in place to help staff to support this small group and to monitor where they need additional support to help them make progress. Where staff use visual cues consistently to help pupils move from one activity to another, there are fewer behaviour problems. However, this consistency is not always apparent amongst the small group of pupils with more complex needs and, as a result, their behaviour is sometimes disruptive and results in their being taken out of class. As a result, the learning of these few pupils is not as good as that of other pupils in the school.

50. Since the last inspection the school has made huge improvements in its assessment procedures for monitoring pupils' personal and academic development. Staff use criteria from 'Development in Areas Related to Learning' (DARL), performance 'P' scales and National Curriculum level descriptors, according to each pupil's stage of development in each subject. This system enables staff to recognise and record each pupil's development, measured in very small steps, and so to plan for what they are to learn next. Individual education plans are also of high quality. They provide exceptionally specific, measurable, attainable and relevant targets. While the school places an impressively high emphasis upon communication and personal and social skills, most teachers are also meticulous in their assessment of pupils' achievement across the curriculum.

51. Teachers use this very comprehensive system of assessment effectively and ongoing assessment in lessons is very good. Teachers are adept at picking up misunderstandings and errors and skilfully use them as teaching points at the end of lessons. They are similarly careful to notice, applaud and record a pupil's success with new learning. The communications manager retains an overview of all the assessment procedures used, and has made a very significant contribution to the school's vastly improved procedures. She works with the senior management team to review how useful the procedures are, and to judge the 'value' that the school is 'adding' for individual pupils and groups of pupils. Staff working with children in the nursery provide extensive information about what each child knows, understands or can do when they join the school. This includes very good identification on entry of the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language. This means that the school is able to document every child's achievement over time. The recording of this information is innovative and exceptionally easy to use.

52. The school has a considered approach to assessment and how to make best use of the information it yields. The communication manager and senior staff are reflective managers who ensure that systems are monitored and evaluated and modified where necessary. They are aware all teachers do not consistently assess some aspects of science and information communication technology. They have plans to further monitor teaching and learning in this respect. They and the teachers retain an exceptionally clear view of the purpose of assessment. Staff recognises the value of finely tuned assessment as a tool for planning for each pupil's achievement. Additionally, the school recognises the value of analysing the achievement of groups of pupils as a means of reviewing its own effectiveness and continually seeking to improve standards. However, the school does not yet specifically monitor groups of pupils who speak English as an additional language, although it monitors them individually very well.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

53. The school continues to develop strong and effective links with parents and carers. It places high value on maintaining a positive partnership to benefit the quality of pupils' learning and support. As a result, parents are more positive about the school, its work and the support provided for their children than they were at the inspection in 1996. Her Majesty's Inspectors made no comment about the quality of partnership with parents in 1998.

54. All parents who responded to the questionnaire said that leadership and management and the quality of teaching are strengths of the school. They value highly the progress that their children are making and the fact that their children like coming to school. Nearly all parents say that they can approach the school if they have any questions or problems and that the school works closely with them. Most parents say that they are kept well informed about how their child is getting on. A significant minority of parents feel that their children are not provided with the right amount of homework. There are also a few parents who do not agree that the school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons. Inspectors agree strongly with parents' positive views of the school. The school recognises that it could be more proactive in providing regular homework for pupils, and that it needs to explain to parents the type of homework that will be given and how it will be used in class. Inspectors find that there is a good range of extra-curricular activities, including residential visits and the recently introduced holiday play schemes. Not all parents have taken up these opportunities.

55. The quality of information provided for parents is good. Parents say that they are kept well informed through the high quality and attractive newsletters that include information about what their children will be learning. The school prospectus is also well presented and gives parents a good range of information about the work of the school and the daily routines, although curriculum information is less well developed. The governors' annual report, although meeting requirements, is not as informative and readable as it could be in giving parents an overview of a year's work in the school. Most parents feel that the pupils' end of year academic reports are quite good, although some feel that they could be more specific about the progress that their child has made over the year. Inspectors agree that the quality of reporting, while good in English and mathematics, could give parents more information about the skills learned and the progress made by their children in other subjects of the curriculum. Parents are given good quality information about the targets set for their children and the progress that they have made towards them in pupils' individual education plans.

56. The school makes a good commitment to encouraging the support and involvement of parents, both in their child's work and in the life of the school. However, the wording of the home-school agreement does not adequately reflect the quality of the partnership that actually exists. The school is very open and welcoming to new parents and has a good induction programme in place to help parents feel at ease with their child's placement. The school encourages regular communication through the home-school books. Staff are always willing to see parents at any time if they have concerns. A few parents feel, however, that

the home-school books are not used as well or consistently as they have been in the past. Parents and staff are regularly in contact with each other by telephone, which means that there is continuity in the care and support provided between home and school. Any worries are quickly dealt with. Parents have frequent informal and formal opportunities to meet staff to discuss their child's progress and annual reviews. Reviews of individual education plans are also well attended.

57. Overall, the impact of parental involvement is good. Although there are few parents who are able to help regularly during the school day, all parents are very supportive of events and activities to which they are invited; for example, assemblies, concerts, book fairs and fundraising events. Some parents help in the school library or assist on visits outside school. Meetings to explain the school's strategies for literacy and numeracy, transfer to secondary school and residential visits are mostly well attended. Although the school recognises that there could be more formal provision of homework, parents are encouraged to support their child's learning at home in terms of behaviour management programmes and independence and social skills. Reading prompt cards to help those parents who wish to hear their child read are a particularly good feature. They demonstrate the willingness on the part of the school to help parents with their child's learning at home.

58. The school recognises parents' need for additional support to help them cope with their children's special needs. The parent governors have been pro-active in this respect by setting up the Parents Supporting Parents group. At a monthly meeting, parents and carers gather together to discuss mutual issues of concern and to offer each other advice and support. The school has recently started a summer play scheme. This is soon to be extended to the Easter holidays in recognition that parents need additional provision for their children during that time. These schemes are very well supported by staff in the school who are keen to offer continuity in care and provision for pupils and their families.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

59. The leadership and management of the school is good overall. The headteacher has been formally in post since November 1999. He and the senior management team provide a very firm steer to the work of the school. They have worked in close and effective partnership to manage the continued necessary changes at the school. This is reflected in the continued improvement in achievements, the curriculum and in teaching and learning, particularly in English, mathematics and science. All members of the senior management team share a common vision for the school to achieve a national and local reputation for excellence and for the school to be a provider of accredited training. The co-ordinators have a common aim to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. The school has a clear, staged plan to achieve these aims. It has already begun to publish some of its most innovative work in the area of communication assessment. In addition, some members of the senior management team already provide training services in the management of pupils with autism and/or communication difficulties.

60. There is good leadership and management overall by curriculum co-ordinators. All staff have clear roles and responsibilities outlined within job descriptions. There are plans to improve the performance of co-ordinators through further training and by planned release from teaching to undertake monitoring and evaluation of teaching. All co-ordinators support teaching by providing outline subject planning and by monitoring and evaluating medium-

term plans. This has been effective in improving planning throughout the school in the vast majority of subjects. The senior management team has undertaken rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning in numeracy and literacy. They have identified teachers who needed most support and direction, and have provided this efficiently and effectively in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently, teaching and learning have improved greatly since the last inspection. The performance of subject managers is to be reviewed as part of the professional development arrangements.

61. There are sufficient suitably qualified teachers and learning support assistants to meet the demands of the curriculum, and a very good balance of experience and expertise among all staff members. All teaching and support staff are appropriately trained and take part in continuing professional development, which is well matched to the priority needs of the school. The newly appointed communications manager, who is a speech and language therapist, works very closely with the well-trained and knowledgeable literacy co-ordinator. Both are instrumental in ensuring the very good progress the vast majority of pupils are making in communication and literacy. The school has a physical education specialist whose knowledge and expertise have a very positive impact on pupils' physical development. Many members of staff have original art qualifications and this, alongside the very good leadership of the co-ordinator, has raised standards in art. No permanent member of staff has mathematical qualifications. However, the very good training all staff have received in the implementation of the numeracy hour has had a very positive influence on standards in the subject. In contrast, there is no permanent co-ordinator for religious education and at present no one is rigorously monitoring the subject. This has led to patchy teaching of the subject and some pupils have better opportunities to learn about it than others. Although there is a music specialist, she is not used to teach music throughout the school and has not yet had the opportunity to monitor teaching and learning rigorously. Many teachers do not have enough confidence and understanding of the subject to follow the good scheme of work. This has resulted in lower achievement in music since the last inspection.

62. The governing body fulfils its statutory responsibilities well. It keeps a close eye on the work of the school. It knows the school's strengths and the areas that are still to be developed through the very good information given by the headteacher. It gives good support and guidance to the headteacher. There is considerable expertise among its members. However, not all the expertise is used to full effect. For example, the literacy and numeracy governor is a teacher at the school. This is a lost opportunity for governors to be more informed about standards of achievement and the quality of teaching and learning at the school in these important skills.

63. The school recognises that the aims and mission statement are in need of review, so that they better reflect the changing clientele and views of new staff and governors at the school. Aims within subject policies have for the most part been changed, although some give more detail than others about how they are to be met for different groups of pupils. On the whole the school does achieve its aims except for a very few pupils with very complex needs. However, the school has recognised this group of pupils through its very good assessment procedures, and is in the process of reviewing its provision for their future management.

