

INSPECTION REPORT

MESTY CROFT PRIMARY SCHOOL

Wednesbury, West Midlands

LEA area: Sandwell

Unique reference number: 103907

Headteacher: Mr. Graham Speller

Reporting inspector: Mrs. Brenda Iles
12000

Dates of inspection: 22 – 25 May 2000

Inspection number: 194460

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Infant and junior

School category: Foundation

Age range of pupils: 3 - 11

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: St. Luke's Road
Wednesbury
West Midlands

Postcode: WS10 0QY

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Appropriate authority: Governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr. Mark Postans

Date of previous inspection: January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Brenda Iles	Registered inspector	Art	What sort of school is it?
			The school's results and achievements
			How well are pupils taught?
			How well is the school led and managed?
Richard Barnard	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
			How well does the school care for its pupils?
Judy Dawson	Team inspector	Science	How good are the curricular and other opportunities?
		Geography	
		Music	
Judy Ruff	Team inspector	Equal opportunities	
		Information technology	
		Design and technology	
		Physical education	
David Hill	Team inspector	English as an additional language	
		English	
		History	
		Religious education	
Vivien Davies	Team inspector	Areas of learning for children under five	
		Special educational needs	
		Mathematics	

The inspection contractor was:

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	12
The school's results and achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?	15
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS?	17
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	20
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	21
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	22
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	26
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	31

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Mesty Croft Primary school is situated in the Mesty Croft area of Wednesbury and serves the local community. There are currently 382 pupils who range from three to eleven years old, of whom 78 children attend the nursery on a part time basis. The school is larger than most primary schools. Attainment when children start school is below that normally expected of most four year olds and well below in literacy. Seventy-nine pupils have special needs, two of whom have statements, which is about average. Just under 10 per cent of pupils come from non-European backgrounds, of whom 15 speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who receive free school meals is about 20 per cent but the level of entitlement is higher than this figure suggests.

The school has recently been awarded Beacon status for initial teacher training and the arts. It has made a significant contribution to the Wednesbury Education Achievement Zone, which is supporting the education of pupils in the area.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This school is effectively improving standards. There is a good team spirit to move the school forward and the aims of the school are underpinned by a strong ethos. Pupils enjoy school and work hard. The happy learning atmosphere supports life long learning for parents and community members who are included in projects to encourage them to raise the expectations of their children. Good leadership and good teaching support the achievements. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching is of good quality.
- The literacy and numeracy strategies are successfully raising standards
- The partnership with parents is strong and supports life long learning.
- The school is well led and managed and there is a caring learning ethos.
- Pupils are well behaved.
- Art is a strength of the curriculum.
- Homework supports learning very well.
- There are very good links with other schools and the playgroup.

What could be improved

- Standards are not yet high enough in writing and science in the infants.
- Standards in information technology and speaking are too low.
- Governors do not play a full enough role in decision making.
- The organisation of the curriculum hinders progress in some subjects.
- Curriculum co-ordinators do not have opportunities to monitor and evaluate their subjects.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the school was last inspected in January 1997, the quality of teaching has improved and teachers now have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. Standards in English, mathematics and science are now higher than they were at the age of eleven. The school has successfully implemented the national literacy and numeracy initiatives and contributed to local developments. Staff development opportunities are now good and the Initial Teaching Training provision is effectively influencing the quality of teaching.

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues raised in the last report. Curriculum policies and schemes of work have been developed and are under regular review. Planning is now of good quality. Senior staff have begun to monitor standards and there is a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the provision but opportunities for co-ordinators to monitor the teaching of their subjects have not improved since the last inspection. The school development plan is now of good quality and addresses a realistic number of well focused priorities.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	All schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
English	E	C	C	B	well above A average above B average C below average D well below E average
Mathematics	E*	B	D	C	
Science	E*	D	D	C	

Trends over the last three years show that standards are improving. By the age of eleven pupils' achievements in English are better than those of pupils in similar schools. In mathematics and science they are about the same. The most recent year 2000 unconfirmed test results for pupils aged 11 indicate a continuing upward trend. Inspection evidence and Year 2000 national tests for seven-year-olds also show a good improvement from the 1999 figures in English, mathematics and science with a larger proportion of pupils achieving average and higher than average levels. The targets set by the school for this year have been exceeded but were not high enough.

Standards in information technology, speaking and design and technology are below the expected levels across the school; in art they are above and this is an area of strength in the school. Standards in writing, science and geography are below those of most seven-year-olds. By the age of eleven standards in geography are well below those expected. Standards in religious education, physical education, music and history are about average.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Children like school and most pupils are eager to learn. They usually concentrate well in lessons. A small number of pupils who find it hard to concentrate are well managed.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Pupils are well behaved in lessons and in the playground. Bullying is rare and pupils say isolated incidents are dealt with effectively. Pupils are polite and welcome visitors.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are good. Pupils help each other and show respect for adults and the views of others. They cooperate well and value the good humour in the school which makes learning fun.
Attendance	Attendance has improved and has very recently matched the national average.

Staff know pupils well and provide good support to enable them to achieve their best, raise self esteem and ensure everyone is valued. Regular poor attendance of a small proportion of pupils adversely affects their learning. In addition, too many holidays are taken in term time.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years	aged 7-11 years
Lessons seen overall	Satisfactory	Good	Good

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

Teaching is a strength of the school and is effectively raising attainment, particularly in English and mathematics, which are generally taught well. In one third of lessons teaching is at least very good and in a further third it is good. The remainder is mainly satisfactory though there are isolated examples of unsatisfactory teaching in each stage of learning. Teaching is strongest in one reception class and classes of pupils in Years 5 and 6 where the practice is very good. Expectations are particularly high in the juniors and planning is of good quality in all age groups. Teachers' good knowledge of pupils enables them to meet the needs of different groups well. Characteristic features of the very small number of unsatisfactory lessons include weak management of pupils and work that is insufficiently challenging.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is suitably broad with a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy. Long gaps of time between the teaching of some subjects adversely affects learning, for example in geography and design and technology.
Provision for pupils with	Pupils' special needs are met well and they benefit from good

special educational needs	support across the curriculum. Their needs are identified at an early stage and targets are well matched to individual difficulties.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Moral and social provision is good; spiritual and cultural is satisfactory. Positive values are promoted effectively and the principles of right and wrong are reinforced through the code of conduct.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils are well cared for and appropriate child protection procedures are in place. Significant emphasis is placed on raising self-esteem.

The partnership with parents is a strength and encourages shared responsibility for pupils' learning. Art is also a significant strength and displays enhance the school.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher and deputy head provide very good leadership and work in close partnership with the senior management team. They are supported well by staff.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	A small number of governors are supportive of the school but rely too heavily on professional staff. They are not sufficiently involved in decision making.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There is a clear direction for future improvements based on the evaluation of pupils' achievements. This is particularly strong in English and mathematics in the junior classes. This information is used effectively to group pupils and to inform discussions held with parents.
The strategic use of resources	Staffing is appropriate and accommodation and resources are well maintained and used.

The school's plans indicate the main priorities over the next three years and are of good quality. The headteacher and staff work together effectively to meet the school's aims but governors do not play a full enough part in the school's work. The involvement of the school in the 'Wednesbury Education Achievement Zone' is supporting learning for the community.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school • Their children make good progress in the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents feel behaviour is not as good as it could be,

<p>important areas of reading, writing and number.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They find it easy to approach the school with problems • Their children are expected to work hard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents would like a broader range of clubs and activities.
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Inspectors support parents' positive views. Behaviour in lessons and in the playground was good during the week of the inspection. A small proportion of pupils who sometimes behave poorly are well managed. While there are few clubs, the use of residential visits and community activities support pupils' learning.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

1. Trends over the last three years indicate that standards are improving. In the 1999 tests for eleven-year-olds pupils attained standards in English that were above those in similar schools. In mathematics and science they were about the same. One pupil achieved Level 6, which is well above the expected level for the age group. When compared to schools nationally, results in English were average and in mathematics and science they were below average. The most recent Year 2000 unconfirmed test results for pupils aged 11 indicate a continuing upward trend in pupils' achievements with one pupil likely to achieve Level 6 in mathematics. Inspection evidence supports this and indicates that pupils will attain average standards by the time they leave the school. Baseline assessment shows that when children start school their attainment is below that of most four-year-olds and in the important area of literacy it is well below. Overall pupils make good progress in learning by the age of eleven.
2. The 1999 national test results for seven-year-olds were well below average in reading, writing and mathematics. Compared to similar schools the results were very low in reading and writing and well below average in mathematics. However, last year's Year 2 contained an unusually high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and very few pupils achieved the higher levels. Although pupils' attainment at seven remains below average in speaking, writing and science, inspection evidence and unconfirmed test results for the Year 2000 both indicate a good improvement from the levels suggested by the 1999 test results. They indicate a substantial improvement in reading, with a quarter of pupils gaining the higher Level 3. In mathematics and science a larger proportion of pupils are now achieving average and higher than average levels but there remains room for further improvement in writing; almost half the pupils still fail to achieve the nationally expected level.
3. The targets set by the school for this year were not ambitious enough and have been exceeded significantly. Projected targets are under review and are much higher. They show a commitment to continuous improvement and high expectations. There has been a recent improvement in the analysis of assessment information. This is enabling the school to measure more precisely individual gains in pupils' learning to enable targets for each cohort to be set with more accuracy. This information is beginning to be used to identify weaknesses in pupils' performance but has not yet had a full impact. The school has recognised the need to further analyse baseline assessment and assessment information gathered in Year 1 and 2 to provide support for children experiencing difficulties at an early stage and to measure rates of progress. Pupils' national test results are analysed according to gender. Overall, there are no significant differences between the performance of boys and girls although girls perform slightly better than boys.
4. Speaking skills are a weakness across the school. Although pupils are encouraged to express their ideas and opinions in class and group discussions, they are not always prepared to present their work to an audience and lack confidence. When pupils are told in advance that they will be talking to the class at the end of the lesson and receive good quality adult support, they achieve these expectations well, for example one group in a reception class sequenced a story using puppets and through the help of a student teacher spoke in clear, well formed sentences. There are too few planned opportunities for pupils to practice speaking to different audiences and in different styles across the curriculum. When teachers reinforce vocabulary well, for example in art, pupils develop a good understanding of technical terms and use them appropriately when required to

do so. This was evident in a Year 5/6 art lesson when pupils used terms such as 'still life', referred to the artist Cezanne by name and described different types of lines such as sharp, circular and heavy. However, there are too many occasions, for example in numeracy, when language is not sufficiently reinforced and pupils have difficulty using the correct terminology. Speaking skills are higher when teachers expect pupils to use the terms they have introduced and consistently model Standard English in their own speech.

