

INSPECTION REPORT

COMMONSWOOD SCHOOL

Welwyn Garden City

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117378

Headteacher: Ricci Achillini

Lead inspector: Judith Charlesworth

Dates of inspection: 14th – 17th June 2004

Inspection number: 255873

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Primary
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 – 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	371
School address:	The Commons Welwyn Garden City
Postcode:	AL7 4RU
Telephone number:	01707 880420
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Appropriate authority:	Local Education Authority
Name of chair of governors:	Laurence Leedell
Date of previous inspection:	8 June 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Commonswood School, which serves a mixed community on the edge of Welwyn Garden City, is large by comparison with most primary schools. Almost all the pupils are of white European heritage; a very small proportion is of Asian or African heritage, and for an even smaller proportion (one per cent) English is an additional language. Twelve per cent of the pupils are on the school's register of special educational needs, most of them at an early stage of concern. Of the others, their needs relate mostly to specific or moderate learning difficulty and emotional and behavioural difficulty; four pupils have a statement of their special educational needs. Pupils' attainment on entry is average. The mobility of pupils is an issue in the school, about 29 per cent of the pupils now in Year 6 having joined the school during their Junior years. The recruitment and retention of teachers is also an issue: sixteen teachers left the school in the last two years and twelve new teachers joined the staff in the same period. Consequently a significant proportion of the teachers at present on the staff are comparatively inexperienced. The school holds the Investors in People and School Achievement awards.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
21501	Judith Charlesworth	Lead inspector	Science, art and design, design and technology, special educational needs
32655	John Bostock	Lay inspector	
10269	David Figures	Team inspector	English, music, personal, social and health education
2607	Brian Griffiths	Team inspector	Mathematics, information and communication technology, physical education, English as an additional language
32747	Kathy Faulkner	Team inspector	The foundation stage, geography, history, religious education

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The effectiveness of Commonswood School is **satisfactory**, and improving. The school provides a sound quality of education and gives satisfactory value for money. The leadership and management are very good. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and, though standards are below average, they are now rising.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The leadership of the governors, the headteacher and the deputy headteacher is very good and the staff respond very well to it
- Standards in writing, mathematics and, in Years 3 – 6 in science, are not high enough
- The standards and achievement of the potentially higher-attaining pupils are not high enough
- Provision for art is very good and for information and communication technology it is good
- Very good management systems ensure that changes of staff have the minimum effect on the quality of provision, but systems to ensure the curriculum is balanced are insufficiently developed
- Pupils' punctuality is unsatisfactory

School improvement has been satisfactory since the last inspection. After the last inspection there was a marked decline in most aspects of the school. However, improvement has been considerable in the last three years. The very good governance and leadership and very good management systems now put the school in a good position to improve further.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
English	E	E	D	D
mathematics	E*	E	C	C
science	E*	E	B	B

Key: A - well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average; E - lowest 5 per cent of schools*

Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 2.

Pupils' achievement is **satisfactory**. Standards are below average. Having declined since the last inspection they are now rising, though still volatile. The goals children are expected to reach by the end of their reception year are achieved in personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy, mathematical development and in knowledge and understanding of the world. They are exceeded in physical and creative development. Standards are average and achievement satisfactory at the end of Year 2. Although standards are below average at the end of Year 6, pupils' achievement is satisfactory given the many pupils in Year 6 who joined the school in their Junior years with below-average standards. The age group was also affected by past unstable staffing. Higher-attaining pupils do not do as well as they should.

Pupils' personal qualities are **well developed**; their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **good**. Their attitudes are good, and behaviour satisfactory. Attendance is satisfactory but a significant number of pupils do not come to school on time.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is **satisfactory**. The quality of teaching is **satisfactory**. Pupils are well cared-for and learn at a satisfactory rate. The curriculum, well

enriched by additional activity, is satisfactory overall. The school occupies very good accommodation, is well resourced and works well with other schools and the community at large. The partnership with parents is satisfactory.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are **very good**. The governors are very effective and see to it that the school meets its statutory obligations. The headteacher and deputy headteacher lead the school very well and other key staff make good contributions to the leadership of the school. Management is effective.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Most parents are satisfied with the school. Some, however, record reservations about the way the school communicates with them and some have a concern about pupils' behaviour. Pupils like coming to school and enjoy lessons. They feel well supported by the adults who work with them. A number of junior-age pupils have reservations about the behaviour of other pupils.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Raise standards in writing, mathematics and, in Years 3 – 6, in science
- Improve the standards and achievement of the potentially higher-attaining pupils
- Strengthen systems for ensuring the curriculum is balanced
- Improve punctuality

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects

Standards are below average; having declined since the last inspection they are now rising, though they are still volatile. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in writing, mathematics and, in Years 3 – 6, science are not high enough
- Lower-attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs achieve well, but potentially higher-achieving pupils do not achieve as well as they should.
- Standards in art are above average

Commentary

1. The trend of the National Curriculum test results at the end of Year 6 over the past five years follows the national trend very closely. Taken together, results in English, mathematics and science in 2003 (the latest available at the time of the inspection) were broadly in line with the results recorded in the year of the last inspection. Results declined markedly after that time, but have been improving – overall – since 2001 as new management strategies take effect, although there is still variation from year to year. Pupils' scores in 2003 were better than they had been in 2002, which, in mathematics, were better than in 2001. Work seen in the present Year 6 is consistent with lower results in 2004, but the work of Year 5 is consistent with higher results in a year's time.