64. All new staff in the school, both teaching and non-teaching, are given support and special training through the school's induction programme. This training has had a significant impact on raising the quality of teaching and learning. Members of the learning support staff are fully involved in the school and their time is used well. They contribute significantly to the quality of teaching and learning, but some need further training in dealing with the behaviour of children with complex behavioural needs. Teacher appraisal procedures have been formalised in line with new government guidelines. In this regard, all statutory requirements have been met. An accredited External Advisor has been appointed and governors have been appropriately trained. Team leaders have been appointed and objectives set for and accepted by each teacher. The school has decided to operate on a nine months cycle in the first year. Opportunities for staff development are planned and targeted well, with many professional recommendations incorporated into the objectives that have been set for individual members of staff. These measures should contribute well to raising standards of teaching and learning.

65. At the time of the last inspection, the governing body had established a finance committee with clear terms of reference and there was very good planning in place to improve the resources and accommodation. The excellent improvement reported at that time has been maintained and the arrangements for financial control and planning are now well established and secure.

66. The governing body has made good improvement in its monitoring and evaluation of its spending decisions. It examines carefully all planning to ensure that as many pupils as possible benefit from any money that is spent. It challenges any decisions made if it feels that these will not have a direct impact on pupils' learning. The school applies the principles of best value satisfactorily. It seeks the best price for goods and services, evaluates the cost effectiveness of its decisions and seeks the views of the school community before investing in any developments. The school is beginning to compare and contrast its performance with other similar schools although this is, as yet, an underdeveloped aspect of the best value principles.

67. The day-to-day office administration and financial control are well managed and office staff help the school to run smoothly. The school is well supported by bought-in services of the local authority and good information is provided for the governing body and its finance committee. The recent audit found that most financial controls are secure, with only a few improvements needed, some of which have already been carried out. Overall, good use is made of new technology. Administration and financial matters are effected well using the computer systems in conjunction with the local authority's financial team, although the system is not yet fully networked. Computers are used to monitor pupil matters such as transport punctuality. Teachers make good use of new technology to write reports, education programmes and lesson plans and display notices. There are good plans to make better use of Internet and email facilities. A particularly good feature of the school is the use made of technology to provide high quality signs and symbols to aid pupils' communication.

68. Through careful financial planning, the school has made significant improvements to its accommodation and has secured sufficient reserves to fund the addition of two more classrooms. This will improve nursery and nursing facilities, and the accommodation used for pupils with complex needs, all of which are at present too small. This weakness in accommodation limits the youngest pupils' opportunities to make choices of play activities. In addition it makes it difficult for teachers of pupils with more complex needs to organise

groups and individuals when all pupils are in the room at the same time, particularly when pupils find it so difficult to be in a group with others. A number of pupils were ill at the time of the inspection and there was no place for them to rest away from their peers, before parents collected them from school.

69. The balance of spending on teaching and learning support staff has meant that more money has been made available to carry out these improvements and to ensure the employment of a key member of staff for the next three years. The school recognised that resources needed to be improved across the school and has made significant investment in all areas of the curriculum. However, although a considerable amount has been spent on improving information and communication technology resources, the impact of this expenditure has yet to be seen in terms of raising pupils' standards of attainment. Likewise, the good resources for religious education and music are also being underused. At present, subject co-ordinators do not sufficiently monitor whether resources are being used to have the maximum impact on pupils' learning. Good use is made of specific grants to realise improvements in pupils' attainment. The school's strategies for literacy and numeracy have particularly benefited in this respect.

70. The school is well maintained and internally the satisfactory accommodation is in good condition and the level of cleanliness is high. The school has improved parking facilities for school buses, but a number of pupils still have to get on and off buses on the roadside and, although pupils are very well supervised, this still remains a health and safety issue. Teachers have worked very hard to create a bright stimulating environment in all areas of the school and displays of pupils' work are of high standard.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

71. In order to improve the quality of education provided, the headteacher and governors should:

- Improve the achievements of about 3 per cent of the school population who have complex behavioural and communication needs by:
 - * Carrying out rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure these pupils are always managed and moved from one activity to another according to the school communication policy;
 - * Carrying out observational assessment and analysis to identify why some pupils do not co-operate, and putting in place individual behaviour-management programmes to increase the amount of time these pupils are learning;
 - * Providing training for the safe physical management of these pupils;
 - * Strengthening links with partner institutions in order to share good practice.

- Improve the presentation of pupils' work by:
 - * Improving the school's handwriting policy;
 - * Ensuring all teachers and support staff provide good handwriting models for pupils and raising expectations of teachers so pupils are encouraged to start joining handwriting earlier;
 - * Using information communication technology more consistently to support the writing of lower attaining pupils.

- Improve standards of achievement in religious education and music for all pupils by:
 - * Appointing a religious education co-ordinator to rigorously monitor and evaluate the planning, teaching and learning of religious education lessons in all classes to ensure it is securely linked to the Agreed Syllabus, as the school policy states;
 - * Ensuring that the good resources for music and religious education are used more effectively in lessons;
 - * Supporting the teaching of music by either providing a commercial scheme or sharing good practice throughout the school;
 - * Developing links with other professionals and partner institutions that have expertise in music therapy.

- In addition to the key areas above, the following areas of development, which are already identified by the school in its development plans, should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:
 - * The implementation of the very good plans for information communication technology;
 - * The implementation of the good plans for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in science;
 - * The implementation of the good intentions for the development of the schemes of work for humanities for all pupils, including those for older pupils with more complex needs;
 - * The implementation of the good development plans for creative development at the Foundation Stage, including increasing opportunities for choice of play activities;
 - * The continuing issues relating to the safety of pupils who get on and off buses on the busy road outside the school;
 - * The improvements in the partnership with parents, including improvements in the quality of information and homework provision.
- The implementation of plans to improve inclusion opportunities by providing training for other schools and agencies and developing further links with mainstream schools.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	87
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	50

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	36	43	19	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	115
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	39

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	17

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	2
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	7
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	3
Pakistani	10
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	1
White	63
Any other minority ethnic group	11

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	1	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes:

Y N – Y 6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	14
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	8.3
Average class size	10

Education support staff:

Y N – Y 6

Total number of education support staff	37
Total aggregate hours worked per week	1108

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999 - 2000
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	£
Total income	1,253,148.00
Total expenditure	1,119,164.00
Expenditure per pupil	10,659.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	380764.00
Balance carried forward to next year	548044.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	115
Number of questionnaires returned	55

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	44	8	0	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	37	15	0	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	23	26	2	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	11	19	8	2	13
The teaching is good.	42	8	1	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	37	13	2	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	44	6	2	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	29	18	1	0	5
The school works closely with parents.	36	11	4	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	44	9	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	30	19	1	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	23	13	3	3	11

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

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

72. There are 19 children in the Foundation Stage. There are seven children in the nursery and 12 in the reception class. Most children who join the nursery class at Uffculme School have had some previous experience of working outside their home. However, their experience is mostly of working alongside their parent or carer with a professional specialist for one or two hours each week. Very few children have previous experience of working in groups or of being away from their home for the whole day. The school works very hard to introduce children gradually to the nursery and ensure that they settle quickly. They successfully help children to adjust to the school routines by working closely with parents and carers. They also immediately provide calm, clear and consistent expectations and routines that ease a smooth transition from home to school.

73. Judgements about teaching in nursery and reception are based on twelve lessons observed during the inspection, scrutiny of work, planning and records of achievement. Teaching of children in the nursery and reception classes is very good overall and makes a significant contribution to the high level of achievement of all children, irrespective of their level of need, gender, ethnicity or background. It is good or better in 92 per cent of lessons and satisfactory in the rest. It is very good or excellent in 67 per cent of lessons. Teaching and children's achievements have improved dramatically since the inspection in 1996 and have continued to improve year on year. Several factors account for this vast improvement. There have been staff changes since Her Majesty's Inspectors visited the school in 1998. The relatively newly appointed communication manager makes a significant and positive contribution to the work in nursery and reception by working closely with teachers. Together they pay considerable attention to developing and reviewing systems of planning and assessment that help all staff to meet the needs of individual children. With support staff they plan a relevant programme of activities designed to enhance children's skills where they are most in need. All staff have a very clear understanding of the priorities for these children and how best to meet their needs.

Communication, language and literacy

74. The quality of teaching of language and literacy is very good overall. In the two lessons where this was the prime focus, one was good and one very good. All staff are highly skilled at exploiting every opportunity to promote children's communication skills through every activity, experience and situation throughout the day. All staff in the nursery and reception classes use carefully selected photographs and symbols to help children understand what is happening and also to provide them with a means of communicating their wishes. This results in all children making very good progress in language and communication skills. Most children join the nursery with extremely limited communication skills and these are reserved for their parent. During their time in the nursery and reception

classes most children make impressive gains in their repertoire of communication skills. Several children use their voice increasingly and begin to use language. During the inspection one child in the nursery increased her vocabulary on a daily basis, finally saying 'bye-bye' to an inspector at the end of the week. Children who are developing English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic groups have equally high achievements in communication, language and literacy.

75. The photographs and symbols are also an effective means of developing children's awareness of the difference between print and pictures and their understanding of the importance of written words. For example, in the nursery children match photographs of their peers and hand out name cards, while staff carefully adjust the level of support they provide to give each child experience of success. This means that children gradually increase their level of independence with the task. In the reception class, children share a book individually or in small groups with an adult. Lower attaining children share books of class photographs, while higher attaining children move on to commercially produced books of favourite subjects, such as 'Thomas the Tank Engine'. They trust the adults working with them, and the combination of strong relationships and thoughtfully chosen resources successfully increases the attention they pay to a book. Consequently all children are interested in these books and learn to treat them carefully and turn the pages. Staff encourage all children to follow simple sentences when they are in a whole group, and so help children to develop an understanding that print carries meaning.