5. Weaknesses in writing in the infants arise from limitations in pupils' ability to express themselves in well-structured sentences. Dialect inhibits spelling accuracy and pupils often write sentences using patterns of speech. This, together with a limited range of vocabulary, inhibits pupils' abilities to write sequences of descriptive sentences that would enable them to achieve more highly. The majority have good awareness of punctuation and present their work neatly. Pupils make satisfactory progress overall and are keen to persevere because teachers give them good encouragement and support. Reading skills are better developed and pupils describe the books they have read from a range of fiction and non-fiction. Pupils are encouraged to make regular visits to the local library and most describe accurately how to locate books and use the index and contents pages in non-fiction texts. Progress in reading is well-monitored and reading homework and the teaching of phonics support raising standards in this aspect well. The parents guide to literacy is a valuable resource which is encouraging home reading.
6. By the time they are eleven pupils read and write for different audiences and purposes. All pupils, including those who have special educational needs, take pride in the presentation of their work at all stages of the drafting process. Regular opportunities for creative writing are timetabled for pupils aged eight to eleven and emphasis is placed on applying the skills taught in the literacy hour to specific writing tasks. Pupils understand the difference between letter writing, poetry, story and reporting and distinguish facts and opinions. However, there are not enough planned opportunities for writing in other subjects. Pupils enjoy reading and talk about their favourite authors and illustrators, for example Roald Dahl and Quentin Blake. They identify preferences for types of books such as science fiction, humorous novels and poems. Pupils access information independently from the library but limitations in information technology facilities inhibit the development of these skills. Literacy skills have been supported well through the literacy hour, which is having a positive impact on standards.
7. Similarly the numeracy strategy is effectively improving pupils' competence in mathematics, with the most noticeable improvements evident in mental mathematics. By the age of seven pupils have a good knowledge of place value and work with number facts to 20 orally adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing using a range of strategies. While pupils' work is mainly appropriately matched to their abilities, there are times when worksheets do not challenge the more able pupils as much as they could. By the time they are eleven they respond rapidly to tables up to 10 and calculate the area of shapes. More able pupils are beginning to use formulas in their calculations and are appropriately challenged. For example, pupils in Year 6 were challenged because their teacher had very high expectations of the use of complicated vocabulary, which was reinforced throughout the lesson and resulted in pupils using the vocabulary to describe their learning during the plenary.
8. In science pupils make sound progress in the infants but teachers' expectations are inconsistent between classes. While some teachers plan opportunities to extend scientific enquiry through challenging and interesting work, others rely too heavily on worksheets for recording and this limits independent discovery. This is especially evident at the end of the infant phase when worksheets are sometimes too difficult for

lower attaining pupils and their work is not always completed. While pupils are taught the correct scientific terms they have difficulty explaining their investigations in coherent sentences. Strengths in learning are pupils' understanding of the effect of forces on materials, for example that pushing or pulling can alter the shape of some materials, their knowledge of how to keep healthy and classification of natural and man-made materials.

9. In the junior years pupils make good progress in science and understand the needs of living things and the reproductive cycle. They make detailed observational drawings of flowers that are accurately labelled and describe the functions of the stigma, stamens and ovary. They have a good knowledge of the function of different parts of their bodies and the importance of oxygen to sustain life. Weaknesses are found in pupils' lack of awareness of environmental issues, and they do not relate their knowledge and understanding to the wider issues of life. This was apparent when pupils described magnetism but could not explain the function of a compass or how it works.
10. Standards in information technology are below the expected levels across the school. This is due to some teachers lacking expertise in teaching the subject. In addition, resources to support the teaching of information technology are limited and pupils' have insufficient regular access to computers. Information technology does not receive the teaching emphasis it should across the curriculum as a core subject. Pupils who have computers at home make the best gains in learning; those who have not are supported through a computer club. The school is aware of the deficiencies and ambitious plans are in place through the Education Achievement Zone funding. Standards in design and technology and geography are below those of most seven-year-olds. By the age of eleven standards in geography are well below those of most eleven-year-olds. The gaps in time between spells of teaching in these subjects are too long and pupils have difficulty remembering what they have learned. This results in reviewing work already covered and slows down progress, particularly for older pupils. Pupils' achieve standards in art that are above the expected levels for seven and eleven-year-olds and this is a strength of the school. Achievements in religious education meet the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus and in physical education, music and history they are appropriate across the age range.
11. Overall standards in English, mathematics, science, art and physical education have improved since the last report. Standards in other subjects are similar except in geography where they have fallen. More detailed descriptions of pupils' achievements in subjects are included in Part D of the report.
12. The school makes good provision for pupils with special educational needs and due to the good support of classroom assistants they make good gains in learning by the age of eleven. While pupils receive good support in the earlier stages of their learning specific needs are not identified early enough to enable more precise targets to be set in individual educational plans. Overall, the needs of more able and less able pupils are well met by the age of eleven and the proportions of pupils who now achieve average and above average levels are an indication of the school's commitment to raising expectations.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

13. The high standards shown by pupils throughout the school in relation to attitudes, values and personal development have a positive impact on their academic achievements. Standards have been maintained at the level reported in the previous inspection.
14. Pupils like school and enjoy their learning. This was evident in the majority of lessons. In about one third of lessons attitudes were very good or excellent and in a further half they were good. Pupils respond well to teachers' strong encouragement to succeed; they usually concentrate well to meet their teachers' expectations. The small number of pupils who find it hard to concentrate are managed well by staff. The youngest pupils make good progress in developing their personal confidence and social skills. Many enter the nursery with skills well below the expected level but as they move through nursery and reception class they learn to take turns, play with each other, and be kind to others. By Year 6 pupils' attitudes to work are very good. They concentrate and apply themselves to work very hard and this has a positive impact on their achievements. In a swimming lesson many pupils showed real delight and increasing confidence as their effort was rewarded with significant improvement in performance. Pupils' keen response to art has a positive impact on standards throughout the school, for example when Year 1 pupils are fully engaged in still life drawing, working closely with a parent.
15. The behaviour of pupils in lessons, assemblies, around the school and in the playground is good. No incidents of aggressive behaviour or bullying were observed during the inspection. Pupils say occurrences are rare. The number of temporary exclusions is below the national average. Pupils throughout the school know the rules well and understand how to behave. They have very good manners and are extremely polite and friendly. They not only hold doors open for adults and others but also always offer a kind and friendly word in reply when thanked for their good manners. They are helpful and courteous. Lunchtime with the pupils is a delight as they are keen to talk in a friendly and welcoming manner.
16. Relationships and pupils' personal development are good. Older pupils are appreciative of their younger colleagues. This was particularly evident in a whole school assembly when all the older pupils listened and watched carefully to an excellent performance from a reception class. Pupils undertake a range of tasks from the earliest age in an increasingly mature and responsible manner. Pupils' keen response and positive attitudes to visits and visitors further demonstrate their good personal development. They reflect well on moral and social issues. Pupils co-operate well both in groups and in pairs. The sense of fun and humour between staff and pupils in many lessons has a positive impact on learning.
17. Attendance levels have shown a steady improvement over the last year and have recently matched the national average. Few pupils are late and lessons start promptly. In spite of the good efforts of the school to improve attendance, the regular poor attendance of a small proportion of pupils adversely affects their learning, and a significant number of pupils miss lessons through taking holidays in term time.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

18. Teaching is of good quality and supports the priority to raise standards. It is of particularly high quality in Years 5 and 6 where over half the lessons are very good and one in ten are excellent. This high quality was also seen in the teaching of one class of reception aged pupils. Senior staff provide very effective role models for colleagues and students.

19. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection when it was described as sound. The strengths mentioned in the teaching of the oldest pupils have been maintained. Weaknesses identified in the key issues of the last report included low teacher expectations and lesson planning that did not build effectively on pupils' prior learning. These have been tackled effectively. During the inspection almost one lesson in three was very good or excellent and a further third of lessons were good. The remainder were mainly satisfactory with one lesson in twenty being unsatisfactory.
20. Since the school was last inspected, when the monitoring of teaching was the subject of a key issue, a monitoring programme has been introduced by senior staff to identify weaknesses in teaching. Staff training has supported teachers to address these weaknesses and broaden the range of strategies they use to enhance learning. For example, a teaching and learning policy provides good guidance on the school's expectations of the roles of teachers and learners; in addition the homework policy has provided a useful link between home and school to promote partnership in learning between the school and the community. This gives a very clear picture about the school's expectations of homework and how it supports and extends pupils learning at school.
21. In the excellent lessons observed in Year 6 and in one class of reception aged pupils, teachers inspired pupils to learn and held their rapt attention through the high quality use of language, high expectations of all pupils to succeed and detailed understanding of the needs of individuals. In the reception class the teacher ensured that all elements of the literacy session were timed exactly to meet the concentration levels of these young learners. She also ensured that pupils knew who would summarise the learning that had taken place towards the end of the lesson. The lesson was linked effectively to the forthcoming visit to the zoo and the choice of text extended pupils' knowledge of animals as well as their literacy skills. In Year 6 the teaching of mathematics was excellent because the teacher ensured that mathematical terms were understood and asked questions that tested pupils' ability to use new words correctly. The organisation of resources and challenging timescales for each element of the lesson contributed to the very brisk pace. This enabled pupils to build on prior learning and extend their understanding to new situations, for example when playing games involving problem solving.
22. Only three unsatisfactory lessons were observed. On one of these occasions the teacher was feeling unwell and did not manage the very challenging behaviour of a small number of pupils effectively enough. The use of worksheets in one reception class resulted in a lack of challenge for children and in a geography lesson for seven-year-olds the teacher's planning was not clear and she did not introduce appropriate geographical terms such as 'climate' to enable pupils to achieve the learning objectives.
23. Strengths in the teaching are the use of planning to ensure that the resources, timescales for each part of the lesson and assessments are identified. Good reference is made to the national strategies for literacy and numeracy and teachers use their evaluations of learning to plan for the next lessons. Where plenaries are used well, for example in the teaching of literacy in Years 3 and 4, even pupils who find learning difficult understand the progress they have made and what they need to learn next. For example, pupils understood the term 'compound' and explained how these words were made. One pupil described to the class an error he had made in defining 'Saturday' because he pronounced the word as 'Satday'. Through positive reinforcement the teacher supported pupils to recognise differences between speaking and writing and placed a high level of importance on raising self-esteem. Pupils' work is regularly

marked and at all stages the best practice shows use of informative comments to guide pupils' understanding of their progress.

24. Subject knowledge and expertise are strongest in literacy, numeracy and art. In these subjects staff training has supported continuity in curriculum delivery and the strengths of subject co-ordinators have been effectively used. The main features of the daily literacy and numeracy sessions are implemented well and teachers ensure that text is appropriate and that the different elements of the lessons are matched to the needs of groups. For example, different tasks are planned for more and less able pupils and their needs are met well. Good quality marking helps pupils to know how successful they have been and what they need to do to improve. The art co-ordinator and the headteacher provide good role models for the teaching of art. Their ability to work alongside pupils to develop skills and techniques is a significant strength. The headteacher regularly joins art lessons and supports teachers and pupils through demonstration and description of how to work with pastels and pencils to create shade and tone. In a lesson with pupils in Years 5 and 6 the co-ordinator skilfully linked the work of Cezanne to the development of lines to create effects. She reinforced that accomplished artists make many changes to their work before its completion and taught techniques of refining errors without the use of rubbers. A reflection of the good quality of teaching came from an older pupil who said 'Our art lessons are like adventures.' The very positive attitudes to art come from the respect and knowledge they have of their teachers' talents.
25. The pace of learning is fastest in lessons of high quality. This is a reason why standards are higher by the age of eleven than by the age of seven. Although teaching is satisfactory for children under five and they have similar experiences in the earliest stages of their learning, the pace of learning for this age group is slower and there are variations between classes. It is much faster in one reception class because the teaching is of a high standard. Other teachers have limited experience of the age range and this means that the range of strategies used to organise lessons is not as varied as it could be. The co-ordinator has not had the opportunity to monitor teaching for this age range.
26. Other weaknesses in teaching are the lack of confidence and subject expertise to teach information technology effectively and the inconsistent use of Standard English in some lessons. While most teachers model reading and sentences appropriately there are a small number of occasions when sentences are not completed and when new words are not reinforced sufficiently well to enable pupils to use them in their own speech. Expectations of pupils to use Standard English are not always sufficiently high and teachers do not plan enough opportunities for pupils to prepare to present their thoughts and ideas to a wide range of audiences.

