

INSPECTION REPORT

BENINGTON C OF E VC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Benington

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117389

Headteacher: Mrs G Hollingsworth

Lead inspector: Martin Creasey

Dates of inspection: 10th - 13th November 2003

Inspection number: 255489

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Church of England Primary School
School category:	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils:	4 – 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	83
School address:	Walkern Road Benington Road Benington Stevenage
Postcode:	SG2 7LP
Telephone number:	(01438) 869 254
Fax number:	(01438) 869 254
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Cobb
Date of previous inspection:	26 th April 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Benington Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School is much smaller than the average primary school with currently 83 pupils on roll. It serves the village of Benington and has become popular outside its catchment and admits pupils from other nearby villages and Stevenage. There are more boys than girls on roll and a very small number of pupils from an ethnic minority background. All pupils speak English as their first language. The number of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is above the national average and the percentage with statements of SEN is in line with national average. Many pupils leave the school after completing Year 4 to go to middle schools some way outside the area in order to gain entry to popular high schools. As a result of this only one child attended in Year 6 in the summer of this year. In the current school year there are 12 pupils in Year 6. A significant number of pupils move to the independent sector at the end of the same year. The school serves a diverse social catchment. Children come from housing which is privately owned or rented from housing associations and the local council. The attainment of children entering the school in Reception is about average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	4 - 5
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	6 - 9
Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	9 - 16
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	16 - 18
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING AND SUBJECTS	19 - 30
AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE	
SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 AND 2	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	31

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective and improving school. Since the headteacher's appointment in September 2002 there has been a very clear focus on raising standards and improving the quality of education. The governing body and the staff play a key role in supporting the headteacher and share in the success of developing the strengths of the school. Foundation Stage pupils achieve very well and this is linked to the very good teaching. Teaching is good in Years 1 – 6 and pupils are achieving well at the end of both key stages. The annual fluctuation of numbers in Year 6 affects the school's ability to plan for the long-term development of the curriculum, teaching and learning for the oldest pupils.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage are very good and sometimes excellent.
- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics have improved this year in Key Stage 1 and are good.
- Achievement in mathematics is very good at the end of Key Stage 1.
- Pupils' achievement is good throughout the school in English, mathematics and science.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is good and they make good progress.
- The leadership of the headteacher is very good and she is well supported by staff and governors.
- Reports to parents do not give enough guidance on how pupils could improve their work.
- The school does not always provide higher attaining pupils with enough challenge in their writing.

The school has made good progress since the last inspection in 1999. Mathematics has improved considerably and pupils in Key Stage 1 attained well above average results in the 2003 national tests. Achievement in all core subjects shows improvement across the school. There is full use of the agreed syllabus in religious education and pupils now achieve well. The improvements in the Foundation Stage for pupils in Reception are very good. All curriculum requirements are taught appropriately and to the highest quality and achievement is good. School improvement planning is now a very effective process and focuses on the action required to improve the quality of education and standards of education.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 2, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
reading	A	D	C	E
writing	A	E	C	C
mathematics	A	D	A	B

*Key: A - well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average.
Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 2.*

NB. The size of groups of pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 are small and vary each year. This means that statistically in some year groups each pupil can represent more than ten percentage points of the total. Consequently analysis of test scores must be treated cautiously. Last year only one pupil attended Year 6 and as a result there will be no publication of the Key Stage 2 scores as Ofsted is committed to not identifying individuals if at all possible. Comments on Year 6 will reflect standards seen during the inspection.

The standards pupils achieve are good and match the mostly high quality teaching observed throughout the school. Foundation Stage pupils are on course to exceed the required standards in all the areas of learning at the end of Reception. Standards in Year 2 and Year 6 in English, mathematics and science are good and improved since the last inspection. In the 2003 tests Year 2 pupils did much better than their peers in similar schools in mathematics, were about the same in writing but below in reading. There are improvements in place in guided reading and standards in

reading observed during the inspection were good. Pupils with SEN do well and reach their capabilities, some achieving more than this. There are no significant differences in the achievements of boys and girls. In most lessons pupils capable of achieving higher standards do so, particularly in mathematics, however, teachers sometimes set writing tasks that are too easy causing some underachievement.

Pupils' personal development is good. The personal, social, moral and spiritual education provision for pupils is good and contributes significantly to personal development. There is a happy, positive atmosphere in the school generally and this fosters good learning. Pupils behave well in lessons and in the playground. Attendance and punctuality are very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a good education. Teaching is good in Key Stages 1 and 2 and very good in the Foundation Stage. Pupils learn well and make good progress because of the quality planning for the needs of pupils in mixed age classes. In most lessons the needs of all pupils are addressed carefully and teachers monitor their progress well. There is good information about individual pupils' achievement and progress and overall teachers use this well to prepare work. There is not enough challenge in some writing tasks for pupils capable of higher achievement. The curriculum follows the National Curriculum and the recommendations for the areas of learning in the Foundation Stage. Parents support the school well. There is a good range of visits and activities involving the wider community that enhance the curriculum.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher provides very good examples of leadership and management to her colleagues and the community. Since her appointment in September 2002 she has focused rigorously on improving the standards and quality of education. She has a clear vision for the improvement of the school and shares this well with staff, governors, parents and pupils. The school improvement planning process involves staff and governors and uses data to provide key information in order that targets are set for improvement. There are good systems in place for improving the performance of teachers and supporting new staff. The governors are very supportive and work well in the best interests of the school. They meet statutory requirements but need to clarify some details in their annual report to parents. Reports to parents about their children's progress at school are clear but do not make sufficiently clear what pupils need to do to improve their work.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents' questionnaire returns and the responses during the parents' evening reveal a high level of satisfaction with the school. Some parents would like improvements to the way information about their children's progress is reported. Pupils' questionnaires show they like school and feel teachers treat them fairly. Some older pupils would like more responsibility.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are:

- Ensure that all teachers provide more demanding work, particularly in writing, for pupils capable of achieving higher standards.
- Improve the detail in the reports to parents on pupils' progress and achievement so that it is clear what pupils are required to do to improve.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects

Standards are good across the school. There has been steady improvement since the last inspection and standards in English and mathematics are generally above average at the end of both key stages. Standards are also above average in science, information and communication technology (ICT), history, religious education (RE), physical education (PE), art and music. In all other subjects standards are in line with the national expectations. The improvements in teaching and the processes of planning and assessment contribute significantly to the standards of achievement. The small size of year groups and the low numbers of pupils in Year 6 mean that there are wide fluctuations in annual statistics. There are no significant differences in achievement between boys and girls. Pupils with SEN achieve well throughout the school because their work is carefully planned to their capabilities and they are well supported by learning assistants.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in the Foundation Stage are good.
- Standards have risen in Key Stage 1 national tests particularly in mathematics.
- Both reading and writing have improved at Key Stage 1 but not enough pupils attained the higher Level 3.
- In Year 6 standards are improving and in a larger year group this year results in the tests in 2004 are likely to reflect this.

Commentary

Starting school

1. Children beginning school in the Reception class have a wide range of skills, knowledge and understanding. Early assessment shows that overall they have an average profile and are particularly strong in social and personal skills. Although children have only completed a half term of the full year in the school they are making good progress and are on course to achieve the early learning goals in all areas of learning, as the reception pupils managed last year.