76. In the nursery children begin to enjoy deliberately making marks on paper. They learn to wield a paintbrush in more than one direction and so produce thick painted vertical and horizontal lines. In the reception class children refine these skills to control a pencil and for example, draw straight lines from left to right, and begin to trace the letters of their name. However, simultaneously, staff extend children's experience of constructing short sentences with a sequence of words, and words with a sequence of letters. Teachers have high expectations that children will listen and look. As a result, children begin to understand that a written sequence of abstract shapes carries meaning, such as 'this is a house', before they have acquired independent writing skills. This means that children learn to use sentence strips to read and write simple phrases. These strategies successfully promote children's interest in writing and print, consequently most children make very good progress in relation to their prior ability.

Mathematical development

77. Children make very good gains in mathematical skills and understanding because of the very good teaching they receive. During the inspection three sessions were seen that had a primarily mathematical focus. Two of these lessons were very good and one was excellent. When teaching is excellent, there is exceptional teamwork. All adults use extremely well chosen resources to help individual children solve problems related to size, quantity and shape. Every adult sustains a helpful commentary and proceeds at a skilful and sensitive pace. This ensures that each child remains interested and participates fully at his or her own level. The very good teaching makes full use of music to ease the transition from the previous activity into the beginning of the mathematics session. In the reception class, higher attaining children show their appreciation of number rhymes by working hard to follow the accompanying actions. Those with speech also join in with the song. These children enthusiastically distinguish between long and short lines or pieces of railway track.

They count meaningfully up to five and are beginning to record numerals. Children with more complex learning difficulties work with an adult to recognise and follow a pattern or to sort items by colour. They make impressive gains during the session because support staff know each child very well and systematically use familiar systems to explain what they expect each child to do. All staff share high expectations of children's behaviour and active involvement in the session. Children who are developing English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic groups have equally high achievements in mathematical understanding.

Personal, social and emotional development

78. Teaching in this area of learning is very good overall. Staff have high expectations of children's behaviour. They seek to extend children's social skills throughout the day by encouraging them to work as a whole class or in small groups as well as individually. Consequently most children make impressive gains in social conformity in the nursery and reception classes. For example, most children accept sitting in a circle in close proximity to either an adult or another child. They quickly understand the rules of taking turns and sharing, for example when they are changing the date and weather information. Children who are developing English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic groups make equally impressive gains. Teachers and support assistants are extremely clear and consistent in their expectations. They use the photograph and symbol cue cards to communicate to children about what they are expected to do next. They are very successful in using these to manage children's behaviour. For example, they bring the relevant card to show a child and encourage that child to move to the computer when he or she is showing an initial reluctance to do so.

79. Staff have equally high expectations of children developing independence in dressing and undressing, and feeding themselves at lunchtime. They give children plenty of time and encouragement to do as much as possible on their own. Those children who are ready to use a sequence of pictures and symbols have these reminders to help them with the easiest order for changing for physical development sessions. In this situation children are also encouraged to use and extend their vocabulary by naming, 'shoe', 'jumper' and 'trousers'. While children in the nursery and reception classes make choices within a session, for example they may select the colour paint that they wish to use, this aspect of their development could be extended. There are limited opportunities for children to select equipment or activities and take greater control over their learning. This means that they do not use their impressive gains in communication and social maturity fully.

80. Children's behaviour is very well managed throughout the day. The main reason for this is that tasks and activities match individual needs so well. However, staff also successfully adapt their speech to avoid confusing children. For example, they consistently signal the beginning and end of activities within lessons. They also use shortened phrases that help children to focus on the significant elements of what is being said or asked. Additionally, they provide consistent praise, encouragement and enthusiasm. Staff are highly skilled at deciding when a child needs 'space' and when they need someone close by. As a result children feel valued, liked and respected. They demonstrate the extent to which they trust staff when they are distressed and either seek or accept comfort.

Physical development

81. Children in the nursery and reception class share a small outside play area situated just outside the reception class and a few minutes walk from the nursery. Neither classroom is sufficiently spacious for children to increase large movement skills on equipment in their base room. In spite of these limitations children make very good progress in physical skills. This is because the school makes very sensible use of a specialist teacher of physical education who leads sessions in the school hall. The teaching of physical development is highly successful. Two lessons in physical development were observed during the inspection and both were very good. These sessions are designed to increase skills of balance and co-ordination and participation in physical games. They are planned meticulously to meet the developing physical needs of children as they move through nursery and reception. They make exceptional use of music and familiar 'trigger' phrases to ensure that children feel safe and so participate willingly in the whole session. The sessions are strongly supported by support assistants who sensitively offer and withdraw support, as a child needs it.

82. The sessions make a valuable contribution to other areas of learning. For example, sessions that require children to move 'in' or 'over' equipment give them practical experience to help understand the language of position, vital to their mathematical understanding. Games are chosen that incorporate colour matching alongside running and turning at speed. Children clearly enjoy these sessions enormously. Staff who work with children throughout the day provide a wide range of equipment and activities that help children to extend their precise movements and skills of control and manipulation. For example, children in the nursery use precise control to press glued flower shapes onto a representation of a 'plant pot'.

Creative development

83. The teaching of creative development is good and all children make good progress. Staff have rightly identified planning for this area of learning as the next focus to develop. This is because, while elements of this area of creative development are covered in other plans, it is not planned for in one cohesive format. This means that opportunities for children to use their imaginations to explore and experiment with materials are not planned with the same attention to detail as other aspects of the curriculum. However, during the inspection, three lessons with a creative focus were observed. One of these was very good and two were good. The teaching of music has many strengths. In the nursery a highly successful music session makes a strong contribution to children's communication and social skills, which develop as the session proceeds. For example, children select an instrument from a choice of different drums or a shaker and listen very closely as they make loud sounds on request. These requests from staff are accompanied by the appropriate cue card. Staff respond sensitively and so encourage children to increase their effort and focus. For example, in reception the teacher and a child 'mirror' each other's rhythms. In sessions with a carousel of activities, some children use small-world equipment and begin to use their imaginations with a farm or garage. Other children develop their understanding of colour mixing as they print with sponges. However, opportunities for choice and experimentation are limited.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

84. The teaching of knowledge and understanding of the world is very good and promotes high levels of achievement for all children. During the inspection one lesson was seen with this area of learning as the prime focus and it was very good. Children in the nursery develop their understanding of how plants grow when they place flowers in soil using small tools. This understanding is refined in the reception class where several children identify the need for water to make seeds grow. Children learn to label parts of their own bodies and faces. They become aware of passing time with daily routines that pay attention to the date and celebrate birthdays. Several books, made by staff, record past events that children have shared. They identify weather conditions and use books that extend these ideas to the world beyond their immediate environment. In the reception class, children have regular access to the computer and staff carefully record emerging skills. Children move from looking at the screen and occasionally touching the switch to using touch games confidently. The higher attaining children enjoy playing with farms, garages and fire engines. They demonstrate their understanding of the world when they 'park' a car in the garage, or tip a horse's head to make it 'drink'. When children play freely with construction equipment, they begin to solve problems by strategically using a brick to join two buildings. Children in reception have regular opportunities for such activities but they tend to be a little rushed.

Summary

85. The nursery and reception classes offer high quality provision to children. All staff work extremely hard to provide clear and consistent expectations of all children, suited to their needs. They develop strong relationships and provide a highly relevant range of activities and experiences. These are based on meticulous planning and monitoring that carefully link the areas of learning recommended for children of this age with behaviour that is achievable for each child. The result of this hard work is that children make very good progress. The nursery and reception classes could recognise their considerable achievements and extend their systems for communication to give children greater opportunity for choice.

ENGLISH

86. The vast majority of pupils have very high achievements and make good progress in relation to their prior attainment in English. The majority of lower attaining pupils make at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress towards targets identified within individual educational plans. However, a few pupils with more complex communication and behaviour needs at both key stages make less progress than their peers. This is because the management of these pupils is not always well enough planned. In some instances the challenging behaviour of one or two pupils affects the learning of others in the separate classes for pupils with complex needs.

87. Pupils with English as an additional language do as well as others and benefit from the expertise of an additional member of staff appointed with additional ethnic minority funding. For example, one guided reading session observed in Year 4 was very good because of the way the member of staff explained the very specific language of the literacy framework to pupils. This helped these pupils to make as much progress as their peers in the lesson.

88. There has been very significant improvement in standards and provision in English since the last full inspection in 1996, when progress and teaching were judged to be poor. By the time of the last inspection in 1998, Her Majesty's Inspectors judged progress in English to be good. Standards of achievement and progress are now very good in communication and reading and good in writing in relation to the vast majority of pupils' prior attainment. These high standards can be attributed to several significant improvements. Since the last inspection the school has focused upon the assessment of communication and language skills and has developed a unique and innovative series of assessments. These are exemplary, and they support teachers in designing individual intensive programmes that help pupils to improve their attention, discrimination and sequencing skills and their vocabulary. A rigorous baseline assessment now provides a secure basis for setting detailed individual targets and strategies for teaching.

89. Another factor in the improvement in standards is the appointment of a communication manager who is a trained speech and language therapist. She works very closely with the literacy co-ordinator. Both provide very good leadership for the subject. In partnership, they have supported all staff through training, and rigorously monitored and evaluated teaching and learning of the National Literacy Framework and the individual programmes followed by pupils. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning is now far better than at the last inspection. They have consulted with mainstream advisors and used the information gained effectively to set targets for specific groups of pupils in the school. This is raising standards further in Years 1 and 3.