2. There are several reasons why the pupils' standards at the end of Year 6 are lower than they should be and vary from year to year. The composition of the year groups changes: the present Year 6, for example, has a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs, who achieve well but score only modest results. The number of pupils joining the school during their junior years is high in some years. Some higher-attaining pupils among them did well, but these pupils, representing more than a quarter of the age group in 2003, performed markedly less well than the others in all three subjects. The unusually high turnover of teachers, which has characterised the last two years, has also had an effect on pupils' achievement.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 6 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	26.5 (25.9)	26.8 (26.7)
mathematics	26.8 (25.6)	26.8 (26.7)
science	29.6 (26.8)	28.6 (28.3)

There were 60 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. While a satisfactory proportion of pupils in Year 2 achieve test scores in line with the expectations for their age, results have been well below average overall because too few pupils attain above this level, and too many have been attaining at one or two levels below. There has been improvement since 2002, particularly in writing and mathematics, which continues into 2004.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
reading	14.6 (14.5)	15.7 (15.8)
writing	14 (13)	14.6 (14.4)
mathematics	15.2 (14.4)	16.3 (16.5)

There were 46 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

4. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. Some groups of pupils achieve well, notably the lower-attaining pupils including those with special educational needs. These pupils apply themselves well in lessons, and rise to the challenge of work that is planned well to meet their various needs. Detailed records show that individuals make clear progress over time, and that increasingly they are performing more closely to expectations for their age than in past years. The potentially higher-attaining pupils do not do as well as this, partly because the teaching is not well enough focused on their needs and partly because not enough work is planned to excite, challenge and extend them.

5. English standards in Year 6, though improving, are lower than they should be mainly because of weaknesses in writing. Pupils usually have good ideas, which they can often express well orally, but they have difficulties putting them down on paper because of inadequate skills. Spelling in particular is weak. In Year 2, writing standards, though showing a very wide range, are on balance satisfactory. Reading standards are not as good, with some pupils disadvantaged by inadequate skills for tackling unfamiliar words. Below-average standards in mathematics arise in large part because the higher-attaining pupils, not being sufficiently challenged, do not make the additional progress that could reasonably be expected of them. In science, the average standards and satisfactory achievement in Years 1 and 2 are not carried through into Years 3 – 6, partly because of the way the curriculum is organised and partly because teachers' confidence in the subject is uneven.

6. On the other hand, standards in art are high, as a result of very good provision, well supported by the energy and skill of the subject leader. Original ideas and well-developed techniques are to be seen in the striking art work on display. Overall, pupils in the nursery and reception classes, including those with special educational needs, are achieving satisfactorily and most are on track to attain the standards expected of children the same age when they move on to Year 1. Good teaching in the nursery is helping these children achieve well. Satisfactory achievement follows from satisfactory teaching quality in the reception classes, partly because the comparative inexperience of the teachers results in missed learning opportunities, especially for the more able children.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes to work and school are good and their behaviour satisfactory. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and their personal development overall, are good. Attendance is average but pupils' punctuality is unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have very good relationships with staff and good relationships with one another
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is good and they live up to the staff's expectations
- Too many pupils arrive late for school in the mornings
- Pupils enjoy their work and the time they spend at school
- The school provides very well for pupils' spiritual development, which is very good as a result

Commentary

7. Pupils respond very well to staff and are confident when talking to them. They feel comfortable turning to adults for help and support when they need to, and know that the staff are there for them. In lessons, the staff encourage responses from all pupils, including those with special educational needs. They praise their successes, help them to improve their work and support their participation in the extra curricular clubs available. Pupils help each other with work, mix well in play, and show compassion and care when others are upset, or are working more slowly than themselves. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has improved since the last inspection. Lessons and the social and moral climate of the school enable pupils to develop a good understanding of communities, and others' points of view and emotions. The school encourages pupils' spiritual development by well-considered stories, discussions and themes in many subjects.

8. For instance, an assembly about Fathers' Day explored the notion of parents' unconditional love, and very well-taught art techniques have enabled pupils to express themselves powerfully and sensitively. Provision for some aspects of pupils' cultural development is therefore very good, although there are not enough opportunities to develop pupils' multi-cultural awareness.

9. Pupils concentrate well in lessons, although a few with special educational needs can find this difficult. Pupils are keen to participate and be involved, are excited when they complete tasks, co-operate well together and work diligently individually. They ask questions readily, listen and contribute well. Participation in the extra-curricular activities, such as clubs, competitions and visits is good.

10. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is good, which allows staff to focus on teaching and learning. At lunch-time and play, the pupils are lively and full of energy. There were no signs of bad behaviour or bullying during the inspection, but some pupils talked about it, and pupils and parents also reported it in the questionnaires. Members of both groups recognise that behaviour has improved in recent years. This is the result of a fierce drive to eliminate both bad behaviour and bullying. This zero tolerance has reduced the incidence of exclusions substantially: from 15 events in 2002/3 to four events in the present school year.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	360	15	0
White – any other White background	8	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	2	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	4	0	0
Black or Black British – African	4	0	0

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

11. Pupils' punctuality is a concern. Most pupils have been late at least once this year and for a significant minority, lateness is regular. The school has stringent procedures for registering pupils promptly, and addresses the issue of punctuality with parents where there is a pattern of regular lateness. However, a significant proportion of parents are not supporting the school enough to eradicate this problem.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year – (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.8	School data	1.1
National data	5.4	National data	0.4

12. The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year. The school does not normally authorise absence for holidays, and in consequence, the school's figure for unauthorised absence is above average.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is satisfactory. Pupils are well cared for and the learning resources, buildings and grounds support the work of the school very well.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory in the nursery and reception classes and in Years 1 – 6. Arrangements for assessment are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lessons are well planned to meet the needs of middle and lower-attaining pupils
- The well-judged use of different teaching strategies results in pupils' continuing interest in many lessons, but the slow pace of some lessons leads to inattention and unfinished tasks
- Warm reciprocal relationships contribute to good classroom management and ensure pupils are involved and learn effectively
- The final minutes of lessons are not always used to confirm and consolidate what pupils have learned
- Teachers' subject knowledge is not always secure
- Explanations are sometimes not clear enough so pupils are confused about what is expected of them

Commentary

13. The quality of teaching, and with it the quality of pupils' learning, is better now than it was at the time of the last inspection when 15 per cent of the lessons seen were judged to be unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, the overall picture is mixed, for a variety of reasons. The very frequent changes to the teaching force is one. This has resulted in a high proportion of comparatively inexperienced teachers. Some of the new teachers, having trained abroad, have needed to become familiar with the National Curriculum. Experienced or not, it takes time to get to know the pupils and assimilate the practices of the school. Vigorous management action has established routines and procedures to help newly arrived teachers, so placing the school in a good position to make further improvements.