School's results in national tests

2. Results improved last year in the Year 2 tests. All pupils made at least the expected progress in tested subjects based on their baseline assessments undertaken in Reception and some did better than this. The table below shows that standards rose in reading and are now very close to the national average. Fewer pupils reached the higher Level 3 and this affected the overall points score; however the percentage of pupils attaining the nationally expected Level 2B or above was very good. Improvement in writing has been good and pupils now attain in line with national expectations, but, as in reading, improvements are needed in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels. In mathematics the scores show considerable advancement and pupils now attain levels well above average throughout, improving from a position that was below average last year.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 2 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
reading	15.5 (15.3)	15.7 (15.8)
writing	14.8 (12.6)	14.6 (14.4)
mathematics	17.9 (15.8)	16.3 (16.5)

There were 11 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. There is no analysis of last year's Key Stage 2 test results as only one pupil took part.

Inspection findings

The Foundation Stage

4. The children in the Reception class had attended for half a term at the time of the inspection. The children are taught in a single age group and many have received pre-school experience in the local playgroup. They are achieving well because of the very good teaching that enables them to settle well to school life. At this early stage of their school career it is evident that many will exceed the goals expected of them by the end of the year. Children have good attitudes to school and are socially well adjusted. The skills required for developing good language and numeracy skills are well planned and taught by the staff. There are very good facilities in place for their physical and creative development and opportunities for using large equipment in the secure outside play area are well organised. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection.

Years 1 and 2

5. The pupils in Key Stage 1 are taught in a single class. They make good progress and are achieving well in English and mathematics. The lesson observations and work scrutiny also revealed that progress and achievement in science, ICT and RE is good. Work is carefully planned and ensures that Year 1 and Year 2 pupils will achieve above the national expectations in most subjects. They have lessons in PE taught by an instructor bought in by the school and achievement is good. In reading pupils make good progress throughout with guided reading, introduced as a separate daily session from literacy, having a good effect on standards. Writing is improving generally but some tasks set for more capable pupils are too easy. In mathematics the achievement of all pupils is good and there are indications that the more capable pupils will attain the higher levels in tests as they did in the last school year.

Years 3 to 6

6. In Key Stage 2 pupils are achieving well in all subjects by Year 6. There are 12 pupils in Year 6 this year, but only 3 in Year 5 and these together with some of the Year 4 pupils are in one class. The other class has the rest of the Year 4 and all the Year 3 pupils. This mix generally works well and the emphasis placed on good planning by the headteacher is reflected in the practice of the teachers who ensure the work of the split year group, Year 4, is jointly planned. By Year 6 the pupils achieve good standards in literacy and the guided reading sessions are producing confident readers in all year groups. Writing is generally satisfactory in both style and content with some good work observed. The pupils are developing their imaginative work alongside practical, informative writing. There is some inconsistency in the achievement in writing in Year 4. Pupils in the Year 3/4 class tend to write less well and less extensively. This is partly explained by the difference in the capabilities of those pupils but there are occasions when higher standards could be expected of Year 4 pupils in the Year 3/4 class. The standards in mathematics, science and ICT are generally good by the end of the key stage.

Whole school matters

7. There are good examples of pupils using their developing literacy skills across other areas of the curriculum. In history in Key Stage 2 pupils are writing newspaper reports of historical events showing a good command of the writing style required. In Key Stage 1 written work in RE is imaginative and shows pupils using skills developed in literacy lessons. Pupils are able to use reading skills to research topics in humanities and further develop their knowledge and understanding. In almost every lesson the computer was being used by pupils to good effect. ICT is well used across the curriculum in all year groups and this occurs in classrooms as well as in the ICT suite.
8. There are no significant differences in the achievement of boys and girls. Pupils capable of achieving at higher levels are now mostly working at those levels, particularly in mathematics. In writing they are sometimes set the same task as other pupils by teachers and this leads to some underachievement.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Their personal development is good with the social and moral aspects strongest. Attendance and punctuality are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- From the youngest reception children through to Year 6, pupils are encouraged to respect each other and the school. This strong ethos means that attitudes are very positive amongst pupils.
- Attendance and punctuality are very good and parents play a significant part in this by supporting the school's policies very well.
- Pupils' moral, social and cultural development are good.

Commentary

Attitudes and behaviour

9. Pupils' attitudes are very good. The good aspects seen at the last inspection have been improved. Attitudes towards school, peers and adults are very good and pupils demonstrate mature social skills when in large groups at lunch and break times. The pupils' behaviour is good. The youngest children in Reception enter school with satisfactory social skills that are developed by the very good teaching and support that sets out expectations of behaviour and the clear routines to be followed. Parents are very supportive of the school and are generally satisfied that behaviour is good. Pupils also enjoy school and recognise that most of their colleagues behave well. There are many activities arranged for them during and after school and pupils enter into these enthusiastically. They talk knowledgeably about the school, their work and extra activities and are clearly pleased and proud to be part of the school community.
10. There are currently a number of pupils with SEN behavioural problems but they are generally well managed in classes and around the school. No bullying was observed during the inspection and only one child has been temporarily excluded in the past year. The racial incident recorded by the school has been thoroughly and appropriately dealt with under the schools' effective policy.

Personal development

11. This aspect is good. The pupils learn about what is right and wrong and the impact of their behaviour on others through assemblies and their work in personal, social and health education (PSHE). Opportunities are provided for pupils to reflect on their actions in these lessons but less so in other aspects of their work. There is a school council and pupils feel that issues raised by them are taken seriously, for example the improved provision of the

range of games and activities in the playground. There is a 'Buddy' system in the playground where pupils are identified as helpers to colleagues by the wearing of yellow bands. Pupils take this very seriously and genuinely feel that they contribute to the well-being of their colleagues. There were no negative attitudes to this from pupils. This aspect is a particular strength of the school and contributes significantly to the general good attitudes to learning seen in the lessons.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Asian
Asian or Asian British

No. of pupils on roll
76
1
2
2
1

Exclusions in the last school year

Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0

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

Cultural development

12. Cultural development is very good. Pupils develop their understanding of the cultural heritage of this country very well in history, through trips to important local and national sites and from visitors to school. They also have good knowledge and understanding of wider western cultural development particularly from their studies in art. The pupils' knowledge and understanding of other cultures such as Islam and Judaism are well developed. The work in RE is essential to this as are the many and various displays representing the different cultural traditions in this country. Pupils understand that skin colour is not a way of identifying nationality.

Attendance

13. The school's attendance figures are well above the national average and remain very good. There are few unauthorised absences which again is better than national figures. Punctuality is excellent and the school's attendance procedures are not often used; in fact staff need to be reminded as to how they work as they are rarely invoked! Registers are maintained appropriately by staff and returned to the central office. Parents are very good about informing the school regarding their children's absences.

Authorised absence	
School data	4.2
National data	5.4

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.3
National data	0.5

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Throughout the school the quality of education provided is good. There is a close link between the good teaching and pupils' learning enhanced by careful planning that ensures that in most lessons the mixed age classes have work appropriately matched to pupils' capabilities and needs. Learning is developed through good use of visits and interesting activities that are linked across subjects wherever possible. The accommodation is used well and the limitations of the outside mobile classroom are overcome by good planning by the teacher and the sensible behaviour of the oldest pupils located there. The ICT room only accommodates a half of a class at a time but teachers and

pupils use it regularly and learning support assistants manage the groups remaining in the class bases well.

Teaching and learning

Teaching is very good in the Foundation Stage and good in Key Stages 1 and 2 which shows good improvement since the last inspection. There is a consistent quality to the teaching that only rarely falls below high standards. As a result learning is regularly good in the lessons and pupils progress well. Pupils with SEN are well taught and there is good inclusion of all pupils in the work of classes.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In the Foundation Stage teachers and support assistants assess pupils well and have high expectations.
- The improvements to teachers’ planning means that most lessons are well prepared and meet the needs of all pupils.
- Teachers’ planning has clear objectives and expectations in terms of learning.
- There are good relationships between staff and pupils.
- Teachers work hard to interest pupils in most lessons generating enthusiasm for learning.
- The teachers and assistants work well together sharing in the planning and assessment of work.
- The tasks set for pupils are usually challenging but in the very small amount of unsuccessful teaching they were not.
- Some more capable pupils were sometimes set the same work as their colleagues which was too easy for them.
- Teachers provide good introductions to lessons, recap on previous learning and use questions very well to promote pupils’ thinking and ideas.
- The improvements to the assessment of pupils are reflected in the way teachers use the information in planning and teaching.