90. Teaching is now very good overall at both key stages. All lessons are at least satisfactory and teaching is good or better in 77 per cent of lessons and very good in 23 per cent. Teachers use assessment procedures successfully to plan work to meet the needs of individual pupils and to monitor the acquisition of language and literacy skills. Teachers are skilled in linking communication and literacy targets within individual educational plans to lesson planning in most subjects. This supports the very good progress of pupils across the school.

91. Most teachers consistently use pictures, photographs and symbols effectively to gain the attention of lower attaining pupils, and to teach early communication, reading and writing skills. Communication boards and visual timetables provide a successful structure for the school day and enable pupils to understand what is happening next. A staged approach is used, whereby teachers initially use photographs and symbols before the pupil moves to text. In addition to this good strategy, teachers give clear and specific directions. Consequently, the vast majority of lower attaining pupils respond to the symbols used, and move from one activity to another without feeling worried or insecure. They learn to read a greater range of symbols, and to write simple sentences about themselves and their peers using a sentence building system with whole words provided by the teacher. Information communication technology could also be used more effectively for these activities.

92. The provision of simple pencil-control exercises of increasing difficulty ensures that the lowest attaining pupils make good gains in forming letters or lines correctly as they move through the school. However, they could make better progress in their understanding of the purpose of these exercises if they were given more opportunities for making marks with a purpose, by routinely signing in each day, for example.

93. The pupils with more complex needs are encouraged to work with the class group for short periods of the literacy hour, but this is not always successful. This could be planned more effectively so that when these pupils find it difficult to tolerate group activities, other strategies are available to keep them actively learning and not disrupting others. Challenging individual programmes are often carried out at individual pupils' workstations with high levels of support. However, not all teachers are skilled in this approach or organised enough to ensure all pupils are working all the time. This slows progress in lessons. The managers of the subject have identified the slower progress of these pupils and have sought medical advice. However, they have not yet analysed why pupils are still displaying challenging behaviour; nor have they developed with teachers further strategies for their management. Lower attaining pupils benefit from a structured programme designed to give them opportunities to use language in social contexts. This helps them to practice using their language skills in very structured contexts and improves co-operation in small groups. These pupils listen and participate with increasing confidence during these lessons. Snack time routines and lunchtime sessions allow them to transfer these skills in more natural social contexts.

94. Teachers' planning for mixed ability classes is very good. They link individual and group targets very well to their lessons planning and this ensures pupils learn the right things. Communication and literacy targets are constantly planned for in lessons other than English, and this gives pupils additional opportunities to make progress towards their priority targets. Teachers place an emphasis upon class discussion and the development of vocabulary work in all lessons. Consequently, pupils make very good gains in their confidence to use expressive language and in their range of vocabulary. High attaining pupils make good contributions to class discussions and there is good video evidence that, by the age of 11, pupils read aloud or deliver a learnt script very successfully during school performances.

95. Most teachers are skilful in questioning pupils at different levels of understanding and this encourages all pupils to talk about their work. Most teachers understand how pupils learn to answer a widening range of questions as their language develops. Often targets in individual educational plans relate to different levels of questions to be understood by pupils. Many teachers use symbols of different 'wh' questions to help pupils to understand what they are asking. This works very well for lower attaining pupils. For example, in one mixed ability Year 1 science lesson high attaining pupils were asked, 'How does a light bulb work?' The pupils replied, 'The battery makes it work through the wires then round again to the battery'. Lower attaining pupils were asked what was used to make them work, to which they responded, 'battery', 'bulb' and 'switch'. However, not all teachers use questioning this skilfully and they therefore do not always meet the differing language needs of lower attaining pupils. For example, in one Year 4 class, the teacher asked higher attaining pupils, 'How do you think they are feeling now?' This allowed pupils to empathise with the characters in the story and to express their understanding of the text and illustrations. Yet lower attaining pupils were asked, 'Do you think it is cold?' to which they could only reply with 'yes' or 'no'. Occasionally, teachers talk too much in lessons and do not encourage discussion and pupils get restless because they have to spend too much time listening.

96. By the age of seven and eleven, pupils make significant gains in reading. Teachers read texts enthusiastically and at a good pace during whole-class teaching and during guided reading. All pupils aged seven in the mixed ability class, listened attentively to 'Peace At Last', and answered graded questions on the text. Higher attaining pupils read some phrases along with the teacher and gradually became more accurate and fluent. High attaining pupils aged 11, read a range of texts fluently and with expression and offer opinions about the types of books they read. They use the computer system in the well-organised, colour-coded school library to record their choices and a small number of pupils' use the Dewey System in the local library to locate books they want to read. Teachers assess pupils' phonic skills very effectively and use these assessments successfully to plan work in small steps. Pupils make impressive progress towards individual targets set for reading and spelling in relation to their prior attainment.

97. Pupils are given a rich variety of opportunities to develop writing skills. They write for a range of purposes including stories, poetry, descriptions, letters and instructions. However, report writing in science is less well developed. High attaining pupils aged seven, improve the quality of their writing by redrafting work on the computer. They enjoy writing their own poetry and all contribute to class anthologies. Lower attaining pupils use the sentence builder to write 'the zebra is stripey, the cheetah is spotty.' Higher attaining pupils write poems independently. For example, one higher attaining pupil wrote, 'The snake is long. The snake slithers. The snake climbs the tree. He likes for his tea a mouse. He squashes it'. By the age of 11, higher attainers write structured letters which are informative and interesting. They express their opinions in writing, about pollution for example. Although grammar in complex sentences is not always correct, vocabulary choices are often good and sometimes imaginative. For example, at the beginning of a descriptive piece one pupils wrote, 'Tom is a stockily build man; he's got a dog called Sammy for company.' Another wrote a poem about a Chinese dragon. 'A Chinese dragon on the street. Dancing on his Chinese feet. His eyes are bloody red. His tail is razor sharp'. Spelling and punctuation are often accurate and good use is made of dictionaries and thesauri. High attaining pupils begin to use speech marks accurately and lower attaining pupils write simple sentences using capital letters and occasionally full stops.

98. The English curriculum is very good overall for the vast majority of pupils in most aspects of English. However, the school has not sufficiently monitored the implementation of the handwriting scheme of work. Consequently, progress in handwriting is not as good for all higher attaining pupils. In all classes teaching includes correct formation of letter shapes and an emphasis on legibility. However, progress is not consistent progress throughout the school so that all pupils learn a fluent and joined handwriting style. Teachers have low expectation of how well pupils should write by the age of seven and eleven, and do not always provide consistent handwriting models for pupils too imitate. In some instances teachers were printing when half of their pupils were joining their writing.

MATHAMATICS

99. Standards of achievement in mathematics are now very good across the school for the vast majority of pupils. Higher attaining pupils are achieving levels in line with or above their mainstream peers. The high standards directly relate to the high quality of teaching and leadership of the subject. There have been good improvements in the teaching of mathematics since the last inspection in 1998. Overall the quality of teaching and learning is now very good across the school. Out of ten numeracy sessions seen, none was less than good and half were very good. Very good progress in numeracy is linked to the very well thought out and managed introduction of a modified numeracy framework across the school. There has been rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning in relation to its implementation. Staff have had good opportunities to share effective practice, which has also helped to raise standards in the school. The school has set targets and tracks individual pupils very well. However, a small number of pupils, identified with more complex needs, do not make the same progress as their peers in relation to their prior attainment between the ages of seven and 11. Teaching methods to focus pupils' attention and minimise anxiety about learning are not always used effectively to manage these pupils, particularly when moving from one activity to the next. As a result, their learning is good rather than very good.

100. The greatest strengths of mathematics teaching are the consistent use of the range of methods and activities introduced as part of the Numeracy Strategy, a focus on the development of mathematical language, and the use of assessment. Teachers plan activities for groups and for individuals using the results of assessments very well. This ensures all pupils are learning the right things in lessons and the vast majority are making very good progress towards targets set within individual educational plans. Assessment data are recorded effectively on matrices (charts) that clearly show progression over time.

101. Teachers are now adept at explaining different methods of computation, number concepts and specific mathematical language. Consequently, by the age of seven, higher attaining pupils are beginning to develop a very good range of ways to tackle numeracy problems. For example, they use strategies such as adding 10 to 32 then taking away 1 to complete the task of adding 32 and 9. They know mathematical terms such as equal, number sentence and digit. Teachers provide a range of practical equipment for lower attaining pupils to help them to solve mathematical problems. Lower attaining pupils therefore solve numeracy tasks such as '5 add what equals 10?'

102. The teachers use the greatly improved and very good resources effectively for all pupils. Staff have worked hard to secure the right resources and spent many hours making quality materials themselves to support the numeracy work. All pupils use number fans and number lines with fluency and enthusiasm during the mental part of lessons, for example. Teachers of pupils with more complex needs use their specially made resources to give good opportunities for pupils to anticipate and use number language by singing number songs and rhymes. These pupils respond well to number songs such as 'Five Cheeky Monkeys' and '10 Green Bottles', for example.

103. Teachers provide very good opportunities for higher and lower attaining pupils to solve mathematical problems related to everyday life. Consequently, by the age of 11, higher attaining pupils apply their numeracy skills to everyday situations involving money, time and measurement and to other areas of learning. Pupils produce timetables and determine

mentally how long a programme will last on a television schedule. They produce graphs in geography after surveying a street of shops and use the data to find how many take away food outlets there are. Lower attaining pupils use practical mathematics equipment effectively to find how long a minute is and what task one might complete in this period of time. They order the days of the week, months of the year and, with adult help, assign seasons to the months. They follow up this work independently using motivational software on the computer. Pupils with the most complex learning and behavioural needs match coins to photographs of coins and some fill in missing numbers on a 1-10 number line.