14. The quality of some teaching is very good, and much is good; it stimulates pupils to learn systematically and well. The best lessons are characterised by careful planning which ensures the lessons move forward at a pace which is fast, productive and purposeful. Teachers use a good range of different strategies to vary the lesson and maintain pupils' involvement; these include 'talking partners' (to help pupils develop their ideas) and personal whiteboards (so that all pupils have to commit themselves). Pupils respond willingly to these approaches and learn well. In Year 1, for example, this resulted in attentive pupils, learning all the time, eager to 'help' and willing to be pleasant with each other when they made mistakes. Teachers' questions are generally well focused, directed at helping pupils understand, and at ensuring their contributions are valued. Sometimes, however, teachers tend to accept answers from those offered by more confident pupils, while wider functions of questioning – for example, to prompt, probe, stimulate, assess; to challenge pupils of different abilities at their own level, to give opportunities for pupils to practise speaking or oblige them to refine their thinking – are not always well exploited. Very good classroom routines ensure time is used well and pupils make good progress as a result. In lessons where the pace was not fast enough, because the teacher was anxious about managing the pupils or because they were insecure in the subject matter, pupils, although compliant for the most part, did not make the progress of which they were capable: their attention wandered and they did not finish the work intended.

15. Lessons are generally well planned and pupils of different levels of attainment are usually catered for properly. Classes are well organised to meet the needs of the lower-attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, often through extra support by the teacher, assistant

or a volunteer. Their behaviour, sometimes more of a challenge than that of other members of the class, is generally well handled by staff who remain calm and persistent about their expectations. As a result, the pupils behave and learn well. Sometimes, however, the higher-attaining pupils do not get the extra support they need because the additional work planned is not challenging enough, or available opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants to work intensively with the upper groups are not taken. Warm, respectful relationships between pupils and between pupils and teachers make for well-behaved pupils who work hard and make progress. When behaviour is not as good as it should be it is often because teachers have not explained clearly enough, using suitable language, what they expect. On these occasions pupils are confused and can be frustrated to find they have been doing the wrong task. The final few minutes of a lesson are often – but not always - well used to review, assess and confirm what has been learned and to look forward to the next lesson. Sometimes when time is short, this final section becomes hurried and superficial and the potential for pupils to talk about what they have learned and, in doing so, reflect and refine their understanding, is not realised.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 38 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0(0%)	4 (10%)	17 (45%)	16(42%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

The curriculum

16. The school provides pupils with a satisfactory curriculum that meets statutory requirements. A good range of extra curricular activities and educational visits enriches the pupils’ experience. The school’s accommodation, extensive grounds and resources are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is imaginative and stimulating but some subjects are unevenly distributed across the year
- There are good opportunities for enriching the pupils’ learning
- The accommodation and outside facilities support learning very well
- Some lessons covering more than one subject are not planned carefully enough

Commentary

17. The curriculum has improved since the last inspection when weaknesses were reported in art, design and technology, history and physical education. Curriculum planning takes into account the learning needs of all pupils including those with special educational needs or for whom English is an additional language. Lessons are well planned to ensure that activities meet these particular needs, which are usually similar to those of the other pupils, but vary in complexity, depth or the amount to be completed in the time available. The computer suites introduced into each classroom provide a very motivating resource for pupils with special educational needs although they are very new and are not yet used to full advantage. Pupils use these independently and can concentrate on the subject in hand without worrying so much about writing and presentation. This helps them enjoy their work, concentrate and learn. Planning now takes account of the needs of the pupils in the mixed-age classes to ensure that there is no repetition of work and sees to it that pupils’ skills and knowledge are built upon each year. This makes for an imaginative and stimulating experience for pupils.

18. Subjects are often taught together to help pupils understand better. This is good practice. However, there is not always sufficient rigour in planning the work to make sure that each subject or curriculum area receives appropriate attention or that pupils experience a well-balanced curriculum, spread appropriately over the whole year. Daily lesson plans do not always clearly identify the

subject knowledge, skill and understanding being taught so that curriculum coverage can be accurately accounted for. Pupils work at some subjects intensively by turn in blocks of weeks. This is an effective way of giving time to subjects such as history or geography. Where, however attention to a subject is separated by many months, as is the case at times with science, pupils do not progressively build up knowledge and skills in the subject.

19. Pupils' learning is enriched by good additional first-hand experiences. The curriculum is planned so that, as often as possible, pupils begin a topic with a well-planned visit. This puts the topic under study into a wider context, provides much relevant material for the pupils to work with and generates enthusiasm for it. The outcome of such learning is that pupils develop more knowledge and a deeper understanding of the subjects studied. Older pupils have the opportunity to take part in a residential activity week, which contributes well to their personal and social education. A good range of activities during the school day helps pupils extend their skills and interests further. The teachers lead a range of clubs including art, music, physical education, computers and a story club for the younger pupils. After school, parent volunteers help with football and netball clubs, and coaches from local rugby and lacrosse clubs coach pupils in these sports.

20. The school buildings, extensive grounds and well-chosen resources contribute very well to the quality of the curriculum provision. The delightful and well-maintained grounds provide very good opportunities for children and pupils to extend their learning in such subjects as science, art, geography and physical education.