Commentary

14. The following table shows the high quality of teaching across the school. Most lessons were good or better, half were very good or excellent and only one was unsatisfactory. In this lesson the teacher showed some misjudgement in the setting of the work and pupils were confused about what they were expected to do. This led to very rare underachievement across the ability range in the class and some poor behaviour from a few pupils. However, the vast majority of lessons are successful and are exemplified by the teachers’ ability to work with two and three year groups in their classes. The quality of teaching and its steady improvement since the last inspection are directly responsible for the rising standards in core subjects. The headteacher provides strong leadership and sets high expectations for teaching which is regularly monitored. Pupils enjoy their lessons and express high levels of satisfaction about their teachers. Parents share these views and believe teachers expect hard work and their children to make good progress.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 20 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
3	6	7	3	1	0	0

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

Characteristics in very good and excellent lessons

15. By tracking Year 6 pupils in one very good mathematics lesson it was possible to record the high quality of the teaching required to plan appropriate work; to manage the group; and ensure that all Year 6 pupils, regardless of their capabilities, were challenged by the tasks, had their progress monitored during the lesson and successfully met the learning objectives at the end of the hour.

Example of outstanding practice

An excellent communication, language and literacy lesson in the Foundation Stage in which children began to develop knowledge and understanding of rhythm and rhyme.

The teacher in the Reception class provided an exciting and well planned lesson that generated great enthusiasm and concentration amongst the youngest children in the school. She used the nursery rhyme of 'Humpty Dumpty' to provide a familiar base for the work. Her warmth and respect for the children provides a friendly encouragement to which they respond very well. The teacher and the support assistant have high expectations and as a result the work is successful and rhyming words such as 'flute', 'scoot', 'coat' and 'goat' are produced with some children able to write them with near accuracy on whiteboards. The teacher uses praise well and draws on children's work to provide good examples to others. The growing success of the children increases their enthusiasm and the whole lesson progresses with pace and high quality learning.

This approach by the reception teacher was used to great effect in other lessons during the inspection. This means that children not long in school have high levels of enthusiasm for their lessons and their learning progresses very well.

Common strengths

16. Teachers generally have a good understanding of the requirements for pupils with SEN and they use the individual education action plans well to organise teaching and learning. The reception class teacher has a very good understanding of how young children with special educational needs learn and what should be provided to increase the learning opportunities and engage their interest.

Assessing pupils' progress

17. The school has worked hard to improve the assessment procedures since the last inspection when they were judged as unsatisfactory, particularly in the teachers' use of assessment to plan teaching and learning. They are now good. The link with a Beacon School in London has proved very successful in providing clear support and guidance to the school for assessment. A computer system used by the Beacon School has been introduced to track individual pupils through the school and ensures that assessment information is now available to every teacher on each pupil. In the Foundation Stage class there is a baseline assessment of each child which measures their starting levels against the early learning goals. Appropriate assessments were made at the end of the summer term on all pupils completing the Foundation Stage. This information is used well to inform the planning and teaching in Key Stage 1. All teachers keep ongoing records on pupils' progress and achievement and assessment tasks are built into the lessons on a regular basis. The school monitors the statutory test results at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 and uses the information to identify weaknesses and plan improvements. Marking is carried out regularly and teachers feedback to pupils both orally and in writing on what is required to improve. The literacy books all contain appropriate targets for individual improvement. This is not yet a regular feature in the numeracy work books.

Homework

18. Homework is set regularly in every class and reception children also take home reading and word books. Parents felt there was some inconsistency in the quantity and regularity of homework, but early in the term teachers were still establishing their practice with their new

classes. There is a policy which is well supported by parents and pupils complete the work set.

19. The school provides a broad curriculum that is strengthened by after-school clubs, practical activities, visits and visitors and the link with a Beacon School. The school's plans to support the teaching of different subjects and meet the needs of pupils in mixed age classes have greatly improved since the last inspection. There are sufficient teachers and teaching assistants to provide effective support for pupils and they work well together. A new enclosed outside area for children in the Foundation Stage has been provided. There are good resources for all subjects and these are well used to support learning. The new ICT suite is a valuable resource but due to lack of internal space in the school it is only large enough to hold half a class of pupils at a time; however the staff make good provision to overcome this difficulty.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good use is made of educational visits, participation in locally based events, visitors and the link with a Beacon School to enrich and improve the curriculum.
- There is a good range of out of lesson and after school clubs and activities.
- This is an inclusive school committed to ensuring individuals and groups have equality of access and opportunity.
- Planning of the curriculum has been improved considerably since the last inspection and now meets all statutory requirements including those in the Foundation Stage.
- The new secure outdoor area for the Foundation Stage is a good improvement.
- ICT is used well to support learning in other subjects.
- The accommodation is satisfactory. The school suffers from a lack of storage space, has a very small library area and a computer suite.

Commentary

Planning for work in the Foundation Stage

20. Planning in the Foundation Stage is very good and based on national guidelines. Staff plan activities to engage and interest the children and these are enriched by the provision of the enclosed outside area.

Planning for work in Years 1 to 6

21. The curriculum provides a sound basis for pupils' learning. It is firmly based on the National Curriculum and the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. A regular programme of visits and visitors help to make learning exciting. The links with other village schools for inter-school sports, the summer day trip to Walton on the Naze for pupils, staff and parents and carers, with the annual residential visit for pupils in Years 5 and 6 to the Isle of Wight provide very good opportunities for pupils' personal development.
22. Engagement with events in the village when the school provides Maypole dancers or singers and on occasions when the school choir sings to the retired members of the local community and the close relationship with the parish church are examples of how links between subjects are used to extend learning and develop a strong sense of community.
23. The school is now reviewing and developing the school-devised rolling programme of curriculum coverage so as to plan the curriculum more effectively to meet the needs of the school. Since the number of pupils in a cohort can vary greatly year-on-year, annual planning for curriculum coverage is particularly challenging for this school.
24. Suitable emphasis is placed on English and mathematics. The National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy have been used well by teachers as their basis for planning in these

subjects and have contributed to the recent good improvement in standards. Literacy and numeracy skills are being developed and employed in other subjects as pupils read and record information or carry out tasks. The school has already identified that further improvement needs to be made so that this becomes a regular planned feature of provision.

25. The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced. Pupils maintain concentration and interest in lessons and time is used well. Currently the time available for teaching meets the recommended minimum.

An inclusive approach

26. The school's strong commitment to ensuring equality of access and opportunity for all its pupils is achieved by active intervention through additional programmes, setting for English and mathematics in mixed age classes and the good support provided by teachers and teaching assistants in lessons. A two-year planning cycle in Years 1 and 2 and a four year cycle in Years 3 to 6 ensure that the needs of the different age groups in the mixed age classes are met and ensure that pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are systematically developed. All pupils on the special needs register have individual education plans (IEP) highlighting the pupils' individual needs and these are regularly reviewed. Parents and carers are able to be involved in decision making for their child. All pupils with special educational needs have access to the same curriculum as their peers.