104. The analysis of pupils' work showed other aspects of mathematics were also taught very well. Higher attaining pupils by the age of seven investigate how many ways a different number of triangles can be joined, and they halve shapes and measure in standard units. Lower attaining pupils use practical apparatus to make 2-D shapes and measure using non-standard units. High attaining pupils, aged 11, estimate and measure acute and obtuse angles of shapes, and lower attaining pupils draw shapes with a given number of sides. They learn the names of many 2-D shapes.

105. Mathematics contributes well to the moral and social development of pupils. Staff provide good role models and many activities encourage taking turns, working together, co-operating and thinking about the needs of others. The vast majority of pupils are very well managed and attitudes to work and behaviour are very good in lessons. This is because work is set to meet individual needs and motivates and challenges pupils. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is never less than good and often very good. In the Year 6 class, attitudes to mathematics work were noted to be excellent. They worked with the same enthusiasm as the teacher and support staff and tried hard to reach their targets in lessons. Relationships between pupils and pupils and staff are very good. Learning support assistants make a very positive contribution in most numeracy sessions seen. They know the pupils very well and work with teachers as an effective team, especially during the group work which forms the main part of the numeracy sessions. Changes in activities are well timed and managed by most teachers.

106. The co-ordinator has plans to improve the tracking of progress for groups of pupils next year, including those pupils from ethnic minority groups and those who speak English as an additional language. Inspectors found that these pupils did just as well as others. Higher and lower attaining pupils' progress is tracked very well through individual educational plans and through statutory assessment tests. Homework is set for some pupils whose parents request it. However, the school could be more proactive in this respect. Information technology is used to support pupils' learning, but in too many classes it is used as an extension activity rather than being integral to the learning. The school has good plans to remedy this situation once technical difficulties at the school have been addressed.

SCIENCE

107. Pupils' achievements in science are better than they were at the time of the last inspection in 1998. They are now good throughout the school. Higher attaining pupils in Year 6 are now attaining standards in line with or above those of their mainstream peers. The rise in pupils' achievements is clearly related to improvements in the quality of teaching and planning.

108. In 1998 teaching was rated as satisfactory. At the time of this inspection, in the ten lessons seen, it was good in five lessons, excellent in one, very good in one and satisfactory in the rest. The school's science policy and schemes of work have been updated to more closely match the needs of all pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language. The schemes of work help teachers plan precisely the skills and concepts to be taught in each key stage over the year, and in each term and each week. This focus on planning, together with the rise in quality of teaching, has helped pupils at all levels make good progress, in relation both to targets set in their individual education plans and to the broken down targets that teachers use to assess and record gains in science skills, knowledge and understanding. An analysis of pupils' work, annual reviews and their work on display in classrooms during the inspection confirmed the overall progress made by pupils during their time in the school. However, the good progress seen for pupils up to the age of seven and by the end of their time in school was not always evident in every class. The headteacher and the subject co-ordinator monitor teachers' planning and records and are aware that some aspects of the schemes of work are not implemented consistently in every class. Plans are in hand for the subject co-ordinator to be released from her timetable on a regular basis to observe all colleagues' science lessons at first hand. This should help ensure continuity in the progress pupils make as they move up the school and should help raise standards even further.

109. By the age of seven, pupils have been systematically introduced to all elements of the National Curriculum and the high attaining pupils are working in line with or above those expected of their mainstream peers in all areas of science. Pupils respond to suggestions about how to find things out by collecting evidence and making measurements and observations in order to answer questions set by the teacher. They are guided into looking at life processes and living things by testing in a controlled way the conditions needed for seeds to germinate, for example. During the inspection, pupils followed up earlier work on germination by planting sunflower seeds and drawing up charts to record growth. Teachers and learning support staff used appropriate technical vocabulary during the lesson, taking care to ensure that pupils at all ability levels, and those with English as an additional language, understood. Pupils were introduced to the names of the main parts of plants and the need to observe changes very closely. Most pupils make a good start in acquiring investigative skills and the higher attaining pupils learnt to say whether what they found out was expected. However, the learning experiences provided by teachers are so carefully worked out that they tend to leave few chances for the children to raise their own questions, test out their own hypotheses, make errors and learn from their own mistakes.

110. By the age of 11, both high and low attaining pupils are learning to make generalisations about what they find out when they carry out experiments. For example, they talk about the need for 'fair test' and the need to ensure that 'things that can change' are held constant. In a lesson seen during the inspection about materials and their properties, pupils investigated the suspension of weights using various grades of elastic bands. They worked out that comparisons would only be fair if the same weight was used with the various grades of elastic bands, or if different weights were used with the same type of elastic band. Most of the pupils used correct scientific terms such as 'forces' when describing their work and recording their observations. Pupils made excellent use of digital cameras during the lesson, photographing the weights and elastic bands and the results of

their investigation. They entered their photographs into a class computer, adjusted the size of the images and printed copies to use in their own books to record the lesson and their investigation. Children who speak English as an additional language are fully involved in lessons and a bilingual learning assistant ensures that they correctly follow instructions and guidance. Discussions with pupils after the lesson indicated that even the low attaining pupils confidently explain their conclusions in their own words on the basis of their own investigation.

111. Despite the severe behavioural difficulties presented by some of the children, most teachers are skilful in managing their classes. Sensory approaches for the lowest attaining pupils allow them to concentrate effectively and contribute well to the rate at which they learn. Cue cards are immediately used to facilitate communication and to refocus the attention of pupils when the challenging behaviour of a few of their peers is a distraction. Teachers have a clear grasp of the standards that pupils should be achieving and there is evidence of more challenging work being provided for the higher attaining pupils. Teachers have high expectations, especially of what pupils are capable of learning, and this has a positive impact on the progress that pupils make. Teachers and learning support staff expect pupils at all ability levels to learn how to use appropriate scientific terms correctly, and they offer plenty of opportunities for pupils to discuss their learning. However, a scrutiny of pupils' past work, and that displayed in the classroom, suggests that materials prepared by the teacher and the school-produced worksheets are used too much. This reduces the opportunities for pupils to suggest ways in which experiments might be carried out, and to develop the skill of extended personal writing. It is clear that the calculations children make in science, for example, in working out the proportionate weight of objects, is making a valuable contribution to the development of numeracy. Teachers now need to provide more opportunities for science lessons to contribute to the development of pupils' literacy skills.

112. Resources are good and are used well to stimulate interest and to teach specific scientific skills. For example, pupils in both key stages have access to a range of magnets and they enjoy finding out for themselves the materials that magnets attract. Teachers expect pupils to look after resources and to work carefully and safely. Pupils respond well in lessons and act responsibly during practical tasks. Despite the difficulties and problems that some pupils have, all enjoy science lessons and are enthusiastic in their learning. They are interested, listen attentively and work carefully in class. The inspection evidence fully supports the view expressed by parents at the consultation evening prior to the inspection that their children love science, and that there many practical activities in which children can show what they know and can do.

ART

113. Pupils' achievement in art is very good. This is a very good improvement since the 1998 inspection, when standards were found to be sound. The school has improved its planning and this has supported teaching and learning.

114. Most pupils join the school with very limited experience of making marks on paper, and with underdeveloped manipulative skills. As they move through the school, higher attaining pupils make impressive gains in observational drawing and composition. Pupils with more complex needs develop their choices and make marks on paper with support. When a pupil has complex needs but a particular drawing skill, staff are adept at encouraging and developing this.

115. Teaching of this subject is very good. Judgements are based on the eight lessons seen during the inspection and a scrutiny of pupils' work throughout the school. Teaching in lessons seen was good or better in 100 per cent of lessons and very good in 50 per cent. Very clear and detailed planning supports teachers and ensures that each pupil develops his or her individual skills and understanding. The subject also makes a significant and positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Staff plan to encourage pupils to develop work co-operatively and with increased collaboration as they move through the school. There is a good programme of visits to galleries and the Midlands Art Centre. Additionally, the school recently worked with a community artist who introduced staff and pupils to a new method of mask making.

116. Teachers and support staff have high expectations of pupils. This is exemplified by the use of sketchbooks throughout the school, for pupils to plan and prepare work and try out ideas. Staff plan for pupils to use a wide range of media and techniques and to develop their understanding of the work of well-known artists. Younger pupils experiment with fabric weaving, with support as necessary. As a result pupils produce simple alternate patterns, but also begin to associate colour and mood. For example, they describe colours that remind them of a sunny or rainy day. They decide that blues look more 'rainy' and yellows more 'sunny'. In Year 2 pupils observe fruit and vegetables closely. Most produce careful and detailed sketches of segments, working for an extended period of time and sustaining their concentration impressively. They add colour carefully and accurately, evaluate their own work sensibly, and seek to improve it.

117. Staff plan clear and suitable goals for pupils with complex needs. A sensory approach meets their individual needs. For example, pupils in Years 2 and 3, participate well in matching coloured paper of different textures. In Years 4 and 5, pupils show choice and preference of colour and texture. With support they explore paint mixtures with their fingers. Staff continue to have high expectations and teach skills and techniques well. In Year 5 pupils are inspired to use a paintbrush to reproduce the style of impressionist paintings. Older pupils have very good opportunities to observe the natural world. Consequently in Year 6, higher attaining pupils first closely observe and sketch fruit, then use this work to design their own ceramic tile. Throughout the school, art is planned to support other subjects. For example, when older pupils produce work in the style of Mondrian, they also consolidate their understanding of geometric shapes. When pupils in Year 4 produce portraits of Anglo-Saxon people, they reinforce their historical understanding. They produce confident and imaginative illustrations of 'Jubjub' birds, inspired by their study of Lewis Carroll's 'Jabberwocky' poem.