Care, guidance and support

The school takes good care of its pupils. It provides pupils with satisfactory support, advice and guidance and takes good account of their views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All staff are very caring towards pupils which results in the trusting relationships which help pupils learn effectively
- Care and welfare arrangements are rigorous and well organised so that pupils and staff are secure and safe
- The school council provides a good forum for pupils to discuss their concerns

Commentary

21. Caring attitudes by teachers and all other adults in the school ensure a safe and happy environment in which pupils feel secure and valued and which is conducive to their learning. They are all encouraged to participate fully in lessons as well as the many other activities available to them and they feel teachers listen to their comments. When pupils are upset there is always an adult available to give support and nearly all pupils recognise this. Parents are pleased with the individual care given to their children.

22. The welfare of pupils is well managed by the school through its rigorous processes for child protection, risk assessment, staff training and use of healthcare experts. As a result staff are fully aware of the required procedures and pupils feel safe. The maintenance of buildings, grounds and equipment is carried out appropriately and the whole site is free from litter and graffiti. The buildings are secure and there are good arrangements to manage the access of visitors. Some necessary checks to Health and Safety arrangements such as the Governors' routine site survey are not systematic enough.

23. The school council is well established and discusses subjects of relevance to pupils such as behaviour and bullying, safety, food and playground equipment. It meets regularly under the leadership of the head teacher. A good use of class discussion time generates topics for discussion in the council.

24. Suitable individual education plans are created for pupils with special educational needs. Targets for pupils' next steps in learning reflect each individual's specific needs, and incorporate specialist advice as appropriate. Lessons are planned to incorporate work towards the targets, and pupils generally have the support of an additional adult to help them. Some pupils are given short sessions of individual help – often first thing in the morning. The individual education plans are used well to record progress towards the targets set and provide a useful record of achievement.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with the community and with other schools and colleges are good. Partnership arrangements with parents are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers, pupils and the school as a whole benefit from good links with other schools and colleges
- Good links with the community contribute to pupils' personal development
- The school provides good information and support to parents about the life of the school and pupils' development
- Despite the school's endeavours, a significant minority of parents remain dissatisfied or not fully and actively involved with the school

Commentary

25. The school profits from its membership of a consortium of local schools which share development training for staff. Good links with a nearby Beacon school have benefited teachers' skills. Development of teaching in information and computer technology has followed the support of an advanced skills teacher and visits to other schools. The transfer of pupils to the local secondary schools is handled satisfactorily.

26. The school's links with the community enable pupils to extend their learning in interesting ways. For example, they perform with choirs from other local schools at the Royal Albert Hall where they both learn about performing music and also develop social skills. The work of a Cornish drama group in school, creating a show from scratch, involves a large number of pupils. They not only learn about drama but also acquire planning, organisational, leadership and social skills. There are growing links with the local churches which support assemblies and spiritual and moral themes. The coaching for lacrosse, rugby and other team games involves local clubs as well as parents. Pupils support several charities with their fund raising. Residents in a local retirement home make up story sacks for use by younger pupils. Pupils also sing and perform school shows for them.

27. The school works hard to provide parents with good information about the school and their children. The school surveyed parents about their satisfaction with the school during the last year and is addressing the concerns identified. Attractively presented monthly newsletters and the good web site are very informative about changes to arrangements in daily school life and opportunities for forthcoming clubs and trips. The web site appears to be well used, for example it was consulted many times during snowy weather as parents sought information about the school's opening arrangements. Each term parents receive a statement of the curriculum topics pupils will cover. There are three meetings a year for parents to discuss pupils' progress, and they are regularly invited to attend assemblies which celebrate pupils' successes. Annual reports are comprehensive and informative both about the work of each child and the specific developmental suggestions for them. Parents are kept well informed about the progress of their children with special educational needs. Furthermore, the school's open-door policy means that they can speak to staff any time they have any specific concerns. The school already has, or is developing, courses (such as ICT, parenting and reading) for parents about how to help their children at home.

28. However, despite this good practice, a significant minority of parents perceive the school's communication, approachability and willingness to agree with their views as a concern and remain

dissatisfied. Some parents work in school supporting teachers, helping with trips and clubs, working as mid-day supervisors or being 'Friends' of the school. However, there is scope for even more parental support: some parents have yet to be convinced of the value of entering into an active and constructive partnership with the school. The present under developed sense of parental engagement disadvantages the education of some pupils.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The headteacher's leadership is very good: he sets clear and ambitious goals for the school. Management is good. Governance is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's very good leadership receives powerful support from the deputy headteacher and the team approach of other staff
- Governors have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and use this to give invaluable support
- Very good management systems support other staff, particularly those new to the school or their roles. The management of provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good
- Procedures for monitoring have not kept pace with an imaginative and stimulating curriculum
- Despite the leadership's strenuous efforts, staff mobility remains high

Commentary

29. After a long-serving headteacher left in 1999 there was a period during which there were two temporary headteachers and a third was appointed but did not take up the post. Many connected with the school talk of a loss of direction and deteriorating behaviour on the part of the pupils. Year 6 test results fell in 2001, from above average the previous year to well below average. The number of pupils on the school roll dropped and the school's income was reduced. During this period, members of the governing body helped and advised the school in ways that ensured continuity and that gave governors a clear picture of the qualities the school needed in a new headteacher. A carefully planned process resulted in a good appointment.

30. It took determined and carefully considered action to get the school back on track. With very clear direction from the headteacher, all concerned with the school worked hard to resolve the financial situation, which is now secure. A comprehensive behaviour policy was put in place and staff worked hard and consistently to ensure that good behaviour was encouraged and poor behaviour firmly discouraged; there is still occasional misbehaviour but matters are very much improved and continue to improve. Standards reached by pupils are rising from the low points of two and three years ago and in several subjects are at national average levels or higher. This is the result of well-directed team work to which the governing body makes a substantial contribution and to which all staff are committed. The deputy headteacher's role has been crucial: she is a good role model for other managers and plays a major part, alongside the headteacher, in setting the school's direction, formulating policies and designing management systems. These systems are central to the improvements being made, as they allow new staff quickly to understand their roles so that they may rapidly make their full contributions to pupils' learning and well-being. Without exception, new staff praise the high quality of the induction programme provided by the school.