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

27. The school fully meets the statutory requirements for the English, mathematics and science curriculum. Teachers have successfully implemented the national initiatives in literacy and numeracy and provision for mathematics is now good. The school has adopted the scheme of work for science produced by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA] and this has been successful in raising achievement, especially in the juniors. The school meets the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. Provision for information and communication technology [ICT] is unsatisfactory. This is because there are not enough computers and insufficient time is

allowed for teaching the subject. The school has reduced the time spent on other subjects in line with government advice to concentrate on raising standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. This has been very successful and pupils' results in the national tests have improved steadily over the last three years, especially at eleven. However, the organisation of the time spent on other subjects of the curriculum has resulted in some subjects not being taught often enough to allow pupils to make the progress they should. The provision for art is good but there is too little time for design and technology. The time allocated for history and geography is too irregular. There are long periods of time, amounting to over six months in some cases, during which subjects are not taught. This makes it extremely difficult for pupils to maintain their knowledge and skills and their learning suffers as a consequence. There is some focus on history but provision for geography is poor. Provision for physical education and music is satisfactory.

28. Children under five in the reception and nursery classes receive an appropriate curriculum that fulfils the requirements of the nationally agreed Desirable Learning Outcomes and leads purposefully towards the National Curriculum. The infant co-ordinator has established effective systems for co-ordinating the curriculum for children under five and the first levels of the National Curriculum. In the nursery children have access to pertinent and interesting activities. However, there are not enough opportunities for children in the nursery and pupils throughout the school to have regular opportunities to develop their speaking skills. There is no systematic structure within the curriculum to promote speech for different purposes, audiences or styles. Although there are some opportunities for drama and for pupils to speak to larger audiences in assemblies and school productions, these skills are not systematically planned across the curriculum.
29. All subjects have schemes of work to support the curriculum and curriculum planning has improved since the last inspection when it was the subject of a key issue. The school is in the process of amending the current curricular provision to meet the requirements of "Curriculum 2000" that becomes statutory next term. Some QCA schemes of work have been trialled this year. Teachers have given their opinions of the effectiveness of, for example, the science curriculum. Other trials, for example, in geography, have not yet been consistent enough to evaluate. The school has appropriate systematic plans for curricular development that need to be carefully tied in with the organisation of the timetable for teaching the subjects throughout the year. Subject co-ordinators do not have opportunities to monitor how effectively their subjects are implemented. This is a weakness, as co-ordinators do not have a whole school overview to enable them to identify strengths or areas for development.
30. The school's curricular provision for pupils with special needs is good and it supports learning targets identified in pupils' individual education plans. The national Code of Practice is followed and parents are appropriately involved in their children's learning. A teacher is employed to work specifically with these pupils and they receive good and appropriate help. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum. However, in some subjects, for example science, pupils are given too few opportunities to organise their own work and the over use of worksheets constrains pupils from thinking for themselves. Homework is used effectively throughout the school to support the curriculum.
31. The school has an effective curriculum to support pupils' personal, social and health education and policy documents and schemes of work include appropriate statements showing the school's commitment to providing equal opportunities for all pupils. There are appropriate arrangements for sex education and pupils are given comprehensive support to enable them to understand the dangers of drugs abuse. This is supported by

the Rotary Club "Life Education Caravan" that visits the school. The school has very good links with the Wodensborough Community Technical College and Wood Green High School College of Sport. Although the school has few clubs, there is an impressive range of off-site activities to support the curriculum throughout the school, including several opportunities for residential visits. The school is part of the Wednesbury Education Achievement Zone (WEAZ). This focuses on the development of the arts subjects. The school is proactive in the WEAZ project and has been awarded Beacon status in acknowledgement of this.

32. Overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This represents an improvement since the last inspection. The provision for pupils' moral and social development is particularly good.
33. Opportunities are given to pupils to reflect on fundamental events in their lives, such as the birth of a brother or sister. In religious education they are given opportunities to make up their own prayers and older pupils examine carefully the purpose of prayer. In science, pupils express awe and wonder when conducting experiments relating to the growth of plants from seeds and in the beauty of natural phenomena, for example a rainbow. In a reception class children have shown joy and wonder when catching sequins in water. In an excellent school assembly pupils were helped to reflect on how we are all different and that we all have something special to offer. In this way pupils were helped to value beliefs of others and of their own views. Throughout the curriculum teachers are quick to seize opportunities to develop self-esteem in pupils by valuing their contribution to life both within the school and also in the community. Collective worship fulfils statutory requirements and makes a sound contribution to pupils' spiritual development.
34. The school promotes well principles, which distinguish right from wrong. Pupils are helped to recognise acceptable and unacceptable behaviour through the way in which adults in the school behave to each other and to pupils and through the development of a clear behaviour policy formed through discussion with pupils in each class. Pupils are clear on sanctions that will be applied if they misbehave. Their acceptance of rules is not governed through fear but through an understanding of the importance of order. In literacy lessons opportunities are taken to develop lines of argument and persuasion that support pupils to make decisions that are morally acceptable. In these ways pupils gain a good understanding of a variety of issues, including environmental protection, equal opportunities and personal rights and responsibilities.
35. Pupils' social development is effectively promoted in the school through many opportunities to take responsibilities according to their stage of maturity. These range from collecting registers, operating the overhead projector during assembly and setting up the hall for assembly. If coats fall on the floor, pupils are expected to replace them on the proper hooks, to hold doors open, to think of others first and themselves afterwards. They understand why these tasks are important to school life. When working in groups they learn how to relate to others and to respect and help each other. These attitudes stem from the adults, who show respect for each other and for the views of pupils. Charities are well supported by the school. The strong links with the community, especially through the 'Old Newtowners', a group of former pupils of the school who meet in school on a monthly basis, are a very significant contribution to the provision for pupils' social development. The three residential experiences available each year to pupils of different ages make a valuable contribution to social development. In addition 'The Graduation Ball' introduced two years ago provides a worthy social occasion when all pupils leaving the school have the opportunity to celebrate their achievements.

36. Provision for cultural development, described in the last report as weak, has improved and is now satisfactory. Pupils are gaining understanding of the work of a variety of artists, their heritage in history and the key similarities and differences between religious faiths. In these ways they are taught tolerance through understanding the richness of the ethnic and cultural diversity of Britain. Opportunities are given for pupils to learn to play musical instruments, but opportunities are being missed, particularly in geography, for pupils to gain a thorough understanding of cultures different from Western Europe.
37. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is significant in making the school a happy, friendly and well ordered community in which everyone is valued, positive aspects of life are emphasised and solutions to problems are sought.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

38. The school provides good care, which enables pupils to feel valued and comfortable in a secure, happy environment for learning. Provision has been maintained well since the last inspection.
39. All adults make good efforts to support pupils in the school. They know pupils and their backgrounds well and respond quickly and effectively to concerns. Arrangements for child protection are good. The school follows local guidelines and the head teacher, as the named designated person, ensures all staff know the procedures and are aware of issues. Health and safety arrangements are good. The school is very clean, tidy and well maintained. Personal awareness of health, safety and related matters is encouraged through science lessons and specific initiatives such as the training of Year 3 pupils in pedestrian safety by a parent and the local Road Safety Officer.
40. The strong emphasis on praising achievements and developing pupils' self-esteem is particularly effective in raising standards of behaviour and confidence in pupils. The consistency with which the policy is implemented is noteworthy; a raised voice from any adult in the school is very rare. Lunchtime staff, who are well trained, make a significant contribution to the success of the positive approach. Good procedures monitor and encourage attendance and these are having a positive impact on improving overall levels. The monitoring and chasing of persistent offenders, with the close co-operation of the Education Welfare Service, is thorough and, together with the rigorous approach the school takes to discourage holidays being taken in term time, means that issues relating to attendance are being addressed effectively. Targets set by the school to address this issue are met well.
41. The procedures for assessing pupil's attainment and progress are satisfactory in the infants and good in the juniors. The school fully complies with the requirements to administer statutory tests and ensures that pupils are prepared well for these. Attainment in the two core subjects of English and mathematics is assessed regularly at the end of study units. Information is well used to target areas of learning which pupils need to improve, for example, the setting of Year 6 children to work in English, mathematics and science during the spring term using additional supply cover.
42. The deputy headteacher has recently introduced a computer-based system for tracking pupils' progress. This will further develop the thorough and detailed analysis of national tests data for seven and eleven-year-olds and enable the school to achieve its next objective of tracking individuals and cohorts of children over time. The school has recognised the need to further analyse the baseline and Year 1 assessment information to provide earlier support for children experiencing learning difficulties.

43. Co-ordinators in English and mathematics are used effectively to boost pupils' performance by analysing test results. In mathematics this has successfully focused on identified weaknesses in order to carry out a specific teaching programme aimed at raising standards. At present there are limited opportunities for staff moderation of core subject work. Parents are used very well to support assessed areas of difficulty with targeted home/school programmes.
44. Planning identifies assessment opportunities but there is limited evidence to show that this information is used to adapt curriculum plans. The lack of tracking of pupils' coverage, knowledge, acquisition and skills development in information and communication technology and in areas such as design and technology and physical education hinders the raising of standards.
45. The school provides good support and guidance for all pupils. The school's documentation supports and promotes the principles of equal opportunities. Teachers know their pupils very well. Achievement in all areas is recognised and the school's reward system encourages self-discipline and personal effort. However, there is no systematic approach to record personal and social development which results in inconsistency between infants and juniors. The setting of targets and the opportunities for self-evaluation for individual pupils are limited.
46. The assessment policy needs updating in the light of recent developments. The co-ordinator and deputy headteacher have a clear vision for future assessment developments, which will promote the raising of standards and the clear tracking of progress.
47. Overall, assessment practices have improved significantly since the last inspection, though there is room for further improvement.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

48. The school has a very effective partnership with parents which has a positive impact on pupils' achievements. Parents' views of the school are generally positive and they support their children's learning well.
49. The school makes strenuous and positive efforts to involve parents in the life of the school and their children's education. Information provided is of high quality and plentiful. Newsletters are regular and include information about the curriculum. The School Association letter gives an excellent flavour of school life to its readers. The school clearly recognises that many parents have low expectations of what the children can achieve and through a wide range of initiatives is taking steps to redress this issue. The positive involvement of the school in the local 'Education Achievement Zone' is a prime example of the importance of this to the school.
50. Annual reports to parents about pupils' progress are of a very high standard. Clear, accurate assessments of attainment and progress are given along with targets for improvement. Parents are encouraged to raise issues and staff are readily available to deal with them. Parents provide good help in the classroom and on educational visits. Skills of parents, for example in art or craft, are used well by class teachers. The School Association provides a good range of social and fund raising events.