118. Behaviour is always managed very well for the vast majority of pupils. Attitudes to art are always at least good and often very good in lessons. Pupils put in considerable creative effort to achieve the best they can. However, a very small minority does not have consistent access to art lessons because behaviour management strategies are limited. Most pupils clearly enjoy the subject and benefit from its contribution to enhancing their self-esteem, social skills and other areas of learning.

119. The co-ordinator provides good leadership for the subject. There are plans for her to monitor the teaching in the subject as part of her professional development. The school would benefit from sharing the good practice in other special schools to build on the sensory approach already used at the school.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

120. Judgements about teaching and learning are based on scrutiny of work and observations of four lessons. Standards of achievement in design and technology are satisfactory up to the age of seven, but there is insufficient evidence to make a judgement about standards and teaching and learning by the age of 11. All pupils by the age of seven make at least satisfactory progress in lessons in relation to their prior attainment, including those who speak English as an additional language. Standards have been maintained since the last inspection for the younger pupils.

121. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall for pupils up to the age of seven. It was satisfactory in two lessons out of the three seen for pupils of this age. Teachers' plan clearly and are well prepared for lessons seen in both key stages. They know the pupils' capabilities well and lessons build on previous learning of skills and understanding of the subject. New vocabulary is explained and exemplified in lessons through the use of well-chosen resources. Consequently, pupils broaden their understanding of a range of subject-related vocabulary. For example, pupils in mixed ability Year 1 class investigated and discussed a variety of foods in order to design a healthy sandwich for themselves. Higher attaining pupils described the taste and texture of foods and selected components for a healthy sandwich choosing from a variety of fillings. They talked about their ideas, using the concepts of 'like' and 'dislike'. Sensitive support and verbal prompting complemented a sensory approach for lower attaining pupils. This enabled them to taste a wider range of foods and with verbal prompts to select fillings.

122. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to use their literacy skills in design technology lessons in the Year 2 mixed ability class. Pupils used labels to make a list of the materials and equipment needed to make an Easter egg container. This enabled them to learn to read words used in the instructions, and made it easier for them to follow the simple instructions given. All pupils were encouraged to finish their boxes in their own style by designing their own decorations. Thus, higher attaining pupils discussed and completed original designs for finishing Easter egg containers. Clear instructions and demonstrations for lower attaining pupils in this mixed ability class ensures they learn new skills, such as those needed to make papier-mâché Easter egg containers.

123. Lower attaining pupils with additional complex needs up to the age of eight, were provided with a good range of hats for investigation. This improved their ability to make choices and to tolerate hats being worn. It also widened their general knowledge of which person would wear them in different occupations. The teacher gave a good commentary and asked suitable questions of individuals. This successfully moved the majority of these pupils on in their understanding. Good numeracy links are made when pupils are given opportunities to match four hats to four people with one to one correspondence. However, the lowest attaining pupils' recording of work is not always suitable. Good use is made of digital cameras to record pupils' choices, but some recording methods do not give a true record of pupils' understanding of the task.

124. One teacher of Year 4 pupils reviewed on-going work very well at the beginning of a lesson. She encouraged pupils to be critical about their work and offered suggestions and practical support when necessary and this improved the quality of sewing skills and designs. They made mats and bags using different coloured threads and sizes of needles to create a variety of stitching, having generated an original design for decorating their work.

125. Pupils' attitudes to work and behaviour are satisfactory overall. Praise and encouragement were a strong feature of lessons and most pupils consequently showed confidence, patience and concentration. Pupils asked for help when needed and the lowest attaining pupils' needs were met through demonstration and sensitive support. In all lessons observed, pupils showed interest and enjoyment in the activities. Teachers and support staff provide a relaxed atmosphere and encourage relevant discussion so that pupils have good opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills. Talk is also related to familiar happenings at home, so pupils develop conversational skills as they carry out their sewing activities. However, teachers of pupils with more complex learning needs are inconsistent in their management of pupils in design and technology lessons. Pupils are not always moved from one activity to another using methods adopted by the school. For example, one child was lifted and carried to an activity rather than the teacher using symbols to communicate what was next.

126. Pupils in Year 6 are offered good opportunities to work on group and individual projects. Their design books used in English lessons also promote learning in the subject. For example, pupils in Year 6 learnt to read and follow instructions and communicated their original designs and plans through writing very well. Teachers promote cultural development through the subject. For example, pupils investigated the activities of the Chinese New Year through stories, video footage and research, using information technology, before using the information to design and make Chinese New Year cards with moving parts.

127. A newly appointed co-ordinator is currently reviewing schemes of work. At present these lack breadth and relevance to some pupils given the wide range of ability within some classes.

HUMANITIES (GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY)

128. Achievements in humanities are good and improved since the last inspection in 1998, when they were found to be satisfactory. Higher and lower attaining pupils are making good progress in relation to their prior attainment. There is not enough evidence to make a secure judgement about the progress of pupils with more complex needs. The lessons planned for these pupils were taught outside of the inspection time.

129. Teaching and learning have improved and are now good overall. They are good or better in four out of the six lessons seen and satisfactory in the rest. What is best about most of the teaching is the way teachers plan to meet individual pupils' literacy and communication needs in the subject. Therefore, the objectives set by teachers in most lessons ensure pupils are making progress towards their individual educational plans. Pupils record their work using a sentence builder system that has been designed by the school. It uses a key vocabulary of whole words that are provided by the teacher. For example, after learning about Alexander Bell inventing the telephone, one lower attaining pupil in Year 2 ordered the words and symbols to make the sentences 'Alexander made the telephone.' 'People wrote letters first', with support. A higher attaining pupil generated and wrote the sentence 'Alexander Graham Bell make sending messages faster and easier.' The sentence, although not grammatically correct, was punctuated correctly.

130. The co-ordinators have ensured there is a good range of resources to match the units of work. These are used well in lessons and help pupils to enquire about life in the past. Support staff, including the bilingual support, are deployed well to help the lower attaining pupils and those who speak English as an additional language. For example, in Year 2, a short piece of video footage was used effectively to help pupils to compare how children were taught to write in Victorian school days with today's children. The teacher then showed writing tools from the past and from today. She gave a short explanation and demonstration about how they were used. Well-briefed support staff knew the questions to ask the pupils and supported them if they had problems with the vocabulary. This helped the higher attaining pupils to confidently sort pictures of the artefacts into 'new' and 'old', and lower attaining pupils to name the tools used.

131. Teachers of older pupils plan lessons that combine the skills, knowledge and understanding in history, geography, religious education and art. This gives pupils a broader picture of life today and in the past, and improves their general knowledge. For example, when studying the Egyptian empire in Year 3, they learn to place Egypt on the world map as well as learning about life in the past on the river Nile. They use clay to make an Egyptian sarcophagus. Pupils in Year 4 showed a good depth of knowledge about the ancient religions of Egypt and Greece during discussions about beliefs, which they had obviously retained from their studies in Year 3.

132. The development of map skills is effectively planned throughout the school and helps pupils to practise their numeracy and literacy skills. By the age of seven, higher attaining pupils mark a route on a simple map and understand a bird's eye view. By the age of eight, they use simple co-ordinates to find places on a simple scaled map and learn to use instructions, such as, 'walk one kilometre south west from the cave, start to dig at grid reference 2010.' Lower attaining pupils draw their own maps and use a simple key. Teachers provide maps on a variety of scales, as pupils get older. By the age of 11, during a local studies project, higher attaining pupils learn to use an A to Z of Birmingham to locate

their home. They write their addresses independently, some with a joined script, and then place their address on a large Ordnance Survey map using grid references. Lower attaining pupils and those who speak English as an additional language learn to write and remember their addresses, and postal areas, and label features of the locality today and in the past. They are then sensitively supported to locate them on the maps. Digital cameras are used well by older pupils and teachers. Photographs taken are then used effectively to discover about the local area, to support surveys of local businesses or to help lower attaining pupils to consolidate their knowledge of geographical features, for example.

133. In lessons that are otherwise sound, planning is better than the teaching. Teachers talk too much in lessons and the planning is not fully carried out. Pupils listen to stories well, but opportunities are missed for them to develop questions about history or to answer open-ended questions. Therefore they do not develop their speaking skills or make more than satisfactory gains in learning about history.

134. Behaviour and pupils' attitudes to lessons in humanities are good overall. They are very good when teachers have planned questions and written work that match the priority needs of pupils, in Year 6 and Year 2, for example. Occasionally, one or two younger lower attaining pupils in the class taken by a supply teacher were not managed well enough when moved from one activity to another. In one older class, the materials given to lower attaining pupils, for recording what they know and understand, were too difficult for them to use without considerable support. In these lessons pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory.