31. Improvements to the curriculum have been, in most ways, handled well. Careful curriculum planning, overseen by senior managers, enriches the pupils and stimulates learning; links made between subjects help the pupils to see the relevance of what they are studying. However, monitoring has insufficiently focused on whether each subject receives an appropriate emphasis or whether all the appropriate knowledge, skills and understandings for the subject have been covered. As a result, some aspects of some subjects do not receive attention in enough depth and in some subjects, notably science, the time that elapses between one topic and the next is too great for earlier work to be built on reliably.

32. The context in which the school provides for pupils with special educational needs is difficult, which has caused some parents anxiety. In the last year, an experienced special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) left, and the money allocated for special educational needs by the local authority has been considerably reduced, although the school spends more money on special educational needs than is allocated. It was necessary to reduce support assistants' hours by a quarter in order to stay within budget. At the same time, the staff body has become relatively young and inexperienced due to the recent staff changes. In order to cater for these changes, the senior managers adopted a very clear strategy and the appropriate systems are working smoothly. The head teacher, supported by the deputy head teacher, has temporarily taken over the management of provision until the time is right for a new SENCO to be appointed. Responsibility for meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs has been devolved to staff, and staff plan carefully to see that the needs are met within each class. All teachers have, as a personal target, to develop expertise, through training, in a particular area of special educational needs which will be of benefit to the whole school. In addition, two whole-school training initiatives in special educational needs are due to start in the autumn, and the senior managers are looking to develop the support staff's expertise through appropriate training.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	996470
Total expenditure	1002511
Expenditure per pupil	2705

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	31683
Balance carried forward to the next	25642

Aids or barriers to raising achievement

33. The school finds it difficult both to recruit and to retain teachers, even though great care is taken with the presentation and the wording of advertisements and the further information that is sent to potential candidates for vacancies. The most frequently quoted reason for these difficulties (by staff and governors) is housing costs. Problems with recruitment result in the appointment of a) a high proportion of recently trained teachers and b) teachers who were trained overseas. Most of these teachers are potentially good or better but in many cases do not stay for long enough to get to know the pupils or the school well enough to give of their best. Teachers who qualified overseas have not had access to detailed training in teaching the National Curriculum or the curriculum for children in the nursery and reception classes. There are some positive outcomes. Many of the younger teachers form very good relationships with pupils, for whom they are very good role models, and this helps pupils' personal development and attitudes; teachers from overseas bring a perspective on life that illuminates a number of lessons and contributes well to pupils' learning and personal development. However, many do not stay long enough to take on full management roles and there is an impact on the continuity of learning that makes it difficult for the school to improve standards as quickly as it wishes.

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

34. The Foundation Stage unit includes the nursery and the two reception classes. The nursery provides part-time places for up to 60 children who attend either mornings or afternoons. At present the number of children attending the nursery is below the school's admission numbers. The children move into the reception classes and attend school full-time in the September or January before they are five. Good links have been established with the parents. There is a good induction plan that helps the children to feel happy and secure in school quickly. The teacher and nursery nurse visit the children's homes before they start school, parents receive a good range of information and the daily notice board informs parents of what the children will be learning.

35. Attainment on entry is average in all the areas of learning except for mathematical development, which is below average. Overall, the children, including those with special educational needs, are achieving satisfactorily: most are on track to attain all the learning goals expected of children when they move into Year 1. The quality of teaching in each of the areas of learning is satisfactory overall. Good teaching in the nursery is helping these children achieve well. Teaching in the reception classes is less successful, because the comparative inexperience of the teachers results in missed learning opportunities and the more able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged, so do not learn as much as they could.

36. The nursery teacher is responsible for the day-to-day management of the unit with support from the Key Stage 1 manager. New to the task and comparatively inexperienced, she is making an impact on the quality of provision so that the unit is now in a good position to improve. All staff work together well as a team to improve the learning for the children. The nursery nurses are well trained and contribute well to the progress of the children.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in personal, social and emotional development is **satisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching in the nursery is good
- The quality of relationships with adults and other children is good
- Children share and take turns well

Commentary

37. The children are keen to learn because the planned activities are exciting, interactive and supported by very good resources. The teachers and nursery nurses work well together so that the children feel secure, knowing that their contributions are valued. The children quickly learn to share and take turns because the classroom is managed well and the space for independent work is effectively organised. For example, two boys in the nursery were able to listen to a story tape together. They knew that they needed to take turns in turning the pages of the book and starting and stopping the tape recorder. This was because they were practising what the teacher had shown them in the whole-class teaching sessions. All the adults are good role models and set high expectations of work and behaviour. In the reception classes, children are companionable and at ease with each other in social settings but, because of the teachers' lack of experience in managing children's learning, their time is not so well directed, and opportunities to promote children's development are sometimes overlooked.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Provision in communication, language and literacy is **satisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are good opportunities for children to improve their speaking and listening skills
- Pupils develop positive attitudes to books
- Activities are planned so that children use and apply language skills in other areas of activity

Commentary

38. Every opportunity is taken to help the children to develop their speaking and listening skills from singing names at registration time to reporting back on what they have learned at the end of sessions. As a result children, especially in the nursery, are lively and confident when contributing to class discussions on different topics.

39. The classroom environment encourages a love of literacy through the high quality and wide range of books available. Books are given importance in the lessons and the adults regularly read to children. As a result the children are developing very positive attitudes to books and know that the text conveys meaning. This was demonstrated when Reception children re-enacted 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff' using character masks and music to dramatise the story.