51. The school has a very good homework policy and the support given by parents to this has a positive impact on pupils' learning. Homework diaries are used well as a method of communication between parents and teachers. Guidance to parents on areas such as sharing reading at home is very good. Parents of children who have special educational needs are encouraged to attend regular review meetings and are fully involved in the setting of targets and monitoring of progress. Provision has improved from that described at the time of the last inspection.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

52. The headteacher has a very clear vision for the future of the school. The very good partnership between the headteacher and deputy headteacher has supported a wide range of improvements since the last inspection. Senior staff offer good support and there is a shared commitment by all staff to community learning. This has led to the achievement of 'Beacon Status' for developing the arts and the school achieving initial teacher training status. Through carefully structured debate and planning, much of which has been led by the headteacher in liaison with local schools and representatives from the local authority, the area has successfully achieved 'Wednesbury Education Achievement Zone' funding. The good links established with local schools place Mesty Croft at the heart of a wide range of new school and local initiatives that aim to promote community learning and raise expectations of what can be achieved. All staff share the excitement of developing partnerships which enable all pupils and their parents to enjoy learning. The headteacher provides strong leadership by setting high expectations for all pupils to have equal opportunities within the school. The ethos for learning is fun and caring. The phrase 'Go for it!' is used often and well understood as the signal to try your best at all times. The school's aims and values are reflected successfully as staff and pupils work happily together to promote learning, tolerance and respect for others. This was evident in a whole school assembly where pupils recognised the qualities of others and shared strengths and weaknesses in their own capabilities.
53. The school development plan gives a clear steer to these developments and is well linked to the school's priorities and those of the community and local authority. The school development plan is costed within the boundaries of the minimum-spending budget, which has been agreed with the local authority for the last three years and since the time of the last inspection. Despite action taken to reduce costs, the budget deficit has continued to grow and the school's position is similar to other schools of the same size in Sandwell. The local authority has been fully involved in supporting the management of the school's finances and has approved a level of budget expenditure to maintain the quality of education in line with local expectations. The authority is planning an extensive programme of change in close liaison with the headteacher and governors to enable the situation to be reversed over time. The headteacher and governors have a very clear understanding of the school's finances and ensure that procedures, decisions and communication at all levels are documented and effectively monitored. The school's financial planning and administration is of good quality. All funds and grants are used and applied appropriately and effectively. Spending decisions support identified educational developments and have had a positive impact on raising standards. The school applies the principles of best value appropriately. The targets set for the year 2000 have been achieved but were too low. Targets for future years are higher and are being reviewed in line with the increased analysis of data by senior staff to inform target setting for each year group. The last inspection report was critical of the lack of clear priorities for development and the evaluation by the school of its progress towards them. This key issue has been effectively addressed.

54. The management and coordination of students in their initial teacher training is of good quality and is supporting the development of teaching strategies across the school. The initiative is well structured and the induction procedures and quality of monitoring are effectively enabling students to contribute positively to the work of the school, sharing experiences and ideas to extend and inform their training and practice. This has resulted in two members of staff becoming trained mentors. There are now exciting plans to involve more staff in mentoring as the project becomes a recognised feature of school improvement. Appraisal systems are not yet in place but regular informal discussions support staff training and development. The school is currently planning the implementation of new national guidance to support and monitor the professional performance of teachers.
55. There has been good improvement in the monitoring of teaching and learning since the school was last inspected and the headteacher and senior staff have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching provision. A planned programme of monitoring was used to identify issues that were then addressed through staff meetings. Since this time the system of the headteacher visiting each class on a regular basis to monitor the quality of practice on a more regular basis has effectively raised the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils talk eagerly about the frequent and regular opportunities they have to share their work and discuss their learning with the headteacher. Subject coordinators have led the development of policies and curriculum planning effectively and both the literacy and numeracy strategies have been implemented successfully. There is still room for further improvement and this is recognised. Coordinators have not yet had the opportunities to monitor standards for themselves across each stage of learning and this is a weakness. There are plans to extend staff training and to provide time for this happen through the WEAZ.
56. A small number of governors provide good support to school improvement. The chair meets with the headteacher each week and together with the vice chair steers the work of the governors. This small group have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses but overall the number of active governors is insufficient to enable the governors to offer the school the support it should. Meetings are often not well attended and there is an over reliance on governors who are also staff members to make decisions. This places additional responsibilities on staff and makes delegation difficult. Coordinators give presentations to governors about their subjects and literacy and numeracy governors have been appointed and attended appropriate training. However, there is no structured programme of governor training in place to enable all governors to develop their roles and to feel confident of the tasks they are expected to fulfil in shaping the school's future. In this respect the work of the governors is unsatisfactory.
57. The accommodation is maintained to a high standard by the caretaker and his staff, who ensure the school is very clean and tidy. The school cooks and mid-day staff also show a high level of commitment to providing services of the highest standard to support pupils at lunchtime. These aspects of school life are very well managed and make a valuable contribution to the quality of school life.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

1) Raise standards in writing and science in the infant classes by:

ensuring expectations of pupils' achievement are consistently high;
providing staff training to improve the range and quality of teaching strategies used;
increasing the number and range of opportunities for pupils to practise writing.
(paragraphs: 2,5,8,30,69-70,72,78,91-3,95)

2) Raise standards of speaking by:

improving the range of opportunities for pupils to present their ideas to a range of audiences;
ensuring staff consistently set good role models in the use of Standard English;
ensuring teachers require pupils to use complete sentences in their responses to questions and contributions to discussions and debate.
(paragraphs: 2,4,26,28,63,71,78,95)

3) Raise standards in information and communication technology by:

improving the range of resources to support the teaching of ICT;
providing training to improve staff confidence and subject expertise;
including teaching time for ICT within the curriculum timetable;
improving the use of ICT across the curriculum.
(paragraphs: 6,10,26-7,44,95,118-27)

4) Improve the role of governors by:

requiring the regular attendance of governors at meetings;
enabling all governors to take part in school improvement planning, monitoring and evaluating the school's performance through a structured programme of training and development.
(paragraph: 56)

5) Review the management of the curriculum:

to ensure the frequent and regular teaching of subjects such as design and technology, geography and history;
to secure better progression in learning knowledge and skills; and
to provide subject coordinators with opportunities to monitor and evaluate standards in their subjects.
(paragraphs: 10,27,29,79,90,96,100,102,104,106,111,113,125,131)

In addition the following issues which are of a minor nature should also be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

sharpening the use of assessment information for all children under seven to set more precise individual targets;
(paragraphs: 3,42,60,89)

providing more opportunities for pupils to apply numeracy skills across the curriculum.
(paragraph: 90)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	70
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	37

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6%	26%	34%	30%	4%	0%	0%

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	36	307
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	0	67

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	2	92

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	15

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	17
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	13

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.2
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	0.5

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	24	20

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	13	12	20
	Girls	14	16	19
	Total	27	28	39
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	61 (75)	64 (84)	89 (100)
	National	82 (80)	83 (81)	87 (84)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	13	20	14
	Girls	14	17	15
	Total	27	37	29
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	61 (84)	84 (100)	66 (82)
	National	82 (80)	86 (85)	87 (86)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	21	22

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	13	13	15
	Girls	18	14	16
	Total	31	27	31
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	72 (67)	63 (73)	72 (70)
	National	70 (65)	69 (59)	78 (69)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	12	12	12
	Girls	15	14	13
	Total	27	26	25
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	63 (64)	60 (58)	58 (58)
	National	68 (65)	69 (65)	75 (71)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	12
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	5
Chinese	
White	242
Any other minority ethnic group	7

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR– Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	12.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	24
Average class size	27

Education support staff: YR– Y6

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	101

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	36

Total number of education support staff	2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	65

Number of pupils per FTE adult	12
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	1	
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	2	
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Financial information

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	605943
Total expenditure	656734
Expenditure per pupil	1926
Balance brought forward from previous year	-152707
Balance carried forward to next year	-203498

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	343
Number of questionnaires returned	51

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	59	39	0	0	2
My child is making good progress in school.	51	41	6	2	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	16	59	10	12	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	53	14	2	0
The teaching is good.	39	53	0	6	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	41	43	16	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	55	33	6	6	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	37	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	41	43	12	2	2
The school is well led and managed.	43	41	4	10	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	47	41	10	2	[]
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	22	33	20	20	6

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

58. Children start their early years education in the nursery where they attend sessions in the morning or afternoon, five days per week, for as long as a year. In the school year of their fifth birthday they join one of two reception classes. Many children also attend the Honey-pot playgroup, which has strong links to the school. The majority of pupils in the reception classes were five at the time of the inspection, only seven were under five.
59. Children's attainment on entry to the nursery is below average. Language skills are well below average. By the time they are five years old and ready to enter Key Stage 1 their attainment is still frequently below average. There are differences since the last inspection. Attainment was judged to be similar to the national picture at that time; however, clearer data is now available which shows standards are lower than those usually expected on entry to the nursery and to school.
60. Overall a rich educational programme is offered to the under fives which promotes the nationally recommended areas of learning. Assessment procedures are sound but are not yet sufficiently linked to targets for individuals particularly relating to language development. The provision in the nursery is sound. The reception classes build effectively on the work of the nursery. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall and in one reception class it is very good. In very good lessons the teacher motivates children through her own energetic presentation and her enthusiasm for learning. The organisation and management of activities, space and of behaviour ensure that at all times children are fully engaged in their work and play and meet the very high expectations which are made of them. Trained nursery nurses also provide good support and enhance children's learning. The work of the nursery and reception classes is co-ordinated by one teacher. The other teaching staff are new to the age group. The team is preparing well for the implementation of the Early Learning Goals in September 2000. This will provide an opportunity to ensure that teaching standards, particularly those associated with developing language, are consistent across the curriculum. The space allocated to the nursery is good with easy access to an attractive and well developed outside area. The reception classrooms are smaller. However this provision does contain an attractive and useful shared area, which includes a small kitchen and space for practical creative activity. A further room is available for role-play activities. Access to outside play facilities is limited in the reception classes.
61. The curriculum is broad and balanced and prepares children well for the next stage of education. The activities include all elements of the nationally identified areas of learning for the under fives. The balance between child selected and teacher directed work varies appropriately. Reception children have less opportunity to select for themselves as they are near the end of the foundation stage and preparing to enter Year 1 in September. In all classes there is appropriate emphasis on personal and social development, language and literacy and mathematics. Pupils in the reception classes have too few opportunities for vigorous, freely selected physical exercise. The under fives provision, as a whole, is successful in supporting those children identified as having special educational needs. However aspects of the identification procedure require

sharpening in order to provide support at the earliest stage possible. This is a minor issue for the school to address.

Personal and Social Development

62. Nursery pupils gain confidence steadily in developing their personal and social skills. Many start from a low base. These particular children are solitary and unused to playing and communicating with others. Personal and social education continues to have a high priority in reception classes. Group activities are encouraged, however many pupils lack sufficient skills to fully participate without adult support. Some children take charge of activities, other children let this happen and do not challenge or assert themselves. Nursery children and reception children gain increasing personal independence in dressing and hygiene. They fetch and put on coats before outside activities without help. Relationships between children and adults are good. Standards of behaviour are high. Many children sustain concentration for appropriate periods of time; this increases in the reception class. Overall the quality of teaching is good and most children achieve the expected outcomes by the time they are five. Staff know and understand each child well. The staff in the nursery work well together to develop personal and social development.