Example of outstanding practice

The school has formed a profitable link with a Beacon School in London. This has provided inspirational help in a number of management areas including improving data analysis, recording assessment information and the strengthening of subject coordination. The school has plans to use the available subject expertise of the Beacon School to assist the review and revision of the rolling curriculum programme.

Restrictions imposed by the accommodation

27. The school is located on a good-sized single site but currently has a detached classroom with only cold running water and no mains sewer drainage and therefore no toilets. Access to two other classrooms is through the school hall, which inevitably disturbs lessons. Access to the fourth classroom is directly off the administration office reception area; this is far from ideal. Storage space throughout the school is very limited and some areas are overcrowded with essential resources. The new ICT suite, although of high quality provision, will only accommodate half a class of pupils at a time and the library area is also too small for a class to use, although throughout the school pupils enjoy choosing and using books. The school is well maintained and cared for. Overall it provides a satisfactory learning environment given the constraints caused by lack of space.
28. The school works hard to overcome the limitations of its buildings. There is a programme of off-site provision for swimming. In addition there is on-site provision of physical education and sports coaching which the school buys in from a specialist company. There is a good range of out of lesson clubs and the school maximises opportunities for competitive sporting and musical activities with neighbouring village schools and a secondary school in Stevenage.

Moving from one stage to the next

29. The school is an effective happy community and movement from class to class within the school is achieved very smoothly. There is a well-organised 'buddy system' to ensure that pupils may be befriended if they are feeling lonely. The transfer to middle and secondary schools starts to take place from Year 4 onwards; this is due to parents exercising their

preference for a secondary school where entrance is via a middle school in another area of the county.

Staffing

30. There are sufficient teachers and teaching assistants who are suitably qualified and deployed to teach the curriculum. They have sufficient experience and suitable skills to undertake the tasks they are assigned. All teaching assistants are effective in their role as part of the teaching team.

Resources

31. Good resources are in place to meet the needs of the curriculum in all subjects. Those for Foundation Stage, literacy, numeracy, science and information and communication technology have all been improved significantly since the last inspection. There is now a good, well used external play area with appropriate access from the reception classroom.

Care, guidance and support

The care, guidance and support for the pupils are good overall. There are some very good aspects, particularly those where pupils are involved through the school's council in influencing the provision the school makes. The pupils have good relationships with all staff and pupils are well cared for.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff provide good support and guidance and pupils are confident that they know an adult who will help them if required.
- There are effective procedures for the protection of pupils based on the local authority's guidance; these procedures are not readily accessible by all staff.
- Pupils are able to raise concerns about health and safety measures through the school council.
- There is good provision of care for pupils with special educational needs.

Commentary

Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety

32. The school's procedures for ensuring the safety and well being of pupils are satisfactory. There are appropriate members of staff designated for first aid and child protection. The headteacher is the nominated person for child protection and is still undergoing regular training. The school provides sex education for the older pupils and the school nurse participates in this. There are policies in place for this and drugs education with 'opt out clauses' for parents if required. The main entrance to the school is now secure with a controlled entry device in place and codes for permitted access. The school has published guidance regarding child protection procedures and the details of this are available in the school office. There is no summary guidance readily available for each member of staff in order to assist when dealing with such issues.

Support and advice

33. The induction of new pupils to the school both when they join as reception children and if they arrive later in the school is good. As well as support from staff there is a 'buddy' system in place that means that newly arrived pupils would be designated a 'buddy' to help them around the school. There are also strong family ties in the school and older pupils were observed 'looking after' younger siblings during breaks. Staff know pupils well in this small school and information about them is shared confidentially and sensitively. Pupils trust staff to be fair and supportive if they need them.

34. Pupils with special educational needs are well provided for. The school has a secure system of creating individual education plans which outline how pupils' individual special needs are to be met. The school involves pupils and parents in the plans and they have manageable targets and steps that can be evaluated easily and are reviewed frequently. This has a positive impact on pupils' achievement.
35. There is a school council comprising of pupils selected from each year group. This group takes its work seriously and has raised several issues with the headteacher. Action concerning the unpleasant toilets, reported by the school council, has been taken to improve the environment of these.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

36. The parents' meeting and questionnaire returns reveal a high level of support for the school from parents. The partnership between school and parents is good. Parents recognise the improvements to the school that have occurred during the past year and believe there is a strong focus on standards and quality.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents express high levels of satisfaction with the provision the school makes.
- Parents contribute significantly to the school in time and resources and this supports pupils' learning.
- There are strong links between the school and the village community that contribute to pupils' learning.
- The school has improved its communication with parents and the community and this is now good.

Commentary

Links with parents

37. The school has improved its working relationship with parents since the last inspection. Parents contribute to pupils' learning by providing voluntary support in classes and raising funds for resources in school through the parents' organisation. In addition parents are strong supporters of the school's policies and ensure that children attend well, arrive punctually and complete homework tasks. There is a good atmosphere at the school gates and parents express satisfaction with the way the school responds to and deals with parental concerns or issues. The school has sought the views of the parents on how the school operates and as a result has introduced additional parents' evenings to explain the literacy strategy. The school has improved its reports to parents but they still lack precise indicators about what pupils need to do to improve their work particularly in numeracy and literacy.
38. The school communicates well with parents in other ways; there are notes for parents displayed in classroom windows; a notice board adjacent to the entrance steps to school; regular parents' newsletters at the start and end of each term; and curriculum information on what will be studied in the coming term is provided by the class teachers.

Links with the community

39. There are strong links with the village community. For example the local meals-on-wheels operates from the school and the headteacher writes regular articles in the parish magazine. The governors have established a marketing committee to ensure the work of the school is well publicised in an attempt to address the effects of parents removing pupils after Year 4 to go to a middle school in order to secure the secondary placements they want. There is a Year 6 French class run voluntarily by a villager. The school has its own choir and this performs in the school and around the surrounding area too.

Links with other schools

40. The headteacher has worked hard to establish good working links with schools both locally and further afield. An important link has been made with a Beacon School in London. As a result Benington has benefited from detailed support in key areas of teaching, planning and assessment all of which have a significant effect on school improvement. There are developing links with local secondary schools. The headteacher is working hard to improve parents' views of these schools so that pupils will remain for Year 5 and Year 6 instead of transferring out of Benington School.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher has brought great energy and enthusiasm to the school since her appointment and focused very clearly on raising standards and quality. There are good management systems in place to implement the improvements planned. Governance is good and provides strong strategic support and challenge to the key staff of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher provides very good leadership with a clear vision for school improvement.
- The wider leadership of the school focuses well on raising standards.
- The governors work well with the school's leadership in school improvement planning.
- There are good procedures in place for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning.
- There are good policies in place to support the work of the school in raising standards.
- The leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are very good.
- The teachers all share responsibility for the leadership and management of subjects and undertake this work well.
- The leadership and management of assessment and SEN are good.

Commentary

Leadership

41. Since her appointment the headteacher has shown strong leadership of the school. She provides a clear vision expressed through the school improvement plan and in the work she does to raise standards and support the quality of teaching and learning. This vision is supported by governors and has led to pupils' achievement being improved which is now reflected in the test results, particularly in Key Stage 1 in the last school year. There is a strong sense of teamwork in the school and staff support each other well sharing planning and subject expertise wherever possible. The headteacher leads on aspects of teaching, focusing on literacy this year and also draws on colleagues' expertise when required. She has established procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning and undertakes this work on a regular basis. The headteacher also ensures that teachers with subject responsibilities are able to review the work of colleagues according to School Improvement Plan (SIP) priorities. The whole school staff and governors have worked together to agree ways of changing practice in order to improve standards across the school.
42. All staff share subject co-ordination responsibilities and are effective in their monitoring and evaluation of the school's work because:
- Monitoring is related to the priorities in the school improvement plan.
 - Staff are provided with release time to carry out their work by the headteacher covering classes or supply funding from the Beacon School link.
 - There are good planning and guidance documents in place for all subjects to support teachers.