40. This emphasis on communication, language and literacy enables most children to achieve satisfactorily and attain an appropriate standard at the end of Reception. It is the result of teaching which is good in the nursery and satisfactory in Reception. A strong feature of teaching in the nursery is the quality of questioning: questions are well focused, ensure all children are included, and expect a high quality of response. In Reception, children are sometimes restless and take time to settle because expectations are not high enough and explanations of what they are to learn have not been clear enough.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in mathematical development is **good**

- Mathematics is taught in a structured and practical way
- Children have good opportunities to use their knowledge in other areas of learning

Commentary

41. Activities are carefully structured to help children learn mathematics practically and systematically. Counting skills are reinforced at every opportunity, such as at registration. When the children are learning about 2D and 3D shapes they investigate the edges, corners and faces. They are then challenged to describe shapes in a feely bag to the rest of the group using the right words, allowing them to reinforce what they have learned by talking about it. Children develop mathematical understanding in other areas, especially in physical development where mathematics is reinforced in structured water and sand play.

42. Children's attainment in mathematical development on entry to the nursery is below average. They achieve well, particularly in the nursery, and reach the standard expected of children the same age by the end of Reception. The quality of teaching in the nursery is good because adult intervention is well managed and appropriate, ensuring the children are always purposefully engaged. In Reception, children do not always learn as well as they should because they do not understand what is expected of them. The final minutes of a lesson are sometimes not used as effectively as they could be to assess what has been learned or confirm children's understanding.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

Provision in knowledge and understanding of the world is **satisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children's understanding of the world is developed by making links with other areas of activity
- Plans for the children's learning are based on their own experiences and this is helping them to use and apply their knowledge

Commentary

43. The range of carefully planned activities is linked to other areas of the curriculum. For example, the role-play area in the nursery simulated the seaside, with a beach, water, seaside toys and the sounds of the waves splashing. The children dressed up in beachwear and enjoyed the experience of exploring the sounds and textures of the seaside. The theme of holidays was also developed in the reception classes where the children's role-play area was set up as a travel agent. Children applied their mathematical and communication skills to answer the telephone, book holidays in a diary and calculate the cost. The places the children intended to visit were located on a world map and they chose the clothes they needed for different climates. This is good learning because it is based on the children's own experience.

44. Good use is made of the very extensive school grounds. Nursery children explore the environment in the different seasons of the year observing and comparing the changes in plants and mini beasts and begin to understand their life cycles. The quality of the resources and the careful planning by the staff ensure that children make good progress. Appropriate experiences and expectations in Reception result in sound achievement and children attain standards broadly in line with those expected.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in physical development is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children achieve above-average standards
- Teachers provide a wide variety of experiences for the children to develop their physical skills

Commentary

45. Children achieve well and their standards are above average as they move into Year 1. This is because there are many opportunities for different kinds of physical activity. Outside, nursery children can climb, ride bicycles and scooters, run, jump and skip. Finer skills are developed through experimenting with paint, drawing, sticking, cutting and manipulating the computer mouse to drag and click. In more formal lessons, such as in the school hall, Reception children learn to work in groups with balls and hoops and develop early ball-control skills. The quality of teaching is good because teachers give clear instructions and nursery nurses model tasks with individual children so that all children are included and improve their skills. Teachers and nursery nurses observe carefully and the assessments thus made of the children's progress guide the plans for future teaching. Activities in the outside area are supervised well and the nursery nurses are clear about their role in guiding or intervening so that the children maintain focus and interest.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Provision in creative development is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children achieve above-average standards.
- Teachers plan a wide range of creative activities for the children
- There is a good balance between directly teaching skills to the children and allowing them to explore and be individually creative

Commentary

46. The children achieve well and develop good creative skills. This is because the quality of the teaching is good and balances independent work and teacher-initiated activity well. Nursery children followed the progress of the year from autumn to summer through music, exploring colour, using clay, printing and modelling. The attractive displays of their latest work in the classrooms and around the school show the value placed on their achievements.

47. The wide range of activities through which children can develop creatively are usually carefully linked to other kinds of activity. One group of Reception children working on 'The Billy Goats Gruff' produced good quality posters with the help of an adult, warning of the dangers of the troll. They also used modelling materials and junk, co-operating together to make a scary troll as an independent activity. Another group made very accurate representations of their friends and family after the teacher's input on the values of friendship. In the nursery, children independently made shape pictures in the art area using paint and glue after the teacher's input in mathematical development. Children are learning about space, colour and texture through using different materials to express their own ideas in a creative way. In the discussions at the end of lessons, children take great pleasure and pride in describing what they have created, so demonstrating good understanding of what they have learned.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 and 2

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **satisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have improved since 2002 but remain below average at the end of Year 6 in writing and at the end of Year 2 in reading
- The quality of some teaching is very good but it is mixed and so the overall quality is satisfactory
- Incisive management puts the subject in a good position to improve further.

Commentary

48. National curriculum test results declined sharply after the last inspection and now are recovering, although they are still too low and remain volatile. For example, the proportion of pupils at the end of Year 6 with test results at a level appropriate to their age went up from 69 per cent to 75 per cent between 2002 and 2003, but looks set to be lower in 2004. Taking the results of all pupils into account, the overall result in 2003 was below the average of schools nationally and below the average of schools in similar circumstances; this was because not enough did better - and too many did worse - than the accepted standard for this age. In Year 2, an improvement in standards can be seen in the year by year increase in the upper grades with a corresponding reduction of numbers scoring low grades. The comparison with similar schools is unfavourable because not enough pupils exceeded the standard expected of pupils this age and too many failed to reach it.