Language and Literacy

63. The children's attainment at five in language and literacy is well below average. Listening skills are developed better than speaking skills, although comprehension is limited at times. For example, children who listened carefully to a story about a girl who made a picture for her blind Grandfather did not fully understand the main events. A significant number of children have a restricted vocabulary, rarely use properly constructed sentences and do not speak clearly. In reception classes this continues to be the case, except when the teacher provides a good model and framework for speaking for children to copy and use. Children make a sound start to reading. They learn about the structure of books and realise that print carries meaning. Children recognise some sounds, letters and simple words and most can recognise their name. Children in the nursery and in the reception have access to space for role play. In the nursery this is used well. Children tend to play independently, selecting suitable props including a policeman's helmet, dresses and dolls. They talk about their games but do not develop continuous imaginative dialogue. Most children have appropriate pencil control and in reception can write their names. More able children in one class are beginning to attempt to write independently. The quality of teaching is satisfactory and in one class it is very good. All staff promote book skills well and work hard to support parents to encourage their children. Variation is most apparent in the skill that teachers have in helping children to develop speaking skills. When teaching is very good the lesson objectives clearly focus on teaching the children a particular set of words and in providing model sentences as a context for these words. Consequently children make noticeable gains in their learning, their progress is rapid and they reach higher levels of attainment.

Mathematics

64. Children's attainment in mathematics is below average and they do not attain expected levels at five. In the nursery children know some numbers and can use these to count small amounts. They can use language appropriately when they sort. Most can name simple shapes. Few use this vocabulary to describe hidden objects. In the reception

children can match sets of dominoes and use 'take away' to find the difference. Tallying methods are used appropriately to record. In another class songs and games are used to reinforce counting to and from ten. In this class children are able to add small numbers mentally; very focussed teacher questions, games and partner work help children to use a range of language associated with addition. Overall, teaching of mathematics is sound. The activities chosen in all parts of the provision are interesting and appropriate but are not constantly linked to thorough teaching of the language and vocabulary of the subject to secure faster gains in learning.

Knowledge and Understanding

65. Children's attainment at five in this area of learning is below the expected levels. They talk about the immediate geographical area including the park and other local amenities. Most recall recent past events. They talk about visiting grandparents, birthdays and Christmas; however the range of experiences and the quality of information is too limited. Children know they planted seeds and that these seeds are now small plants. They work with their teacher to transplant them carefully and understand the plants need water to grow. Few recall the names of the plants or appearance of the future crop. When model making children glue surfaces together, brushes are held correctly by about half of the children. Most children can use the computer. Some play with buttons but are not able to use them with purpose; other children use the computer but lack the language to explain to their friends how to use the same program. Some children are very confident, they use the mouse, click and drag and also describe what they are doing. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Staff plan a rich variety of interesting activities and work hard to involve all children. They ask questions but do not sufficiently structure discussion to further children's use of language.

Physical Development

66. In their physical development children achieve the standards expected of their age group. Children in nursery and reception classes are making sound progress in developing their mobility and awareness of space. They have positive attitudes to their personal health and safety. In the nursery, children use attractively planned outside areas well. They play with wheeled toys safely and take part in climbing and running activities. In reception classes children demonstrate increasing ability to control and direct movement. They are able to change from one piece of apparatus to another smoothly, stop when asked and avoid each other when running. In a dance lesson children used tension and relaxation well to imitate a frog. Children's ability to manipulate pencils, scissors and other small tools is sound overall. The quality of teaching overall is good. All staff encourage children to use hand held equipment safely and efficiently. Physical development is supported by well-planned activities. In the best examples, speaking and listening skills are well linked to the activity.

Creative Development

67. Children are making satisfactory progress in this area of learning by the time they are five. They are likely, particularly in art to attain standards in line with expectations for five-year-olds. Through art, music, and stories children learn to listen and observe carefully. Children explore a wide range of materials including fabrics, homemade dough, paints, felt pens and junk materials. Most recognise and name primary colours. They learn many songs by heart, some of these support learning in mathematics. They have an awareness of pulse and rhythm. Artwork in early years classrooms is lively and typical of the work of this age group in detail and perspective. Children make effective use of role play areas. The quality of teaching is good, particularly in singing where all

staff support and encourage children to join in and encourage comment. Clear articulation of words is demonstrated well.

ENGLISH

68. The school has made substantial improvements in the achievements of its pupils since the last inspection when standards were low. Since 1997, standards have improved each year and, in the 1999 tests, standards achieved by eleven-year-olds in English were average when compared with all schools and above average when compared with schools like Mesty Croft. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher level 5, was above average. Overall, the performance of girls is a little higher than boys, although results are in line with average attainment for boys and girls.
69. The grades obtained at eleven contrast sharply with those at seven. In reading and writing the grades for seven-year-olds were well below the national average and were well below the average for similar schools. Teachers' assessments were in line with test results, indicating almost half of the pupils failed to achieve the average grade in reading while four-fifths did not achieve this grade in writing. Trends since 1997 show a variation between years but the overall trend, especially in writing, indicates a decline in attainment levels. However, there was a higher proportion than usual of pupils with special educational needs in last year's Year 2.
70. Unconfirmed test results for this year at seven indicate a substantial improvement with a quarter of pupils gaining the higher level 3 in reading and comprehension. Improvement has not been as great in writing with almost half the pupils failing to gain an average grade. Inspection evidence confirms that attainment is at the expected level in reading but in writing it is below average. At eleven pupils have continued to achieve standards which are expected of the age range and which match those of previous years. Performance in writing continues to show gradual improvement over time.
71. The difference between results at seven and eleven partly stems from the low level of ability on entry into the school. Even at this time in the school year (May) some children have acquired very little spoken language and find great difficulty in communicating with each other and with adults both orally and through writing. The range of opportunities for pupils to develop their speaking skills and to present ideas to different audiences both within and outside school is too limited. Teachers and support staff do not consistently require pupils to use complete sentences in their responses to questions and when making contributions to discussion and debate. The lack of a technical vocabulary is particularly evident in mathematics lessons where pupils find difficulty in expressing number operations with precision. There are also occasions when staff do not set high enough standards in the use of Standard English and are thus not consistently acting as good role models for their pupils to learn from. Although there are opportunities for drama, these are infrequent and, in the infant classes not enough opportunities are given to pupils to be involved in role-play. Progress in speaking and listening is therefore unsatisfactory.
72. At seven, attainment in writing is below average; at eleven it is at an average level indicating the good progress which pupils make in the juniors. Too few opportunities are available for infants to write continuous prose, much of the work being in the form of short sentences or single word answers. Where more is expected from pupils they write well, as in their stories when they went to the Bears' House. In the juniors pupils are given more opportunities to write in a variety of styles and for a range of audiences. In a Year 6 class pupils tackled their writing tasks well and were able to write at length, quickly and accurately describing and evaluating the work of an author. In religious education, older junior pupils wrote extensively about Noah and the Great Flood and described well the parable of the Lost Son. However, in most subjects, the use of worksheets, whilst promoting factual knowledge, is not helping the acquisition of

language skills, too little being demanded. In addition, although the implementation of the Literacy Strategy is raising standards, the structure of this and the way in which it is being applied in the school does not allow enough time for continuous writing. The school is aware of this and has introduced additional lessons for writing activities. This is sound, although even in these lessons there are not enough opportunities for pupils to write from personal experience. There is evidence that pupils are taught how to plan, draft, revise, proof read and present their written work and this is leading to a rise in writing standards. However, there are too few planned opportunities across subjects to enable pupils to use these structures in their recorded work.

73. Handwriting is improving with the adoption of a commercial scheme and this is being extended throughout the school. Most pupils write in a legible style. In the infants pupils are not being introduced to joining letters early enough. Staff and pupils take great care and pride to ensure the presentation of written work is of a good standard. This is evident in the quality of displays and in pupils' books.
74. The main priority in English has been to raise achievement in reading and this is being successfully accomplished, particularly through the literacy hour, the additional language support assistants and the Home-School Reading Project. From reception onwards, pupils are taught to use and enjoy books and to understand that pictures and words have meaning and that print is read from left to right and top to bottom of the page. This is very carefully taught, enabling pupils to gain an early 'feel' for print. In the infants this work is successfully built upon with pupils gaining an increasing knowledge of the structure of sentences and in building up familiarity with letter sounds. Good teaching enables pupils to predict a story line. This is because teachers ask questions which require pupils to consider what they think might happen next. Teachers prioritise class and group reading times and, by the time pupils are seven, most quickly recognise a large number of words from books and their environment. Reading skills continue to be extended in the juniors by texts with challenging subject matter. Pupils have read extracts from Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' and 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', are familiar with poems and know a range of modern children's fiction as well as myths, legends and traditional stories. In addition, the school places importance on pupils' reading, both fiction and non-fiction, for pleasure. These features enable pupils to make good progress in their learning to achieve the levels expected of most seven and eleven-year-olds.
75. The rise in attainment in reading is considerably aided by pupils' positive attitudes to literature. They see books as an important source of information and derive great pleasure from reading. In discussion with pupils, many said they belonged to the public library, visiting frequently to exchange books. This positive attitude has also been aided by the care the school has taken in helping parents help their children, especially through the Home-School Reading Project, where parents are given good guidance to help their children read. Each pupil has a reading record in which pupils, staff and parents are encouraged to write comments.
76. Additional language support for lower attaining pupils is provided by two support workers. They work with eight groups of younger junior pupils three times each week. Through careful planning of work, liaison with class teachers and the subject co-ordinator, these pupils are gaining considerable benefits from this strategy. This is seen through improvements in the results of frequent assessments. Pupils in these groups are making very good progress in their reading.
77. Teaching observed during the inspection overall was of good quality. Teachers carefully plan their literacy lessons, clearly sharing the aim of the lesson with the class and this is

a very good strategy. Grammar, handwriting, spelling and punctuation are taught well and a good link is being established between reading, spelling and writing. Minor weaknesses arise when too much time is spent on the first part of the lesson, resulting in too little time being available for group or individual tasks and for plenary sessions. This more often occurs during lessons in infant classes. In the one unsatisfactory lesson observed in the juniors the disruptive behaviour by a very small group of pupils did not allow the successful completion of a lesson. This behaviour is rare and is usually very well managed. On this occasion the teacher was also unwell.

78. All teachers have a good knowledge of the structure of the literacy hour and have made sound efforts to improve the achievements of pupils in reading and writing. Rather less importance has been placed on the development of pupils' speaking skills. Resources are used well and homework, regularly set, is helping pupils achieve at least satisfactory standards when they leave at eleven years of age.
79. The co-ordinator has been in post of two years and much has been achieved during this time, especially in the juniors. All staff have been trained in applying the Literacy Strategy and more suitable resources have been purchased, especially reading books, dictionaries and thesaurus. There is consistent lesson planning across the school and in recording and evaluating assessments. Infant reading resources are being replaced by more suitable texts and the use of many worksheets is being phased out. The co-ordinator has knowledge of work planned by other teachers but has had too few opportunities to observe teaching and learning.
80. The library co-ordinator has developed the library well and there are now satisfactory stocks of children's fiction, a criticism raised in the last report. The library development plan recognises the need to increase the non-fiction book stock to more readily match the curriculum. At present the library comprises 55 per cent fiction and 45 per cent non-fiction. All classes have a weekly timetabled library session during which library skills are taught. A well-structured library skills scheme enables skills to be taught progressively from nursery and reception to Year 6. In these lessons pupils learn how to find books and read for research purposes. Older junior pupils extract information, assess style and take notes from books in effective ways. Parents provide valuable help in the library. Resources are supplemented by loan collections from the local authority library service, and the school regularly holds book fairs to encourage pupils to purchase their own books.
81. There have been many positive developments in English since the last report and there is a clear view of future subject priorities.