135. The school has improved its planning for the subject and this is now supporting most teaching. The co-ordinators regularly monitor planning for most classes. A member of the senior management team monitors planning for pupils with more complex needs. They need to work more closely together to ensure all pupils' needs are fully met. The emphasis for pupils with more complex needs is on learning key vocabulary for geography and the passage of time in the school day. This is very relevant. However, the rationale for teaching these subjects to pupils with more complex needs is based on a rather narrow interpretation of the National Curriculum programmes of study. The school must ensure these activities take place in age appropriate contexts. The co-ordinators have plans for a further review of documentation in the light of new government guidance. In addition, the school has plans, as part of the evaluation of co-ordinators' performance, to allow the co-ordinators to be released from teaching so that rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning can take place. This should raise standards further for all pupils.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

136. There have been exciting developments in provision for this subject in the school since the last inspection. ICT is now being given higher priority; the quantity of hardware and software has increased enormously, and the policy and schemes of work focus more pointedly on progressive gains in skills, knowledge and understanding. The school has opened an ICT suite containing desktop computers, six laptops, A3 printers and a scanner. Every class in the school has two computers, one a multi-media set, and a colour printer for each machine. There is one digital camera for every two classes and teachers may use the ICT suite's laptops in classroom-based lessons. As a result of attending courses and being able to call upon the advice of a school-based technician, teachers now have greater subject

knowledge and skill in using equipment. They are much more confident and competent and are beginning to use ICT more regularly across the curriculum. All classes are networked, with at least one computer connected to the Internet. However, there was a software failure during the week of the inspection and the school was not able to capitalise on the heavy investment it has made in terms of resources. The headteacher is determined that ICT is not to be regarded simply as another teaching tool. Rather, it is to be used more strategically than at the time of the last inspection to consolidate and extend pupils' knowledge and to enhance the standards they reach in many areas of learning.

137. ICT is co-ordinated by the headteacher and a teacher who has recently been given responsibility for the subject. In keeping with principles of best value, where schools challenge themselves to update their provision, the headteacher is encouraging the latest elements of technology to be used. Resources have improved very significantly since the last inspection and there are ambitious plans to make extensive use of the Birmingham Grid for Learning in lessons. The school has the services of a well-qualified technician and possesses lots of high quality software and hardware to help teachers deliver all elements of the National Curriculum. All equipment is securely stored.

138. The school has developed its own analysis of developmental skills in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. This sets out a sequence of skills to be acquired by each child, and lists the software to be used to achieve objectives. At the bottom of the continuum, is the description: 'Touches switch/mouse but is unaware of the effects this has on the screen/program.' At the other end of the continuum comes: 'Can click and hold down to drag items on the screen.' Such carefully sequenced provision helps children make a good start and helps them to progress. Children entering Reception classes are quickly introduced to using computers as part of their everyday work, for example putting numbers in order and learning place value in mathematics. Records are kept at the side of each computer of the children who have had a turn that day and of the work they have done. An inspection of such records suggests that ICT programs are frequently used to hone literacy skills such as spelling, and numeracy skills such as number bond manipulation. By the age of seven, most pupils, including those with special needs and English as an additional language, have developed appropriate levels of ICT skill and save, retrieve and print work, sometimes without the help of adults. Some higher attaining pupils know how to access menus in CD-ROM packages and how to close and open programs. Pupils have acquired important keyboard and mouse skills and are comfortable in using programs and printing out their work. However, there is some unevenness between classes and some computers were switched on but not used for lengthy periods each day during the inspection.

139. The ICT achievements of many pupils in Years 5 and 6 are in line with those of mainstream pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 nationally. All pupils, including high and low attaining pupils and those with English as an additional language, are used to working with computers routinely in lessons. Examination of pupils' work booklets during the inspection revealed that higher attaining pupils are taking responsibility for their own learning. Many select pictorial information from various sources, prepare it into a form suitable for processing, enter it into a computer and then print it out. In one lesson, pupils took digital photographs of features of one another's faces, entered these into a computer, adjusted the scale of the images, selected images they liked and assembled them into 'new' faces. They

then printed these out and achieved unusual 'x-ray' effects by printing out sections in photographic negative form. However, this exciting use of ICT was not as evident in all lower Key Stage 2 classes during the inspection. In some classrooms, few children were seen using computers, and those who were seen using programs were often rehearsing simple skills, such as changing fonts, or were using the computer to present fair copies of written work.

140. As was also the case at the last inspection, pupils with communication and social difficulties are making sound progress and they are supported by alternative communication systems used by teachers and learning support staff. There is still, however, inconsistency across classes in the use of picture cues, signs and symbols during ICT lessons to promote and assist the language and learning of a few pupils with complex needs. This was apparent in some classes, with learning support staff struggling to keep children on task rather than using communication systems to help pupils to learn. Whereas some Year 6 pupils routinely use laptops to word process in a range of subject areas, pupils in some classes are set more limited lesson objectives. All high and some low attaining Year 6 pupils create files, store, amend and edit text, spell check and manipulate fonts to produce fairly polished documents. In contrast, pupils in some lower Key Stage 2 classes are given little scope to use this expensive equipment to develop their own strategies for learning and studying.

141. Only two ICT lessons were seen during the inspection. One was very good and the other good. Detailed review of teachers' planning and pupils' work on display and in exercise books suggests that teaching is satisfactory overall and in both key stages, but good overall in Years 5 and 6. It is clear that the gains in skills and the positive attitudes evident in Years 5 and 6 could only have been achieved as a result of determined and extensive teaching. Although there are systems in place to monitor gains in pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in Years 5 and 6, monitoring in some lower classes consists mainly of checking coverage and ensuring that all pupils have had their turn on classroom activities. The school now needs to develop procedures for assessing how securely individual pupils in all classes have grasped skills, knowledge and procedures and how well they can explain their ICT actions. It is often hard for inspectors to separate what pupils have learnt in school from what they have learnt at home. This must also apply in the school and will be more directly addressed when more reliable assessment procedures are in place.

142. The school possesses lots of high quality software and hardware to help teachers deliver all elements of the National Curriculum. However, the school is not consistently using it to teach the 'control and monitoring' aspect of the National Curriculum.

MUSIC

143. Judgements are made on the basis of sampling pupils' work on audiotapes and video footage, talking to the co-ordinators and observation of four lessons. Achievements in music are satisfactory overall, but not as good as at the time of the last inspection. This is because there is no longer a specialist teaching music throughout the school. Pupils make very good progress in performance and appreciation of music through movement in physical education lessons, and satisfactory progress in singing. However, they make unsatisfactory progress in learning to play instruments and in the creative aspects of music. They make satisfactory progress in learning about the key vocabulary of music. However, pupils could make better progress overall if teaching was supported by a commercial scheme or by a delegated music

specialist. At present the musicianship of the physical education co-ordinator is used well to support learning of the subject, but many staff do not have the expertise and confidence to teach the subject well enough. There is not enough evidence to make a judgement about the teaching, learning and progress of pupils with complex needs. Lessons for this group of pupils were outside the time of the inspection programme. However, the school does not have the services of a music therapist to support the learning of pupils with more complex needs. Music is not systematically used as an aid to communication for these pupils. There are very few opportunities for the most able pupils to learn to play a tuned instrument and no individual tuition is offered at the school.

144. The quality of teaching and learning of music is satisfactory overall. It was good in two lessons out of the four seen and satisfactory overall in the rest. The quality of teaching is very mixed and some pupils have better opportunities than others to learn about music. Where teachers with an original qualification in the subject, or an enthusiasm for music, teach lessons, the teaching is good. The co-ordinator has worked hard to put a satisfactory scheme of work in place. However, the translation of this scheme into lessons is very dependent on the individual skills, understanding and knowledge of the teachers. There are some very good resources in the school that are not being used well enough in lessons. Even though the co-ordinator has monitored planning, there is an imbalance of activities in some lessons and others do not have a good enough musical focus. For example, in an otherwise satisfactory Year 4 lesson for lower attaining pupils, the objective for the lesson was ‘to respond to a piece of music through poetry.’ Rather than ‘to respond to piece of poetry through music’. This led to the lesson being about composing a poem rather than a musical piece. However, music was listened to well and pupils did learn to appreciate the mood created by Rimsky Korsakov in the piece ‘The Shipwreck’ from ‘Scherzade’. In a Year 2 lesson, too much emphasis was placed on learning the musical vocabulary and too little on group performance. Consequently, lower attaining pupils learnt the meaning of symbols for loud and quiet, and higher attaining pupils gained an understanding of the musical terms ‘tempo’ and ‘pitch’. However, they made few gains in performance because the staff did not give enough guidance on how to play instruments correctly or enough opportunities to explore instruments and to play them following a group symbolic score.

145. In the best lessons the teachers’ knowledge and enthusiasm ensure all pupils have good opportunities to listen and to explore instruments, and to create or perform music as a group. The teachers recall previous learning well at the beginning of lessons and build on it during the lesson. A good selection of instruments is available and pupils are enabled to explore the instruments and make choices based on their suitability for the sound compositions they create. Good routines for making choices and for working as a group are established, so pupils know what they have to do. This ensures no time is wasted and behaviour is good because pupils are putting all their efforts into creating music. In one Year 4 lesson for higher attaining pupils, the teacher exemplified long and short sounds very well through her very good playing of the violin. Pupils listened very attentively and learnt how plucking and bowing could make sounds of different length. Each part of the lesson built towards a group performance with instruments so pupils could show what they understood about tempo and duration. Interesting snippets of information, supported by opportunities to listen and appreciate the work of composers such as Vivaldi enabled pupils to make good progress in their cultural development as well as in their understanding of the term ‘pizzicato’.

146. In Year 6, the enthusiastic teacher works hard to build on previous learning, but many pupils are still at an early stage of exploring the sounds instruments make. This is due to their not having enough opportunities for this type of work at an earlier age. Though they put in considerable effort to create group instrumental pieces in response 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice', performance was well below that expected for higher attaining pupils. Singing was only seen during the assembly and in video footage and was much enjoyed by all pupils. Pupils learn a good range of songs from different times and cultures as they move through the school. There is recorded evidence that higher attaining pupils learn to sing tunefully in rounds and in parts with awareness of others by the time they leave the school. This reflects satisfactory teaching of this aspect of music.