49. Most pupils in Years 3 – 6 have good ideas and can talk well, but many have difficulty in getting their ideas down on paper. Much writing in Year 6 is not fluent enough. Pupils themselves acknowledge that their spelling is weak. For some, basic spelling rules, such as how to form plurals for words ending in 'y', are still to be fully established. For others, their spelling is led astray because they do not hear the words they are spelling clearly enough. Some pupils have difficulty in finding a suitable style for the kind of writing they are adopting. Nevertheless, given their results in Year 2 four years ago, and the fact that more than a quarter of them came as Juniors from other schools, their achievement is satisfactory. There is some very good writing to be seen in Year 5, however, consistent with better results in a year's time. For instance, a history project on the Tudors gave rise to some accurate and stylish, at times poignant, writing: a newspaper report of the death of Anne Boleyn and the diary of Jane Seymour being two particular cases in point.

50. Reading standards are below average in Year 2 because many pupils lack confidence and others do not have sufficient strategies to tackle words they do not already know.

51. Some teaching of English in both Years 1 and 2 and Years 3 – 6 is of high quality, but the overall picture is uneven. An analysis of past test results where there have been parallel classes confirms this, and indicates that this has affected the achievement of higher-attaining pupils in particular. The characteristics of the best teaching, which works well with pupils of all levels of ability, include thorough planning so that work is appropriate to the different needs in the class. Clarity about what is happening carries the pupils forward at a good pace and no time is wasted. Good classroom routines help further by encouraging quick responses, because pupils know what is coming next. Very good teaching strategies keep pupils involved because the approach is varied. The direct teaching of what pupils must know, such as, in Year 1, 'sentence rules' and the importance of listening to the sound of words, ensures the pupils know what they have to learn. Quiet moments of individual coaching for pupils needing extra help are good for their self esteem and ensure their inclusion in the lesson. All this is very good practice. Where lessons are less successful (though never less than satisfactory) it is because the teacher has not been clear enough about what is expected so that pupils are confused and frustrated; or because the language used has been ill-matched to the pupils' level of understanding. Sometimes the teacher fails to check that the pupils have understood the work so far before moving on.

52. Some of the shortcomings in teaching quality can be attributed to inexperience, and relate to the particular circumstances of the staff. The good leadership of the subject has adopted a number of well-judged strategies which place the school in a good position to improve. Not least among these is extended mentoring, and a careful scrutiny of pupils' work, together with helpful feedback to the teachers concerned. Curriculum changes are also helping teachers and pupils. The newly adopted practice of opening a topic with a visit or other event gives pupils a memorable experience which provides relevant material for discussion and makes writing more purposeful.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

53. The links between English and other subjects are good. The mutual support is strong with history, and there are good cross-curricular links with art and design, design and technology and science. In Year 1 for instance, learning to write instructions for making an electrical circuit closely followed a science lesson on the topic, to the benefit of both subjects.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are below average; lower attainers do well but potentially higher attainers should do better
- Determined management action is increasingly limiting the impact of a high turnover of staff
- Teachers use a good range of strategies to encourage good behaviour and concentration levels

Commentary

54. Up to 2001, standards were close to national averages. A period of many and rapid staff changes, especially at senior levels, followed and was associated with a drop in standards. Since then they have slowly climbed, even though there is still a high turnover of staff. Current overall standards in both Years 2 and 6 are below average because too few pupils reach levels of attainment above those expected for pupils the same age, although, for reasons already discussed, achievement is satisfactory. Lower attainers, including pupils with special educational needs, often do well and many reach average standards. This is largely because teachers break learning down into manageable steps, only moving on when a point is understood. At its best, this learning is supported by a good range of practical equipment that is well matched to the learning taking place. On the other hand, pupils who could reach above and well above average standards should do better. The school is aware of this and is attempting to step up the challenges that it provides for all pupils. 'Booster' classes began last September and the smaller group work is bringing pupils on. Some mathematics work is being provided that captures pupils' imagination. For example, 'Our Maths Café' allows some Year 6 pupils to apply their skills in the subject whilst designing a café in the school grounds. There are too few such opportunities for the impact to be great enough, but the combination of harder mathematics with an exciting project is stimulating pupils to give of their best; this approach needs to be stepped up if the most able pupils are to do well. The school has secure plans in place to improve resources that facilitate independent, investigative work which extends the learning of all pupils, especially the most able.

55. A significant minority of pupils do not concentrate well or listen carefully without a great deal of assistance from teachers and support staff. In many lessons, teachers present the work excitingly, using attractive resources so that pupils' high interest levels ensure that they concentrate well. Teaching assistants are adept at encouraging pupils to listen, and often help by giving extra, more detailed, explanations to pupils with special educational needs and to those for whom English is an additional language; this is a factor in their good achievement. On other occasions, the use of the school's carefully set out behaviour policy is used and ensures that pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good.

56. With so many changes of staff it is difficult to ensure that work is built on term-by-term and year-by-year; similarly, with changes at subject co-ordinator level, continuity of management is not easy. In recent years the school has built up ways of limiting the possible negative effects of these changes and of seeking to capitalise on the positive. The teaching in mathematics, satisfactory in overall quality, is supported well by the thorough induction programme for teachers new to the school, allowing them to make their best contribution quickly. The leadership of mathematics is good. It owes much to the coordinator's subject expertise and enthusiasm and also to the very well designed, whole-school, management systems that have allowed a coordinator who has been in post for less than a year to have at her fingertips the needs of the school and make plans to meet them. As a result, and with the support of senior managers, though standards are now lower than those reported by the last inspection, the school is well placed to make the necessary further improvements.

Mathematics across the curriculum

57. There are satisfactory opportunities for pupils to use and develop their mathematics in other subjects. They include data handling in information and communication technology, calculations using dates in history and distances in geography and accurate measuring in design and technology.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **unsatisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well in Years 1 and 2, but not well enough by the end of Year 6
- Too few pupils in Years 3 - 6 reach the higher levels of which they are capable
- The curriculum does not support high achievement sufficiently well

Commentary

58. Standards attained by pupils at both age seven and eleven are broadly similar to those at the time of the last inspection, but have shown fluctuation over the years. They are now average at the end of Year 2, as they were in 1998. As in 1998, standards are currently below average at the end of Year 6. This is because too few pupils reach levels above those expected for their age, although this was not the case in the 2003 national test results when they were above average. A significant factor in the below-average standards is the late entry of many pupils to the school. These pupils do not do as well in the national tests as those who have been at the school since Year 1. Additionally, the two Year 6 classes have different teaching and curriculum provision resulting in differences in their scientific knowledge and understanding. This does not support high standards.