MATHEMATICS

82. Standards in mathematics at eleven are similar to those achieved nationally. The trend is upwards with signs of improvement throughout the school and particularly in the juniors. These improvements are linked to good teaching and the successful implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy.
83. The 1999 test results showed that the standards of seven-year-olds were well below average compared to all schools and below the average of similar schools. Year on year test results showed an upward trend of improvement until they dipped in 1999 when there was a higher proportion than usual of pupils with special educational needs in the cohort. At eleven standards of attainment were below average but in line with those of similar schools. Test results since 1996 show a trend of improvement that is more rapid

than the trend of improvement nationally. Inspection findings indicate that pupils are achieving the national average. In some lower ability classes pupils' achievements are below average. At the age of eleven the proportion of pupils who achieve the higher levels is increasing. This shows an improvement from the last inspection when there was a lack of challenge for more able pupils and the performance at both seven and eleven was below the national average.

84. The implementation of the numeracy strategy, the beneficial effects of class organisation which sets Year 5 and 6 pupils, and the quality of teaching which, during the inspection, exhibited some very good and exemplary features are effectively supporting pupils' learning. Learning made by groups of pupils in lessons was at least satisfactory and often good. In one class where the teaching of Year 6 pupils was outstanding, progress was excellent, pupils acquired command of complex mathematical ideas and were able to use their learning in discussion with each other. Boys and girls make broadly similar progress. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall.
85. By the age of seven the majority of pupils have a secure command of basic counting skills and use doubles and halves of numbers to aid their mental mathematics. Most know whether to add or subtract when solving number problems; more able pupils explain the reasoning behind their choice. Most can count in twos, fives and tens and are beginning to acquire accurate knowledge of tables. Pupils have a sound knowledge of shape and measures. Younger pupils know the attributes of two-dimensional shapes and transfer this knowledge to three-dimensional shapes. These pupils know that a square has four sides and four corners and they use this information to guess that a hidden object is a cube. Pupils respond to new mathematical vocabulary but they frequently find it hard to use these terms to explain their thinking. There are too few opportunities for pupils to extend their work using the computer.
86. By the age of eleven, pupils use their knowledge and skills well to solve problems. They are systematic in their approach and independent enough to select approaches that are different but correct. They have a secure understanding of place value, the four rules of number and use approximation to check the reasonableness of answers. Their ability to calculate mentally is developing well. Pupils demonstrate very quick recall of table facts and of number vocabulary including roots. Less able pupils are consolidating place value well. Average and more able pupils are acquiring a good understanding of frequency diagrams. Their learning in this aspect is rapid. They discuss aspects of their work during set activities and show that they have acquired and can use the associated mathematical vocabulary. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because they receive additional support from their teachers and their work is carefully targeted, based on the class topic but at a simpler level.
87. Pupils' attitudes to mathematics, including those with special educational needs are good overall. They enjoy the subject, listen carefully and work hard. They respond well to the good teaching they receive, mainly because their teachers understand their needs, set appropriate work and astutely manage and motivate them. Behaviour in mathematics lessons is very good.
88. Overall, the quality of the teaching is good. Several lessons were very good and there was one example of exemplary teaching observed in Year 6. Teachers have good knowledge of the National Numeracy Strategy and use the three-part lesson well. They plan thoroughly and provide well-structured appropriate lessons with well-prepared teacher input supported by good use of resources. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Mental starters are focussed and when used well secure previous knowledge, skills and understanding by improving speed of recall and response. In

some lessons this part of the lesson is slowed because the teacher introduces too much new material. The organisation of classes in the juniors is successful with work being carefully matched to the needs of pupils of different attainment levels. Teachers plan work very carefully and set appropriate homework and extension work. In one class a carefully targeted piece of work captured the interest of a special needs pupil with above average mathematical skills but with recording difficulties. Very good and exemplary teachers ask skilful questions to promote pupils understanding. However, in some classes too many questions needed one word answers and there was insufficient demand on pupils to use and consolidate recently taught vocabulary in explanatory sentences. Expectations are very high in the juniors. Praise, rewards and good humour are used well to aid motivation and to manage behaviour. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed in mathematics. Minor weaknesses in teaching relate to occasions where teachers focus too much on the replies they expect and do not respond quickly enough to pupils' insight. There were very few support staff in mathematics classrooms except two volunteers in the infants who were well briefed.

89. Assessment procedures are good but as yet the information gained is not sufficiently analysed and used to set targets for individual pupils or to identify areas of weakness teaching plans. This is a minor issue to be addressed.
90. The mathematics co-ordinator introduced the National Numeracy Strategy early. She has provided effective training and staff individually acknowledge the high level of support she provides. At the moment she monitors teachers' plans but regrettably has not yet had the opportunity to observe teachers in all parts of the school. She has made good links with the local secondary school which is shortly to run a well-funded initiative with Year 4 pupils. In addition, as a leading mathematics teacher she has been involved in an initiative related to teacher training. She has provided well-attended numeracy evenings for parents. The small mathematics budget was well spent and has provided good basic resources for each classroom. During the inspection, computer programs were used to support mathematics but their use is not well embedded. This remains unchanged since the last inspection. There is a narrow range of software and in the main it is used to reinforce rather than challenge. Some examples of numeracy used in other subjects were observed, for example temperature in geography, but there is not enough planned use of numeracy across the curriculum.

SCIENCE

91. In the 1999 tests for eleven-year-olds pupils attained standards in science that were about the same as similar schools. When compared to schools nationally, results in science were below average. In the teacher assessments for seven-year-olds, pupils' attainment was well below average and below that of similar schools. However, last year's Year 2 contained an unusually high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and very few pupils then achieved the higher levels.
92. On the basis of inspection findings, pupils' attainment meets the expectations of the National Curriculum for eleven-year-olds and standards have improved since the last report. There are too few pupils working at the higher levels at the age of seven and attainment is below the expected levels overall and similar to that described when the school was last inspected. Pupils' achievements in the infants are not sufficiently secure in aspects of scientific enquiry and the way they communicate ideas. Non-validated data from this year's national tests and teacher assessments confirm the inspection findings. There has been an improvement in standards at both seven and eleven and pupils now in Year 6 attain levels that are similar to those achieved nationally in 1999. Trends over time show that standards in science are improving. They are higher for eleven-year-olds

93. Children start school with a knowledge and understanding of the world that is below the expected level for children at the age of five. Progress throughout the infants is sound but the way the subject is taught and the expectations of the teachers are inconsistent. While there are teachers who give their pupils opportunities to extend their scientific enquiry by setting challenging and interesting work, others limit the amount their pupils can learn because they use too many worksheets. These worksheets, whether commercially produced or teacher generated, restrict opportunities for pupils to record work in their own way or to organise their own learning and enquiry. This is especially relevant with higher attaining seven-year-olds. Lower attaining pupils are sometimes given worksheets that are too difficult and their work is not completed. In the lessons observed during the inspection, pupils had opportunities to explore the effect of forces on materials and understood that pushing or pulling can alter the shape of some materials. They use the correct scientific terms but find it difficult to explain what they have done in coherent sentences. Their books show that they have had opportunities to learn about the human body and the things that are important to keep healthy. They classify natural and man-made materials and are aware that some materials can change shape. They compare sound and aspects of light and list things that work with electricity. Pupils have been taught about the dangers involved when using electricity. However, much of the written work consists of pupils filling in gaps on worksheets. This is not appropriate for higher attaining pupils in Year 2 and there are too few opportunities for pupils to organise their written work independently.
94. By the time they leave the school pupils have a secure grasp of the needs of living things and know that procreation is part of the natural cycle. They appreciate the part that the different sections of a flower play in this process. During the inspection pupils in Year 5 produced detailed observational drawings of flowers, dissected them and identified the components. These they arranged and labelled. Most knew the functions of the stigma, stamens and ovary. Pupils in Year 6 explain the function of different parts of their bodies and know, for example, that we need oxygen to live. However, they are unable to relate this to environmental issues and do not know, for example, the effects of plants, especially trees, on our atmosphere. They suggest ways of separating materials. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 know the importance of "fair tests" and measured the amount of water used to mix with a variety of substances accurately. In the best lessons pupils selected their own equipment and materials. Pupils have had access to the full range of the curriculum by the time they leave the school. However, discussion with Year 6 pupils indicates that they do not yet have the depth of knowledge and understanding to apply what they know to understanding the relevance of the things they have learnt to the wider issues of life. For example, pupils have some knowledge of magnetism but cannot explain what a compass does or how it works. Pupils in Year 3 do not always have the support they need and some lower attaining pupils do not complete their task or follow up incorrect work.
95. Teaching was at least good in 60 per cent of lessons. One lesson was very good and the remainder was satisfactory. Teachers have a secure understanding of the subject and encourage the use of scientific vocabulary. Most use effective questioning to extend learning and this aspect of teaching has improved since the last inspection. All have high expectations of the way their pupils will present their work and as a result the books are neat and tidy. This is extended to practical work and the pupils take care of the equipment and use it carefully. Teachers plan the work carefully and share the aims of the lesson with their pupils. In some lessons pupils are encouraged to evaluate the success of their learning at the end of the lesson. In the best lessons teachers generate an eagerness to work and an awareness of the wonder of the natural world as in a lesson where pupils gradually "unwrapped" their flowers to discover the detail within.

Here pupils co-operated with each other, holding flowers for each other and, in one case, helping a pupil to find his dropped ovary! Lower-attaining pupils were given the support they needed to enable them to achieve good quality work and to be proud of their achievements. The teacher's very high expectations of the quality of her pupils' work resulted in beautifully presented dissections. Teachers' marking is good overall, with helpful comments and appropriate praise, enabling pupils to improve their work. There are, however, examples of perfunctory marking especially in the infants where the majority of work is completed on prescribed handouts from the teacher. Teachers make good use of homework to support the learning in the classroom. The use of information technology is mostly confined to the older pupils and limited to commercial programs supporting the curriculum or to record data. Teachers do not teach their pupil to use information technology, for example, to sense temperature. They do not do enough to teach their pupils how to communicate their ideas effectively to larger audiences. For example, there are too many instances where pupils reply in single words or phrases and incomplete or grammatically incorrect sentences are ignored. As a result, many pupils lack confidence when speaking to the class.

96. The introduction of the scheme of work developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA] has insured that the curriculum builds on previous work although this has not been in place long enough to give the depth of knowledge that is desirable by Year 6. Teachers assess their pupils' learning at regular intervals. The co-ordinator for science does not have the opportunity to monitor how the subject is taught or planned from day to day and she does not look at pupils' work. Although she has asked the teachers to give their opinions about the effectiveness of the new curriculum she does not have an overview of the effectiveness of the teaching and learning. This is a weakness because she does not have the information she needs to evaluate strengths or weaknesses in her subject or to amend the curriculum. This was a weakness at the time of the last inspection. The co-ordinator should have the opportunity to identify where teaching and planning need her support so that teachers have the understanding and confidence to reduce their reliance on handouts for pupils to record their work. The school has been successful in raising attainment, especially in the juniors. Pupils now cope with the national tests at the end of the key stage. To raise standards further by the age of seven there is now a need to add depth to the curriculum by generating more opportunities for pupils to pursue their own lines of enquiry and to develop an understanding of environmental issues and mankind's influence on the natural world.