- The process is seen by all staff as an important contribution to raising standards and quality in the school.

43. The SEN co-ordinator leads and manages the special educational needs work very well. Any existing statements of need are reviewed at regular intervals and she supports both parents and pupils by always being readily available to them. The coordinator is appreciated by parents for her commitment to the pupils and her understanding of their various needs.
44. The Foundation Stage co-ordinator leads and manages her section very well. There is clear guidance on planning and staff responsibilities and all work well to raise standards and the quality of education.

Management

45. There is good management of staff which ensures that all are valued. New staff receive a good induction into the working of the school which establishes expectations of them and provides key support. The performance management of teachers is well run and links appropriately to the improvement targets for the school. The governors also have undertaken the performance management of the headteacher and this is due for review against the targets set for improvement.
46. The headteacher and governors, through the finance committee, manage the school's funding well. Budgets are directed at resources according to priorities in the improvement plan and are instrumental in supporting the raising of standards. The school's new ICT suite has been resourced well and provides a good example of how finance and school improvement have been successfully combined by the school. There is likely to be a large budget surplus next year in excess of the recommended three to five per cent, in fact around eight per cent. Governors have planned for this in order to counter the uncertainty caused by the fall in the school roll next year in Years 5 and 6 as explained earlier. This could lead to some 'claw back' of school funding in addition to the anticipated reduction in Local Education Authority funding of schools next year. The governors are keen to maintain the current staffing ratio and the way the headteacher functions, using her teaching skills across the school in support of colleagues and improvement initiatives.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	294,387	Balance from previous year	15,497
Total expenditure	285,863	Balance carried forward to the next (estimate)	24,021
Expenditure per pupil (based on average of 86 pupils on roll)	3,324		

47. The management of the school budget reflects good practice in terms of best value principles. Spending on the ICT suite was applied using these principles.
48. The role of school secretary is undertaken as a job share. Both members of staff are very effective and manage the administration tasks well. They provide a good atmosphere in the reception area of the school and ensure that visitors are welcomed and dealt with effectively. Parents are helped by staff and appreciate the work undertaken by the school secretaries.

Governance

49. The governance of the school is good. The chair of governors has wide experience of schools and uses this well to support the headteacher in setting the improvement agenda. There are committees for finance and premises, curriculum, personnel and marketing.

These receive regular and detailed reports from the headteacher and other colleagues on the progress of the school improvement plan. The governors have the statutory policies and procedures in place and report appropriately to parents. Some improvements are required to the way governors monitor the health and safety checks undertaken by the LEA on their behalf.

50. The governing body has a good understanding of its responsibilities. Members are aware of the performance data that is analysed to indicate how well pupils are achieving and how to use this to set improvement priorities in the school improvement plan. There are planned visits by governors who have undertaken to observe practice and feedback to colleagues on the progress of the school improvement plan priorities in SEN, literacy, numeracy and science.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING AND SUBJECTS

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

51. Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is good. This shows good improvement overall since the last inspection. Children are prepared well for transfer to Year 1. The children enter Reception in the September before they are five and at the time of the inspection several very young children were only attending in the mornings. The children are taught in a single age group. Some children have attended pre-school provision. All children achieve well because the teaching is very good and the curriculum is appropriately planned to provide a wide range of interesting and relevant activities, which are well matched to their needs. Adults set excellent role models for the children and manage them very well. The small class allows a good ratio of adults to children, ensuring that the needs of all are well met. The staff work very well as a team, carefully monitoring and assessing all children's progress. The accommodation is satisfactory and includes a recently provided safe outside play area with a 'soft' surface. The children have continuous access to this separate secure outside area and resources for outdoor activities include large pedal toys for riding and balancing and pushing/pulling.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in personal, social and emotional development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children achieve well because of the good teaching and high expectations set by staff and the support of parents for good behaviour.
- Every opportunity is taken to enhance children's development and most children are making progress towards achieving the early learning goals by the end of the year, with some likely to exceed them.
- Supportive relationships are already established and all children feel confident and happy.

Commentary

52. The personal, social and emotional development of the current intake is as expected for their age. By the end of the Foundation Stage most children will exceed the expected levels. There are no children who have underdeveloped social skills or who find it hard to conform to the high expectations set by staff.
53. At this stage in the children's first term the clear boundaries and consistent role models set by the adults in the Reception class ensure that the children know what is expected of them, so that they quickly conform to the expectations for good behaviour. Children are familiar with the class and school routines, they settle to tasks quickly and behave sensibly. The teamwork of the adults in the class gives the children excellent role models for co-operation and a calm, rigorous approach to work. Children show interest in what they are doing, concentrate well, even when not directly supervised and are eager to learn. Children feel confident about what they achieve. They are friendly and take a pride in their work. Children share and take turns amicably and put up their hands when answering a question. They are treated fairly and consistently by the adults so that they learn how to appreciate the needs of others within the group. Children clear up after themselves, without much prompting. The very supportive relationships ensure children feel secure and confident to seek help when required. The gains in learning evident in this area are as a result of the continual reinforcement of class rules by the adults and treating each other and the children with courtesy and respect. This leads to trusting relationships and helps the children succeed.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Provision in communication, language and literacy is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers and support staff take every opportunity to develop the children's language skills.
- Teaching and learning are very good.

Commentary

54. Indications are that the majority of children will meet and some will exceed the expectations in this area of learning. Already children are making good progress as a result of the many opportunities they are given to talk and listen. All staff take every opportunity during activities to develop the children's vocabulary through probing questioning. For example, when children were listening to the story of Humpty Dumpty the teaching assistant made careful assessments of children's understanding and afterwards talked to the children in the outside secure play area. Whilst they constructed a wall for Humpty to fall off she asked them questions so that they had to think and choose appropriate words to describe what they were doing and what would happen to Humpty Dumpty.
55. Very good relationships mean that children have the confidence to talk and the adults are genuinely interested in what the children have to say. Children enjoy books and listen attentively when a story is read to them. For example, when the teacher read the story of the 'Little Lumpty' the children were really enjoying the excitement of the story as she read with expression and excitement; she drew out the moral aspects of 'is it right or wrong, "to do something different to what your mother tells you?"', as the character in the book was doing. This created a very thoughtful atmosphere as the children related the story to their own growing independence yet need for a mother-father-carer figure in their lives. They also greatly enjoyed the story which in turn encouraged them to enjoy books.
56. All children have started a 'recognition of letter sounds' programme and are building up a sight vocabulary of common words and more complex rhyming words arising from the stories and activities they meet in the class. A few children have started to read books with suitable text and there are many opportunities in the day when children can look at books themselves, which they handle with care, understanding that text is read from left to right. The teacher plans supportive activities which reinforce learning and support children's self-esteem as in the activity where children sat in a circle and passed a stone to each other, each one adding a different rhyming word such as 'wall-tall-fall' and 'flute-shoot-fruit'; where more sophisticated vocabulary was used the teacher checked the child's understanding of the meaning of the word. Current planning and children's work in the current year indicate that there is a good emphasis on the recognition of sounds to help children learn to read and write. Examples of writing for the current reception children show that they form letters well and hold pencils correctly for both writing and colouring.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in mathematical development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers plan and implement a wide range of activities to support learning in mathematics which ensures children achieve well.
- Every opportunity is grasped in all activities to promote children's mathematical development.