147. The co-ordinator has worked hard to provide support for the non-specialist teachers and has provided them with a supportive scheme and additional material. There are plans for her to extend her monitoring role as part of her professional development. Assessment is secure, but not always used by all teachers to plan for individual needs in lessons. The co-ordinator has ensured some good links with community, which have extended pupils' learning in the subject. For example, links with the Symphony Hall gave pupils opportunities to appreciate and perform Asian and brass band music.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

148. Pupils' achievements in physical education are very good. All pupils make very good progress in personal development and in improving their performance in dance and gymnastics. This is mainly due to the very good specialist teaching they receive. Scrutiny of records shows that pupils made very good progress in swimming. By the age of 11, the vast majority of pupils swim the required distance of 25 metres. There is not enough evidence to make a secure judgement about other areas of physical education. The co-ordinator has maintained the high standards seen at the last inspection.

149. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. During the inspection, teaching and learning were very good in five of the eight lessons seen and good in the rest. All lessons begin with a carefully planned warm-up activity. There is also effective questioning and discussion about the effects of exercise on the body. Consequently, higher attaining pupils by the age of 11 know that during exercise the heart pumps blood around the body faster. Almost all the younger pupils and lower attaining pupils know where to place their hands to feel the heart beating and register that it is beating faster after exercise.

150. The strengths of the teaching are in the teacher's obvious enthusiasm and in the carefully planned routines that have been successfully established. Good demonstrations and simplified instructions complement this approach. Learning support assistants work effectively with the specialist teacher and this teamwork contributes greatly to effective learning. These approaches ensure that there is always a good pace to lessons and that no time is wasted in managing behaviour. Pupils are on the whole very keen to take part in physical education lessons and try very hard to sustain physical effort. They delight in the successes they achieve. They listen well to instructions and often work independently or in pairs and small groups. High quality certificates and awards are presented to pupils in assemblies. Every week a 'sport class of the week award' is presented as well as a 'fish of the week' to pupils who make significant progress in swimming. These help all pupils to celebrate their sporting successes.

151. A wide range of multi-cultural music is used very effectively to promote pupils' cultural development and to help pupils to join a number of set movements into a range of dance or gymnastic motifs. The youngest pupils move with control to contemporary music or favourite music from films. Higher attaining pupils learn to link travelling movements to a standing balance and final jump with a presentation finish on simple apparatus. Lower attaining pupils travel along a bench and step off. They travel using an increasing number of body parts as the lesson progresses. The very good use of music is exemplified in a Year 3 lesson where pupils warmed up as a group to 'Circle Jig', performing a simple traditional English dance. They extended the range of dances known by listening and watching a simple demonstration of rock and roll. The short, simplified instructions accompanied by demonstration enabled pupils to partner dance to the rhythm of the music. The teacher is skilful at intervening when pupils need more help and sets increasing yet small challenges as the lessons progress. This ensures all pupils, whatever their ability learn new moves. A contrasting piece, 'JC 2000', which encouraged flowing and slower movements, engaged pupils in linking their own movements to create an individual dance that reflected the mood of the music. Pupil demonstrations and the teacher's critical evaluations and praise ensured that the quality of movements and pupils' confidence increased as the lesson progressed. This choice of a slower piece of music also allowed a gradual cool down to the lesson without losing momentum. All lessons finish with a time to relax and listen to a favourite piece and this prepares pupils to move quietly to the next lesson.

152. As they move through the school, pupils are given very good opportunities to practise, improve and refine their performances. By the age of 11, high attaining pupils understand gymnastics is a performance sport and describe movements using the correct terms when evaluating their work. They interpret music with an impressive range of quite complex and imaginative movements that show greater control and fluidity. Low attaining pupils move to music sensing the spirit and mood it evokes. Pupils learn to perform in front of an audience at a local dance festival

153. By the time they leave school, pupils have participated in a range of games. These include cricket, football, and basketball. Trampoline skills are also taught, as well as outdoor and adventurous activities on day and residential experiences. Horse riding has a regular slot on the timetable.

154. The majority of pupils with complex communication needs make similar progress to their peers in relation to their prior attainment. Planning for most of these pupils is good. It is individualised yet still offers opportunities to work in small groups and with a partner. Often the partner is another adult who guides and supports pupils through the activities presented. Music is again used well to establish routines and to enable the pupils to communicate their feelings through movement. A few pupils find working in a group and in the hall very difficult, even with very good support from staff. However, the school could improve its approach for the lowest attaining pupils by working more closely with a range of therapists to define goals and strategies within individual educational plans. More use could be made of explicit cues in some sessions to help pupils make the transition from one activity to another.

155. The subject is very well led, managed and co-ordinated. The programme is planned in half-termly modules over six years. The selection of activities is highly relevant to the needs of the pupils and is enriched by the use of facilities in the community. Linking physical education work with local mainstream schools will ensure a more inclusive approach in the future. This is an area for improvement planned at the time of the inspection. Satisfactory use is made of other professionals to inform detailed lesson planning.

156. Learning resources have improved greatly since the last inspection supplemented by 'Top Play' equipment. The school has a very good range and quantity of quality equipment. The accommodation is satisfactory and every effort has been made to use what is available to the very best effect. The range of after school activities and residential outdoor pursuits trips makes an important contribution to pupils' physical, social and moral development. Staff give their time to support these ventures. Overall the very good quality of physical education has been maintained well since the last inspection.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

157. Achievements in religious education are satisfactory overall. Standards are not as good as at the last inspection in 1998. The school has adopted the Locally Agreed Birmingham Syllabus and its proposed scheme of work and attainment targets. In those mixed ability classes in which teachers keep to the Syllabus, all pupils' achievements in religious education are good and pupils make good progress. However, religious education is not regularly timetabled in classes for pupils with more complex needs and some teachers in other classes regard the subject as being part of the personal and social education programme. Pupils in these classes do take part in weekly assemblies, with the emphasis on Christianity, and celebrate festivals of other faiths. There are some good lessons of personal and social education, which focus on developing pupils' self-awareness and their relationships with their peers. However, it cannot be said that all pupils in the school have the same opportunities as others to learn about and from religion. This is an issue that the school should address and resolve.

158. Teaching seen during the inspection ranged from satisfactory to very good and is satisfactory overall. Out of the five lessons seen two were very good, one was good and the rest were satisfactory. In lessons that are imaginatively prepared, learning is exciting and fun, pupils are well motivated and they make good progress. A close scrutiny of teachers' plans and the wall displays in classrooms reveals that pupils are introduced to key celebrations of various world faiths. For example, all staff and pupils dressed up for the Hindu feast of Diwali. Most pupils had also prepared wall displays to celebrate the Chinese New Year and to illustrate major principles of the Sikh religion. Pupils during their time at the school have visited a local Hindu temple, a Sikh gurdwara, a mosque and a Christian church. Plans to visit a synagogue are in hand. Pupils in Year 6 remember the key celebrations of Hinduism and Christianity and have some awareness of Sikh religious practices.

159. High and low attaining pupils and those who speak English as an additional language are very interested in the activities that have been built into the scheme of work. These focus pupils' attention on how people from different religious backgrounds view aspects of everyday life. The emphasis on social and moral issues, such as the need to consider how one's actions impact on others, helps promote pupils' personal development. Such issues

were clearly cast against a religious education background in mixed ability or higher attaining classes in Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 in the religious education lessons seen during the inspection. However, in one or two lessons, there were lost opportunities to discuss moral and social issues in a religious context. For example, in a Year 1 lesson, pupils discussed friendship very well after being read a moral story and pupils showed a good awareness of the benefits of friendship. However, because the teacher did not use a religious story, there were lost opportunities to discover how different religions view this important aspect of life. This is a pity, since the quality of discussion in some lessons was exceptional and some pupils demonstrated that they had lots to offer and share with others.

160. Pupils' relationships with staff and with other pupils are generally excellent, and they are tolerant of the fact that in every class in the school there are children from religious backgrounds different to their own. The best teachers consider ways to capitalise on this asset when preparing lessons. For example, in a Year 4 lesson for higher attaining pupils, pupils had very good opportunities to discuss their religious beliefs and ceremonies in relation to birth, manhood and death. They expounded their very different beliefs and rituals exceptionally well, listening and considering each other's ideas and views carefully and sympathetically.

161. The school has a good supply of resources that are very well organised. However, they are not always used as well as they could be, to make learning relevant and alive for pupils, for example. Separate boxes of artefacts are kept for the Jewish, Christian, Moslem, Sikh and Hindu faiths, together with accompanying large books, but few were seen in use during the time of the inspection. Arrangements are made for visits to the school from people from a range of world faiths. It is clear that strong links have been developed with local centres of worship and this has the potential to contribute to pupils' social and multicultural development.

162. Pupils are enthusiastic about religious education. Attitudes to the subject and behaviour in lessons are now very good overall. Older higher attaining pupils are beginning to ask searching questions about the celebrations associated with the faiths they encounter in their local community. All pupils in lessons showed a growing respect for others' feelings, beliefs and values.

163. A sound basis has been established to support future developments to promote pupils' learning and progress in religious education. The school now needs to appoint a subject co-ordinator and give him or her timetable release to ensure that there is continuity and progression in all pupils' learning. The subject co-ordinator will need to bring together the abilities of a very skilful staff in the school and a scheme of work that calls for teachers to have good subject knowledge and insights into the difficulties that autistic pupils experience in religious education. Some teachers need further training in this area so they may use the good resources more effectively in lessons.