ART

97. Standards in art are a strength of the school and above those usually expected of pupils at the ages of seven and eleven. They have improved since the last inspection. Positive attitudes to painting, drawing and model making are fostered from the age of five in reception classes. Pupils draw and paint pictures of their experiences and learn to mix colours by changing the amounts of black and white they add to create shades. In one lesson pupils painted masks based on animal design drawings. These reflected awareness of colours, markings and important facial features following a visit to Twycross Zoo.
98. The teaching of art is good, particularly by teachers who have a specialism in the subject. The emphasis on teaching skills and techniques through demonstration and focus on building self-confidence enables all pupils to feel well supported and successful. The very positive attitudes to art are evident in discussions with pupils of infant and junior ages; they frequently describe art as their favourite subject. They are eager to describe how they created pictures displayed in the hall and classrooms and

refer to the particular talents of teachers. For example, they describe their headteacher as an artist and the contributions he makes to art lessons by showing them how to improve their work and use resources such as pencils and pastels more skilfully. This was evident in two lessons during the inspection when pupils in Years 5 and 6 and Year 2 benefited from clear directions about how to shade colours and represent shapes in the early stages of still life drawings. The coordinator also sets a positive role model and ensures that pupils are well positioned in lessons to enable them to observe and learn from demonstrations. There is a high level of talent and enthusiasm among the staff and this contributes to raising motivation and interest.

99. A significant feature of pupils' achievements by the age of eleven is their awareness of artists from different cultures. They compare the work of artists such as Van Gogh and Cezanne and explain differences in the use of colour and paint. Pupils then explain how they have worked in the style of these painters and talk about the way in which the environment and life experiences influence these compositions, for example Monet's gardens. Pupils also talk about their headteacher as a painter. One pupil described art lessons as 'exciting adventures' and although some pupils have difficulty pronouncing names and using precise technical terms they successfully evaluate the quality of their work and are proud of the very good quality displays in the school. Younger pupils also persist well in lessons. For example, in Years 1 and 2 pupils were encouraged to observe shells and sunflowers carefully. Their pictures and use of pastels showed good awareness of shape, size, colour and tone and two pupils wrote a poem to complement their work. Pupils describe opportunities to work with fabrics and clay but say these are limited.
100. Existing guidance is of good quality and good progress was made in planning a detailed scheme of work following the last inspection. However, a current weakness in the provision is the limited amount of time in which art is taught. The time is shared with design and technology and taught in planned units of work. This results in some long gaps between the teaching of the subject and limits the range and depth of learning. However, the curriculum is being reviewed for September 2000 in line with new national guidance and the school rightly placed emphasis on raising standards in literacy and numeracy. Good links are made with English and mathematics through the use of specific vocabulary such as line and perspective and on occasions when pupils are encouraged to both write and draw their experiences.
101. The achievement of 'Beacon Status' for the arts is an exciting opportunity to extend and develop the subject further.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

102. Due to timetabling arrangements no lessons were observed. Pupils' previous work in the form of models and artefacts and a limited collection of photographs were seen in classrooms and around the school. Discussions were also held with some teachers, the co-ordinator and pupils in Year 2 and Year 6. Evidence gathered indicates that pupils' attainment is below the expected levels. There has been some deterioration in standards since the last inspection when the attainment of seven-year-olds was in line with national expectations. This is partly due to the linking of art and design technology time which results in long periods when design and technology is not taught. This results in a slowing down of progress because pupils are unclear about which tasks are art and which ones are design based.
103. Pupils in Year 2 cut, fold and glue card and paper onto surfaces to produce cards for special occasions. However, these follow the teacher's example and opportunities for

originality and participation in the design process are not exploited. While pupils are also able to sew celebratory millennium mats using simple stitches, there is no evidence of planning sheets being used to create a design or evaluation opportunities being taken to progress children's designing and making skills.

104. Pupils interviewed in Year 6 were unable to describe any technology covered in this academic year, although they recollected making hand puppets and Lego rides in Year 5 with the design and technology co-ordinator. Discussions with the Year 6 teacher revealed a "light touch" approach to technology so far this year following the additional time allocated with the co-ordinator. No evidence of pupils' work was available for scrutiny either in Year 5 or 6 and no photographic evidence of completed artefacts. Scrutiny of workbooks showed no evidence of planning or evaluation work and teachers have no recorded assessments on pupils' skills development. The long gaps of time between technology units and lack of recorded pupils' attainment in knowledge of techniques or skills limits standards and hinders progress significantly and is unsatisfactory. This supports the judgements from the previous inspection which identified 'limited long term progress as pupils, generally do not build upon skills they have previously acquired.'
105. No technology lessons were timetabled during the inspection, so no judgement can be made on teacher confidence and expertise. Discussions with some staff members indicated positive attitudes to technology. However, concern was expressed about past low levels of certain skills on entry to the juniors, for example, scissors control. Teachers in lower junior classes had examples of sunflowers and Roman galleys displayed but work is not always planned collaboratively across the same year groups and work covered frequently depends upon the interests and past experiences of individual teachers hindering a consistency of coverage and skills acquisition.
106. The co-ordinator is experienced and has recently acquired further qualification in the 'Nature and Design of Technology in Primary Schools'. She has made a number of useful artefacts to illustrate different design and technology processes as part of the course requirements. These she intends to use to support staff confidence and promote further ideas. There is a policy and a scheme of work both due for amendment in the light of the forthcoming curriculum revision. The co-ordinator has not yet had the opportunity to monitor her subject throughout the school and her position in the Reception class further restricts opportunities to impact upon practice in the juniors. The lack of monitoring remains a concern from the previous report.
107. The range of resources is adequate overall, but there remain shortages of construction kits, wood and sheet materials which limits further the range of activities that pupils can experience, again identified as a concern from the previous report.

GEOGRAPHY

108. The school has properly adjusted its curriculum to concentrate on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science in line with government guidelines. As a result, the provision for geography has been reduced. There has not been enough attention given to the most effective use of the time available for the subject. As a result there are long stretches of time, sometimes over half a year, when geography is not taught. Pupils are unable to maintain the knowledge and skills they have and the teaching of new aspects of the subject is haphazard, with no overview of the acquisition of geographical skills. Pupils' progress was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. It is now unsatisfactory in the infants and poor in the juniors.

109. In a lesson in Year 1 pupils recognised key features of places beyond their own locality. They spotted the Sphinx in Egypt and Tower Bridge in London and traced their fingers over a simple route plan of the area around the school. They are developing an understanding of the use of a key to represent features on a map. In Year 2 pupils talk about the aspects of British weather but few understand that there are different climates throughout the world. In one lesson there was no attempt to extend pupils' understanding and a pupil's mention of a rain forest was not followed through. In another lesson, however, there was some very good teaching as the teacher motivated his pupils through the interesting presentation of information and good use of questions to extend learning. He monitored the pupils' work and gave good advice for improvement, using pupils' own work to demonstrate good achievement. He made good use of homework to support the work in the classroom. However, there is little evidence of other geography in infant pupils' books. Written work is limited to maps of the British Isles and its countries and capitals, flags and some incomplete work on the weather.
110. There is very little evidence of geographical study in the juniors. Pupils in Year 6 have not yet studied geography this academic year, although there are plans for some fieldwork before the end of term. Some pupils in Year 5 have studied the water cycle and name geographical features like mountains and rivers. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 have a few worksheets relating to weather and climate. Discussion with pupils in Year 6 revealed poor geographical knowledge. In one lesson pupils in Years 3 and 4 used brochures to select suitable holidays for different families. The majority identified the climatic conditions from the brochures and used appropriate geographical vocabulary. However, pupils do not have enough regular geography lessons for their progress to be maintained.
111. Seventy-five percent of the geography teaching observed during the inspection was at least good. This indicates that adjustments to the distribution of time given to the subject have significantly impeded pupils' progress. The geography co-ordinator is aware of the deficiencies in the management of the curriculum and that the introduction of the new QCA scheme of work has not been sufficiently rigorous. She does not have opportunities to monitor teaching or to look at pupils' work and is unable to track pupils' progress throughout the school. The resources for the subject are only sufficient for the limited curriculum provided by the school and will not adequately support Curriculum 2000 in the next academic year. The inappropriate use of available time needs to be addressed as a matter of some urgency.

HISTORY

112. At the time of the last inspection standards in history were broadly satisfactory. Standards continue to be satisfactory at eleven but at seven they are unsatisfactory. Over the last two years the school has placed emphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy skills and this has had the effect of reducing time availability for historical studies. Although there are opportunities for the development of historical knowledge and ideas in literacy lessons, these are only being taken in some junior year groups.
113. History is taught as part of a topic cycle and there are large gaps in time between these. In this way enquiry skills are not being systematically developed and infants are not gaining a secure sense of chronology. In Year 2, pupils were unable to recollect any history they had studied apart from the gunpowder plot

114. There is very little evidence of history in infants' books and of reading being undertaken, although there is some evidence of pupils sequencing events in a story within a historical context and comparing toys now and in the past.
115. The situation in the juniors is better. A range of studies has been undertaken and Year 6 pupils have a satisfactory understanding of life in Britain in Anglo-Saxon and Roman times and are especially knowledgeable about the Tudor period. They are just beginning a local study of Wednesbury and are developing the idea of looking for clues of the past in the present. The work is given added value because of its local intrinsic interest and through the use of fieldwork. The fieldwork was well researched, the teacher knowledgeable and the work was well organised, involving six parents who had been well briefed on expectations and scope of activities to be undertaken.
116. Too much of the work is being guided by a commercially produced scheme with photocopied worksheets, often involving little more than sequencing activities, with outlines coloured in at lunchtime or break times. Little check has been kept on the use of colour, for example in costumes, which leads to misconceptions and misinformation. When pupils are more enthusiastic about history they have been involved in associated practical activities, for example in making long boats in their work on the Vikings. They also enjoy visits and can recall more readily what they learnt on those occasions. Special needs pupils make similar progress to their peers.
117. The co-ordinator has been in post for two years. He fully recognises the weaknesses within the subject, acknowledging the need for a scheme to be produced which incorporates the QCA guidelines. Artefacts are being assembled, visits arranged and visitors, such as the former pupils known as Old Newtowners and who talk to the present pupils about changes and consequences in their lifetime, are all good growth points. With the introduction of Curriculum 2000 it is important to firmly establish history within the school curriculum and to produce a scheme which regularly builds on historical knowledge, helps pupils gain a sense of chronology and encourages the use of primary source material.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

118. The school's previous report found that standards in information and communication technology (ICT) were below expectations for pupils aged seven and that pupils' skills in most areas of ICT were below expectations for pupils aged 11. Standards remain unsatisfactory overall. Where standards and levels of skill acquisition are higher pupils either have home computers, attend the computer club regularly or are in classes where teacher confidence and access to ICT equipment are more favourable.
119. Pupils in Year 6 have experienced a narrow range of information technology activities. Pupils interviewed spoke of regularly using revision programs for the junior tests. All were able, either independently or with peer support, to 'log on' to the Internet and access information. E-mail facilities are not yet available at the school, although one or two pupils use these frequently at home. Recent work has focused on word processing activities. Pupils are able to load disks, change the size and colour of font. They are less secure with editing such as the use of 'cut' and 'paste'. They have not had access to graphics or control programs such as 'Dazzle' and 'Screen Turtle' although the Year 5 pupils are using these with an increasing level of skill and confidence. Keyboard skills are slow, although the school has recognised this and introduced programs to speed up location of letter keys.