Commentary

57. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers plan a range of interesting activities to promote mathematical understanding. Most children are working above those levels expected for their age. Children are already beginning to count beyond ten. Adults use a wide range of number rhymes and songs to help children count. Children make good progress, with the most able children understanding numbers to 20 and beyond. There is some written recording of number this term and more-able children can securely recite numbers beyond 20. During one well-planned activity, where teaching was very good, the above average children took turns to choose a coloured cotton reel to thread on the appropriately coloured lace to eventually make five. The teacher constantly asked 'How many more are needed?' and used her fingers effectively to demonstrate how many more were required. In this session children were beginning to appreciate the notion of 'one more than', while consolidating their understanding of ordering numbers to five. They also reinforced their knowledge of colours, and learning to take turns enhanced their personal and social skills. Children recognise simple patterns, such as when bead threading linked to number recognition or clapping in a sequence. All these practical activities prepare the way well for future learning and are very appropriate for this stage of development, ensuring that children sustain interest, have fun and do not become bored. The increase in pace and challenge in lessons represents a good improvement since the last inspection.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

Provision in knowledge and understanding of the world is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A range of interesting activities is planned to promote learning in this area.
- Staff question very effectively to enhance the children's knowledge and understanding of the world about them, they use the outside play area well to support learning and develop children's natural curiosity.
- Teachers provide good opportunities for children to use computers.

Commentary

58. Teaching and learning are very good and children achieve well. Most are working at levels that exceed expectations for their age. A wide range of appropriate interesting activities is planned to stimulate children's curiosity and enhance their understanding and this is successfully achieved. For example, a group of children working in the outside play area built a wall using large plastic bricks; they then moved on to build a wall using a computer program requiring them to manipulate a mouse with care in order to select and move cubes with which they built up a wall. During this activity the support assistant questioned children well about the way a wall has to be constructed and she praised the children for their efforts. By the end of the session the children knew that walls can fall down if bricks or large duplo-type bricks are not interlinked and that anything on a wall would fall down, not up. They also covered health and safety issues, such as the need to handle bricks with care and to wash hands if they had picked up dirt from the play area surface before they ate their fruit and drank milk mid-morning. The children wore suitable clothing for a cold morning and most were independent about dressing, learning how zips, buttons, Velcro-type material and press-studs work. The learning in this lesson was consequently very good and children's vocabulary was enhanced as they learned how to overcome the problem of falling bricks when they did not interlink. In this class all areas of learning are developed effectively alongside each other. There are good opportunities for children to use computers and during the inspection many children were using ICT to support their learning.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in physical development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers make the most of the play accommodation outside and there is access to a school hall for structured gymnastics and games skills lessons from a specialist teacher.
- There is continuous access to an outside play area and the range of large pedal toys ensures that opportunities for development of gross motor skills are good. When outside sessions take place there is always focus and planning sets out how particular skills and understanding are to be developed.
- Fine motor skills are developed in activities such as creative development and in most activities where children handle any resource.

Commentary

59. No lessons specifically planned to develop children's physical skills and understanding in the hall or on the outside play area were observed during the inspection so no judgements can be made about teaching. Children were observed in the outside play area and indications are that all children are on line to meet the expected goals by the end of the year and their achievement was satisfactory. Children have good opportunities for outdoor play and children in the Reception class have continuous access to the outside area. This represents good improvement since the last inspection. The outside area is quite small but suitable for the present number of children in the Reception class. Children develop their manipulative skills well by handling scissors, crayons, pencils and brushes; most can manipulate small construction equipment with dexterity. There is however, a lack of stimulating large construction equipment to further enhance physical development.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Provision in creative development is **good**.

Commentary

60. Standards of work on display and seen during the inspection when creative activities were devised to support other areas of learning indicate that standards are at least as expected. There was use of role-play to develop children's imagination, musical activities with songs and rhymes which the children sing tunefully and free choice creative opportunities as for designing and making a 'get well' card for Humpty Dumpty.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 AND 2

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **good**. The standards achieved in the school during the inspection show continued improvement in the subject.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Reading is improving well and standards are good as the planned guided reading has an effect.
- The literacy skills that pupils learn are well used in other subjects.
- Writing is improving from the below average levels in the previous inspection and pupils' presentation of their work is good.
- Some writing tasks for the more able pupils lack sufficient challenge.
- Pupils with SEN are doing well in literacy.

- Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of the subject and teaching and learning at the end of both key stages are good.
- The headteacher, who is the literacy co-ordinator, provides strong leadership and management of the subject.
- Pupils demonstrate good speaking and listening skills.

Commentary

61. Standards in English are improving because the school has set clear priorities for improvement in the previous school improvement plan. In this year's National Curriculum tests the small Year 2 group attained standards in line with the national average in both reading and writing. Most pupils reached the expected levels but few pupils attained higher than this. This is now the target for continued improvement in this year. The improvement in this last Year 2 group from their start in school was also good and all pupils did as well or better than expected in the tests. Current achievement in Year 2 and Year 6 is good. The Key Stage 2 tests were taken by only one pupil and therefore it is not possible to provide statistics.
62. During the inspection the standards, observed in lessons and seen in the scrutiny of pupils' work, are good at the end of both key stages. Pupils with SEN achieve well and most reach the standards set for them in their individual education plans; many exceed these because suitable tasks are set in lessons, there are high expectations from teachers and good support from learning assistants. There are no significant differences in the achievement of boys and girls.
63. In speaking and listening pupils achieve standards above those expected nationally. In Year 2 pupils are able to talk at the end of literacy lessons about what they have learned to do. They also spoke to inspectors eloquently about their experiences in school, recalling lessons from Reception and the things they have enjoyed. They could sequence events clearly and explain why they liked or disliked aspects of their experiences. By Year 6 pupils are fluent with a good vocabulary that they like to try; they respond well to questions and are able to use skills acquired in literacy lessons in other subjects, such as history.
64. Reading has been a focus for improvement in the school. The headteacher as literacy co-ordinator identified the need to work on guided reading and sessions are now at the beginning of each afternoon in Key Stage 2 and earlier in the day in Key Stage 1. These sessions ensure that all pupils are supported with their reading and have opportunities for group, paired and individual reading. As a result of this focus reading has shown good improvement and the test results attained this year in both key stages are expected to be bettered next year, particularly at the higher levels. At the end of Key Stage 2 pupils are reading well and most are able to identify favourite authors and books with Harry Potter high amongst the most popular. Pupils read well to gather information and use the small library resource as well as CD-ROM and web pages confidently. Parents and carers support the home reading programme well throughout the school. They complete the records in the home reading books and assist their children's book choices in the younger classes.
65. Writing is the current priority planned for further improvement. Throughout the school the standards are satisfactory overall with some good and very good standards demonstrated at the end of both key stages. The Year 6 pupils demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of newspaper reporting styles as they put together reports on the Great Fire of London. They planned the text quickly and soon prepared appropriate and accurate headlines in the style of the tabloids. The longer descriptive sections maintained the tense and first person well. Several pupils were confidently using the computers to draft and edit their text. In Year 2 pupils showed developing control in spelling and handwriting skills. They are able to plan and write a story, although some still require help with the ideas and narrative from known sources such as legend and fairy story. Sometimes teachers set a single writing task for the whole group, expecting the more capable pupils to write more. This approach lacks

sufficient challenge and more could be expected of these pupils if they were set a different more demanding task. Nevertheless, there are strong efforts to improve the standards in writing and teachers' marking is often helpful and informative making clear the improvements required of pupils.