120. Pupils in Year 2 can use a pre-loaded word processing package to type short passages, using the 'Caps Lock' where appropriate. They can use the 'Enter' key and 'Space Bar' but cannot change the font size. Pupils with home computers talked confidently of loading programs and saving their work on disk. Some pupils demonstrated very poor mouse control. There are no current opportunities for pupils to use simple databases or experience using controlling devices such as a Roamer. This has been out of operation for some time awaiting a battery replacement.
121. Pupils' work was in limited evidence around the school. Examples seen were predominantly word processed stories or poems. Pupils' work in ICT is not stored as an ongoing record of program coverage and skill attainment and this prevents proper tracking of knowledge and skills across year groups and within individual classes, keeping standards of achievement low. Usage of computers is monitored within classes and both boys and girls have equal access.
122. Pupils' progress overall is unsatisfactory. This is mainly due to lack of hardware in the infants, where there are, for example, currently facilities in only one classroom for pupils to print out their finished work. Faulty machines prevent the coverage of skills identified within the teaching programme. The unsatisfactory way that ICT is timetabled also hinders pupils' progress. Despite being a core curriculum subject, it only appears on the timetable of two classes as a discrete subject. In both cases, staff confidence with the new technologies was higher. In the Year 1 class observed learning keyboard skills, pupils made good progress in describing parts of the computer and in recognising some function keys. In the Year 5 class pupils made good gains in learning using a graphics program, where they learnt to change colour shades and size of paintbrush.
123. Pupils observed using school computers worked sensibly. Juniors are aware that the equipment has to be used carefully and responsibly. They support each other well in their learning, co-operating well for pair work and sustain concentration and motivation well, overall. Extended typing out of previously written stories is less popular and the time taken up with this activity does not significantly enhance the word processing skills such as editing and moving text around.
124. Teaching was only observed in two classes and there is insufficient evidence on which to make a judgement. Staff confidence in ICT is at different levels. Many teachers familiarise themselves with one piece of software over an extended period of time, e.g. Textease, and opportunities for introducing a greater variety of software is hindered by lack of staff expertise and resources available to integrate into chosen topics. In the co-ordinator's class teaching of ICT is at its strongest, with good subject knowledge appropriately extending pupils' skills and confidence, both within curriculum time and at the computer club, which is very popular and raising standards effectively amongst this small group of attendees.
125. The subject has a hard working temporary co-ordinator, who has a clear vision for future ICT developments within the school, in line with that of the senior management. The Qualifications and Curriculum Agency's scheme of work for ICT is gradually being implemented within the school and recent effective developments have been a thorough auditing of hardware and software and the disposal of outdated equipment. Lack of opportunity for visiting classrooms and monitoring program use and pupils' skills development has reduced considerably the co-ordinator's ability to influence the subject outside her key stage and this is unsatisfactory and remains unimproved since the last report. Pupils' work is not presently stored in portfolios or assessed according to

National Curriculum level descriptors. This results in pupils' skills levels being inadequately tracked and built upon by receiving teachers.

126. The school intends to match national funding to renew Internet services through the National Grid for Learning. The co-ordinator is also presently auditing staff levels of confidence and expertise in preparation for staff training next year through the New Opportunities Fund. Subject co-ordinators are also requested to consider ICT links to their subject and suggest suitable software for purchase. The school has ambitious future plans for a computer suite, plus the help of a technician provided through the Education Achievement Zone funding.
127. The co-ordinator also provides good guidance for colleagues, particularly in the format of simplified instructions for suitable programs and is available during break times to answer queries and provide support. Overall, despite the fact that ICT has been raised nationally to core status, it receives insufficient teaching emphasis across the school.

MUSIC

128. There were no class music lessons in Year 1 and 2 during the four days of the inspection and the inspection team is unable to judge the quality of teaching or pupils' progress in the infants. In a hymn practice taken by the creative arts co-ordinator from the juniors, infants sang accurately and tunefully, although their diction was not clear. They behaved well in spite of the noise from the junior playtime outside the hall. The teacher dealt with the few cases of restless behaviour sensitively and tactfully. Pupils especially enjoyed the action song at the end of the session.
129. The school uses a commercial scheme of work for music. This insures that there is an appropriate range of musical activities and that pupils build on previous learning. The teaching in the juniors is at least sound. In one lesson the teaching was excellent. The teacher had very good relationships with her pupils and they were totally committed to working to the best of their abilities. She has good subject knowledge and high expectations of her pupils' abilities to achieve. Although the pupils had not had a lesson for some time because they were concentrating on the national end of key stage tests, they made rapid progress. Pupils looked at and listened to a graphic representation of voice patterns based on the word "delicious". They then wrote and composed their own with other gastronomic words, using variations in pitch, dynamics, pace and duration. Pupils remembered the musical terms for the elements and used them accurately. Above all, they were really enjoying the lesson, reflecting the teacher's enthusiasm and valuing each other's efforts. The groups worked together very well, organising themselves effortlessly. At the end of the lesson, pupils evaluated the mood of music while the teacher led them towards more and more thoughtful and accurate vocabulary. The pupils and the inspector were sorry when the lesson ended!
130. Juniors sing enthusiastically. They are expected to use technical vocabulary to describe musical elements. In a hymn practice pupils knew, for example, that "crescendo" means "getting louder". Pupils in Years 3 and 4 are beginning to distinguish between music with three or four beats and to play percussion instruments in time to the music. They find it harder to identify the first beat of the bar in 3/4 time. Pupils identify the sound of some instruments but are not yet secure in their understanding of the types of instruments. For example, one pupil thought that the guitar is a brass instrument. Overall standards have been maintained since the last report.

131. The school has an appropriate range of resources for the subject although there are few instruments or examples of recorded music from non-European cultures. Local Authority peripatetic music teachers provide good quality string and brass tuition for about 20 pupils. Some of these pupils play confidently in assemblies. There is an annual musical and dramatic production involving the whole school. Years 5 and 6 will attend the Ingestre Hall Residential Arts Centre at the end of June and will be making music there. Year 5 saw "Calamity Jane" performed by Wodensborough City Technology College in March. The WEAZ initiative will have a positive impact on the creative arts, including music. The school will review the scheme of work in the light of the new National Curriculum that is in use from September this year. However, all the musical expertise is amongst teachers in the juniors and the co-ordinator has no way of evaluating the provision in the infants. Pupils have made satisfactory progress by the age of eleven but in Years 3 and 4 pupils do not have musical knowledge appropriate for their age.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

132. At seven and eleven attainment is in line with national expectations and progress is satisfactory. This is an improvement on the previous inspection when attainment at age 11 was found to be below average.

133. By the age of 7 pupils are refining the skill of using a bat and ball. They aim the ball with increasing accuracy, control body movements such as running and jogging and can stop quickly at the teacher's command. Their awareness of the use of space and the need for personal safety is good. They can explain in simple terms the need for exercise to keep bodies fit and healthy.

134. By the age of 11 pupils jog and sprint over increased distances. They can run in relays and sustain energetic activity over appropriate periods of time. In Year 5 pupils demonstrated good ability in throwing and fielding balls accurately. They work in small groups to devise their own team games with set rules successfully.

135. In swimming, less confident juniors swim short distances across a learner pool. They use floats to help propel them across the pool. The more confident pupils show good awareness of the need to develop their strokes and to build up stamina for swimming greater distances in the main pool.

136. Pupils have positive attitudes towards physical education lessons. They listen attentively, behave well and work successfully in pairs and small groups.

137. Only two lessons of physical education were observed in the infants and four in the juniors. Teaching is best when staff have a secure knowledge of how to refine skills and build on past knowledge. All teachers demonstrated good awareness of health and safety issues and structured lessons well with appropriate warm up and cool down activities included. Specialist teachers, for example, in swimming and a Year 6 class are most successfully raising standards through systematic targeting of skills and good use of teacher and pupil demonstration. Also school staff have benefited from professional development opportunities whilst working alongside these staff, which has raised expertise considerably.

138. The co-ordinator is a recent appointment. She has not yet had the opportunity to monitor standards across the school but is keen and well motivated to improve subject

provision. The present scheme of work lacks sufficient detail about lesson content and support for skills' progression to help the less confident teachers and this has hindered improvement in standards across the school. This situation remains unchanged from the last inspection. Liaison has taken place with a number of external agencies regarding the extension of sporting provision. Recently some Year 5 pupils have been given the opportunity to become involved in weekly health and fitness sessions at a local high school before school starts. The local West Bromwich Albion Football Club has also offered football skills activities for juniors and more work is planned on outdoor pursuits with all pupils.

139. The school hall is spacious with large and small apparatus presenting good challenges across the year groups. Some items of equipment such as mats and bench tops are beginning to show signs of wear. The large hard play areas are used well for outside game activities. The playing field is too small for some junior athletic activities. Overall resources are adequate and in satisfactory condition.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

140. The teaching of religious education is satisfactory, enabling pupils to meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. By the time pupils leave the school at eleven years of age they have gained a sound understanding of the richness and diversity of religions, have a satisfactory knowledge of the Christian faith, know about key events in the life of Jesus and are gaining an understanding of religious concepts and symbolism.

141. Teaching is aided by a close adherence to the locally agreed syllabus and a clear outline of the concepts, skills and knowledge to be taught. Knowledge is progressively built on and concepts explored in greater depth as pupils progress through the school. A good example of this was observed in a lesson on 'selfishness' in which young pupils explored the characteristics through the story of a 'selfish' giant. Year 5 pupils also examined this concept through discussions about caring and sharing in which they began to answer difficult questions relating to types of behaviour, finally linking this to Christian teaching from Biblical stories.

142. Teachers have a satisfactory depth of knowledge and understanding of principal world faiths and expectations are sound, although at times there is an over-reliance on worksheets, which do not place sufficient demands on pupils to decide how best to record their learning. In the juniors there is an over-emphasis on 'telling' rather than letting pupils find out for themselves especially in Years 3 and 4. Older pupils are sufficiently extended through a more open-ended approach. They explore symbolism and give reasons for its importance, for example why the rainbow is important in the Christian faith. They have a good knowledge of other faiths, particularly Sikhism.

143. An important part of religious education lessons is the relationship between faith teaching and the moral code. Pupils are taught their rights and responsibilities, the importance of helping others and how our actions show how much we care about the earth and each other. In this way pupils are helped to see the importance of religion in their lives. Spiritual awareness is supported when pupils are asked to write their own prayers in their religious education lessons. Good examples are given of people whose strong faith has helped other people, for example Mother Theresa and Father Damien.

144. In most lessons suitable arrangements are made to assist the learning of all pupils, especially those with special educational needs. This assistance is given through work

that closely matches the needs of the pupils and with extra assistance being given by the teacher or learning support assistant.

145. The co-ordinator has been in post for only a short time but has produced a new scheme of work which she is adapting to suggestions in the QCA scheme. She is seeking to link the subject to the Literacy Strategy and has purchased books suitable for whole-class reading. Assessments of work over time are not yet having an impact on curricular planning but work is marked regularly and formative assessments made. Resources are being gradually extended to include artefacts from various religions and good use is made of materials, multi-cultural books and artefacts loaned from the local teachers' centre.
146. Standards observed in the previous inspection have been maintained and the appointment of a co-ordinator has strengthened the place of the subject within the school curriculum.