66. The teaching varied across the school, but was good overall. In the one unsatisfactory lesson there was much that was good, particularly the opening of the lesson that revised pupils' recently acquired skills in planning writing, using a web diagram. The questioning was good and challenged all abilities in the class appropriately. The problem was the setting of the task that was confusing, did not establish clear expectations for learning nor provide a time scale for completion. Consequently, all pupils' achievement was poor. The good teaching seen ensured that all pupils achieved regardless of their age and abilities. Pupils in all these lessons were set work that was appropriately planned and met their learning needs. The analysis of pupils' work revealed that learning is generally good and matches the teaching. Pupils are set clear targets related directly to what they need to do to improve. Teachers regularly mark work commenting on progress towards the targets.
67. The headteacher has led the subject well since taking over last year. She has given sample lessons and provides booster classes to the Year 6 pupils. The planning format is good and there is clear guidance to colleagues on how to plan and organise the literacy programme. Regular monitoring has taken place and feedback to teachers has been given. The focused monitoring and evaluation of writing across the school has only just begun this term.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

68. Teachers develop pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum. Pupils use these well in humanities and science demonstrating the ability to research a subject and write about factual matters concisely. The current rolling programme of curriculum planning in the school does not identify where the teachers might build in literacy skills to other subjects in the long term.

MATHEMATICS

Provision for mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising and are now very good in Key Stage 1 and good in Key Stage 2.
- Good standards are achieved in computation and mental mathematics throughout the school.
- Pupils enjoy mathematics.
- Pupils with SEN are well supported and achieve well.
- Practical application of mathematics in other subjects is an area for development.

Commentary

69. Achievement is good throughout the school. In Year 2 pupils demonstrate the ability to perform written computations and recall and calculate mental challenges using addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. In both key stages pupils are able to explain their different methods of calculation and do so with pride. The attainment of pupils in Key Stage 1 is very good and was well above the national average in this year's tests. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported and as a result make the same progress as their peers. There has been a rising trend over the last two years and the school has exceeded its targets in 2003 but the cohort was small (one pupil), consequently no Key Stage 2 data for the school year 2002 – 2003 will be published. The school has set appropriately challenging targets for 2004.

70. Teaching is good overall and as a result, most pupils are making good progress in their learning. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and teach all aspects of mathematics progressively using a scheme in line with the National Numeracy Strategy guidance. Assessments of pupils' work are made regularly and the results are used to inform planning and the provision made in lessons. Some pupils work in ability groups and this contributes to the good standards achieved. Good teaching especially that observed in Years 1, 2 and 6, encourages pupils' confidence and helps them to achieve well. Years 1 and 2 pupils demonstrate a good knowledge of sorting using different criteria.
71. The subject leader for mathematics is newly designated; she has drawn up an action plan to focus on developing the subject further. The subject leader, together with the headteacher and a senior teacher, has identified areas for future development. Monitoring of teaching and learning is undertaken. Parents are kept informed through curriculum plans on classrooms for their referral and they are encouraged and helped to support their children with their homework.

Mathematics across the curriculum

72. Currently mathematics is used across the curriculum but there are opportunities for greater application of mathematics to other curriculum subjects. From the work scrutiny: in science, pupils record temperatures and make measurements; in history, dates are included in displays; in geography, lessons about weather include temperature comparisons and pupils in Years 1 and 2 are taught and encouraged to apply their counting skills in lessons such as physical education and literacy. Pupils use rulers to make linear measurements and scales and weights to weigh. Information and communication technology is used very well and clearly identified in planning. The computer suite is used to reinforce learning in the subject but is not large enough to accommodate a whole class group. More could be done to extend the knowledge and understanding of the subject for more capable pupils.

SCIENCE

No lessons were observed during the inspection. However, the scrutiny of work from all classes and further evidence provided by the subject co-ordinator show the provision in science to be **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a rising trend in standards at the end of Years 2 and 6.
- There is improved attainment throughout the school due to more consistent coverage and improved lesson planning.
- Co-ordination of the subject is very good.
- Opportunities for pupils to work independently and collaboratively in order to develop their own investigations have brought about improvements in investigative science.

Commentary

73. Standards attained by pupils are good in Year 2 and Year 6. Improvement since the last inspection is good. No lessons were seen during the inspection but based on the evidence seen in exercise books pupils in Years 1 and 2 mostly exceed national expectations. This term pupils have studied aspects of life processes related to human and animal needs, food groups related to needs for a healthy diet and how things move by pushing and pulling. The work is generally neatly presented and marked helpfully and the progress of pupils can be seen. Most pupils achieve well in Year 6. Throughout the school boys attain levels on a par with girls and pupils with special educational needs achieve well in relation to their prior attainment.

74. It is not possible to form a judgement about teaching and learning since no lessons were directly observed during the inspection. Based on the evidence available, pupils progress well and learning is good. In most classes pupils achieve good standards. Lessons are planned well and all pupils are fully included through the good organisation of group work. Pupils experience different ways of presenting their work and presentation across the school is good. Good quality marking helps pupils to understand their errors in subject specific spelling.
75. Opportunities for pupils to develop their own investigations, suggest ways to approach a problem or set up a fair test have been developed and work samples showing this were made available. Literacy skills are applied well in recording and presentation. The use and application of information and communication technology is good and there are plans to develop this further.
76. Science is managed very well. Teaching and learning are supported positively by the subject coordinator who displays a conscientious and knowledgeable approach to the subject. She is committed to working with all colleagues to sustain and build upon the current standards. Staff value the supportive teamwork approach to improving teaching and learning. The school and surrounding village provide an exciting resource for the whole school for the study of natural science in the environment and are used by classes throughout the year to inspire and inform their work and to develop respect towards their local community.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have good knowledge and understanding of ICT and use their skills well.
- The pupils have good opportunities to develop ICT skills in literacy and numeracy.
- Progress and improvement since the last inspection are good.
- The new ICT suite, although only large enough for half a class at a time, is used extensively and provides a good resource for teaching and learning.
- All classes use ICT in lessons across the curriculum.

Commentary

77. Pupils in both key stages achieve standards that are good. In Year 2 pupils use ICT effectively to draft and edit writing as part of their literacy work. In mathematics they confidently use computers to solve number problems using programs the teacher had prepared by downloading from the web. Year 6 pupils use ICT in literacy to prepare newspaper stories. They are able to set out the headlines and write text under these in columns using varying sizes of text. Their technical skills are good and enable them to produce interesting, quality work. They also made good use of ICT in history using the web to research their work and in writing using the word processor.
78. Teaching is good and the skills of teachers have improved since the last inspection. The planning and organisation of the subject are good and teachers seek ways of including ICT in the planning of other subjects.

Example of outstanding practice

In Year 2 pupils used the computer to develop their knowledge and understanding of the work of Jackson Pollock by experimenting with a painting program.

The Year 2 teacher planned this work over two, 30 minute sessions. The group of 12 Year 2 pupils worked in the ICT suite. Having introduced the 'Magic Paint' program pupils were quickly experimenting with the 'wandering line' technique creating a mazy pattern on screen. They had been taught about Jackson Pollock and seen some of his work from pictures the teacher had collected from the Tate Modern. They could talk about him and they understood how he explored shape and form. Their enthusiasm grew and they began to develop the pictures by infilling yellow and black into the spaces they had created. In the second session next day pupils had excellent recall of the work they had done and the techniques they explored. The session began quickly and soon pupils were gasping with delight as they discovered different tools on screen that would enhance their pictures. The essence of the teaching here was its almost understated nature. Pupils were allowed and encouraged to experiment, to 'play' with ideas and then share with each other the excitement of first time discovery of the results they were achieving. The teacher brought the session to a close and pupils printed their results. There was still time for excited cheers when the teacher showed a picture by Mondrian and told them that this was their next subject to study!

79. A new member of staff has only recently taken over the coordination of the subject, but there is much good work to build on. There is clear guidance to teachers on how they should plan ICT both in ICT lessons and in other subjects. Resources are good and timetable allocation to the subject is adequate. Some of the software is dated or inappropriate for current curriculum needs and opportunities to use other ICT hardware, such as data projectors require development. The co-ordinator is provided with release time by the headteacher to monitor the progress of the subject.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

80. Good use of ICT is made across the curriculum. All classrooms have computers that are regularly used in humanities, mathematics, literacy and art and design work.

HUMANITIES

81. In humanities work was sampled in **history** and **geography**, with two lessons seen in history and none in geography. The subjects are taught separately in blocks and for Years 1 and 2 and Years 3 to 6 this term the subject being studied is history. It is not possible to form an overall judgement about provision in these subjects, but there is every indication from pupils' work, wall and table displays throughout the school that standards are good overall in history. Geography is likely to be at least satisfactory. There has been good improvement in humanities throughout the school since the last inspection.
82. In both subjects it is clear that a range of visits and visitors play an important part in making the work interesting and relevant. A visit planned to take place after Christmas for Years 4 to 6 to a Victorian schoolroom for a 'Victorian school child's experience' is being keenly anticipated! Pupils try to imagine themselves as children in Victorian times, they read and analyse texts and discuss 'how it might have been' and decide that life for most children was very bleak and hard although they can identify which parts of the Industrial Revolution benefited the country and the lives of the poorer members of the community. Many pupils obviously enjoy history and they speak enthusiastically about their current topic on the 'Victorian period'. They know and can explain that their own school was in existence at that time and this link is part of their heritage as pupils of the school in 2003. They can identify which parts of their school still exist that were part of the original building and know how these older parts of the building were used formerly. The headteacher has permitted pupils to have

access to the original school log and punishments books of the period, together with photographs of the school as it was at the turn of the century.

83. An estate agent's publicity material with high quality photographs was used as an excellent resource in a Years 1 and 2 lesson which developed pupils' observational skills of the features of houses, bungalows and flats. One pupil copied the photograph of a detached house using perspective; this skill was well in advance of those expected to be employed by pupils his age. In geography for example, a whole-school summer-term visit to the beach at Walton on the Naze had enabled all pupils to understand some of the physical and human features of this type of environment, as well as providing an enjoyable social time by the sea for the school and its community. Older pupils go to the Isle of Wight for their residential visit and from time to time other classes visit local museums and collections. Teachers carefully mount displays that contain a wealth of original artefacts, large and small to support learning in the subjects. These successfully enthuse children and bring the subjects alive.
84. Subject co-ordinators have plans in place to monitor their subjects through discussions with pupils and looking at samples of their work. This is not enough to monitor the quality of teaching and provision effectively, but the headteacher and co-ordinator have plans to address this and also aim to improve subject assessment.

Religious education

Provision in the subject is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The provision the school makes for religious education has improved well since the previous inspection and is now good.
- Pupils' achievement is good in both key stages.
- The subject co-ordinator has introduced the Hertfordshire agreed syllabus, an improvement since the last inspection and monitors the subject appropriately.
- Around the school there are many good examples of pupils' work on Christianity and other world faiths.

Commentary

85. Only one lesson was observed in Key Stage 1 during the inspection. In this lesson the teaching was very good and drew on the agreed syllabus well for planning the work. Pupils were continuing their study of Islam. They were able to show great knowledge and understanding of how Muslims pray, worship and lead their lives. They were also aware that this is a faith practised in this country and not just something that happens in another land. The pupils had constructed a small 'mosque' in the classroom and used this to act out Muslim worship. In these difficult times it was a sensitive and carefully presented lesson.
86. The teachers' planning in Key Stage 2 demonstrates a good coverage of the subject. The achievement of pupils is good and their work shows that they have a good knowledge and understanding of other world religions as well as Christianity.
87. The Hertfordshire agreed syllabus is used throughout the school to plan and teach RE. In discussions, the older pupils showed good understanding of how religious teaching influences our lives and provides a strong moral basis for distinguishing what is right and wrong. There is also a good knowledge of other religions such as Islam, Judaism and Hinduism.
88. The RE topics are planned on a two year rolling programme in Key Stage 1 and a four year programme in Key Stage 2 in order to overcome the challenges set by mixed age classes. The subject is managed and led very well by the co-ordinator in post for two years. She has

provided good guidance to colleagues on planning and teaching as well as ensuring the agreed syllabus is planned and taught. She monitors colleagues' planning and teaching and the work of pupils.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

89. No lessons were observed in **design and technology** and so it is not possible to make a firm judgement on provision. Discussions with pupils revealed that they are able to understand the principles of design and build. They could recall making boats and testing them for load carrying and the ability to move efficiently over distances. Other pupils talked about their design and building experience of model Tudor houses. They could explain the reasons why they were built with larger top floors and the original materials used at the time. There is a set of guidance notes for teachers on planning the curriculum and a rolling programme of topics in order to ensure appropriate coverage across the mixed age classes. This evidence suggests that provision is satisfactory.
90. Only one lesson was seen in each of the following subjects: art and design, music and PE. It is not therefore possible to make a firm judgement about provision, although limited evidence indicates that it is good in these areas. In addition to observing lessons, inspectors spoke to co-ordinators about their work, spoke to pupils about what they had learnt and looked at pupils' work.
91. In **art and design** the lessons seen in Year 2 are described in the section on good practice in ICT as this was a combined art and ICT lesson. The planned programme of work set out for teachers shows good curriculum coverage. Around the school pupils' artwork is used to good effect to illustrate work in history, RE and PSHE. The displays in the hall are vivid and show pupils' skills well. They learn to use a variety of media to draw and paint with, including ICT. Pupils also learn about the lives and work of great artists and can talk knowledgeably about them.
92. The **physical education** curriculum is provided by an outside contractor. This company provides specialist instructors to work with all the classes in gymnastics, games and athletics. They also give after school tuition in games. Another planned outcome of this provision is that teachers have some non-contact time. In the lesson observed in the Years 1 and 2 class the instructor provided lively and rigorous activities for the pupils. These followed the National Curriculum appropriately. It would seem that this provision meets all the statutory requirements and is good overall. Swimming is planned throughout the school on a rolling programme and almost all pupils achieve the required level by the end of Year 6.
93. In **music** the one lesson observed was a session combining all Years 1 and 2 pupils with reception children. The teacher of the Reception class led the lesson supported by her colleague from Key Stage 1. This was a very good lesson and provided a wide range of activities for all pupils. It was also structured in order to ensure that all pupils were set tasks to match their age and abilities. Pupils sang with skill and enthusiasm and also made their own music. The Year 2 pupils were learning to make their own notations to indicate the different instruments and sounds in their compositions.
94. Pupils sing well in assembly and there is a successful school choir that performs in school and around the village and wider area on a regular basis, most notably at local secondary school parents' evenings. The subject is well led and managed and there is helpful planning guidance based on Nation Curriculum requirements.
95. This evidence suggests that overall provision is good.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Only one lesson was seen in this area of the school's work and so no judgements are made about overall provision.

Commentary

96. The school sees pupils' personal development as an important part of its work. There is a good programme of activities including work on diet, health, sex, drugs and personal safety. This programme helps pupils develop a safe and healthy lifestyle, gain confidence and interact with others. It is well supported by visits from outside agencies. The school participates in a healthy eating programme.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Inspection judgement

Grade

The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3
Value for money provided by the school	3

Overall standards achieved	3
Pupils' achievement	3

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	2
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

The quality of education provided by the school	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	3
Accommodation and resources	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	4
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2

The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	3

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).