59. Younger pupils achieve well because work is interesting, meets their individual needs and is regularly taught and recorded. The approach which links science with other subjects is generally well used. For example, a very good wall display on 'Our grounds' showed very good use of science (prediction); art (drawing and printing leaves and clay modelling of mini-beasts); the internet (to research and print pictures of mini-beasts); and mathematics (a tally of mini-beasts found). However, even in this positive context, it is possible to lose sight of the science because the specific science learning objectives are not made clear enough, and pupils' learning is therefore sometimes limited.

60. Achievement for the older pupils is not as good as it should be for several reasons. First, too little work is recorded in some classes. Whilst group projects are undoubtedly an interesting and stimulating way for pupils to present work, and the quality of these is good, this is too often at the expense of recording in individual books. Some books – notably in Year 6 – show very little work. What there is, is not always well presented, nor does it show that the individual pupils are developing an appropriate range of skills such as devising investigations of their own, writing them up and recording results in a range of ways, such as in tables, by graphs or using information and communication technology. Secondly, science is not taught at an even rate throughout the school year. This means there are often gaps of weeks between topics, so that pupils' skills are not systematically developed. During the inspection, for instance, there was no science on the timetables of the Year 3/4, 5 and 6 classes. Year 6 books showed no science work since very early February, other than some revision for the national tests. This indicates an over-emphasis on getting the pupils through their tests, rather than systematically consolidating and furthering their science skills, knowledge and understanding right through the year. Thirdly, the cross-curricular approach can mask clear scientific learning objectives. For example, in one lesson, where pupils were learning about the parts of a flower, more time was spent on drawing the parts than on learning their names. Finally, pupils do not always have enough experience of working out their own investigations into scientific problems. For example, older pupils say that they carry out investigations, but that these are often provided for them. One example cited was an investigation into forces where the pupils tested how far toy cars ran down slopes of varying degrees and surfaces. They said that these were all laid out on tables in the classroom ready for them to use.

61. Due to the structure of the timetable and the science programme in different classes only three science lessons were observed, and one of these was weighted heavily towards art. This, together with the lack of enough recorded work in the upper school means that there was insufficient evidence to judge teaching and learning. Discussion with the higher-attaining pupils in Year 6 indicates that they have a good range of scientific knowledge and understanding, but their investigative skills are less well advanced. Day to day assessment of pupils' skills is satisfactory, and a good new system whereby pupils have science targets helps them understand how well they are doing and how to improve.

62. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The subject leader has carried out training to improve staff skills, keeps the resources up to date, and in conjunction with the senior managers, carries out work analysis to identify how well pupils are learning. This guides action for improvement. Pupils' performance data is analysed which allows appropriate support to be given. However, this does not focus on improving the achievement of the higher-attaining pupils, and curriculum planning is not monitored with a view to improving the standards pupils attain.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, pupils are achieving well and standards are rising
- Resources, especially computers, are good
- Teaching and support staff's skills are being extended effectively through training

Commentary

63. Standards reached by pupils, the curriculum, and the quantity and quality of resources have all improved since the last inspection. Pupils reach national average standards across a good and improving curriculum, including word processing, control technology, data handling and the use of internet and email. Some aspects of this work are more secure than others and this is due to the recent upgrading of resources and the slight lag there is between installing the good range of computers, improving the software available – especially material to support subjects other than information and communication technology – and the training of staff in the use of these new resources. However, even at this stage of development, pupils in Year 6 work at the levels appropriate to their age when they design multi-media presentations, safely access information from internet websites and collect and analyse data, using spreadsheets. In this work pupils use calculators confidently and accurately.

64. The best teaching is both expert and enthusiastic. Relationships between adults and pupils are very good and pupils listen intently to teachers' carefully phrased explanations; they set to work with a will and cooperate well with others. The thoughtful grouping together of pupils with different needs encourages pupils' speaking and listening skills as they ask and answer questions. Occasionally pupils' real interest in computers tends towards over-excitement but the use of the school's behaviour policy ensures that learning remains at least satisfactory.

65. Although no lessons were seen in which teachers' expertise was limited, the school systematically identifies strengths and weaknesses and, for example, a recent survey identified areas where teachers lack confidence and firm plans are in place to fill the gaps. This follows the long-standing pattern of ensuring that teachers and support staff are kept up to date with developments in the subject and in the school's approach. The recently installed 'mini-suites' in classrooms were used little during the inspection and this is, quite properly, on the school's agenda for improvement. This work is overseen well by a subject leader who has been in post for only six months; the subject benefits from the school's good management systems, thorough documentation, the coordinator's enthusiasm and the staff's willingness to learn new skills. With such a large turnover of staff this is essential and ensures the school is well placed to improve further.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

66. There is satisfactory use of ICT in other subjects, although there is a shortage of software to support this work that will need to be remedied if the full benefits are to be realised. The school is aware of this and has plans to fill the gaps.

HUMANITIES

Geography and History

67. No judgement about the overall quality of provision can be given about these subjects as only two lessons were observed during the inspection. A selection of pupils' work and the displays around the school were analysed. These show that standards achieved by pupils in both subjects are satisfactory for those of all abilities, including those with special educational needs. This is an improvement since the last inspection when history in Key Stage 1 was judged to be unsatisfactory.

68. The school plans the curriculum for both these subjects carefully with the starting point for new learning based on educational visits and other first-hand experiences whenever possible, enriching their learning also in other subjects such as English and art. A range of very good quality artefacts, books and resources is also available to help the pupils learn well.

69. In **geography** the pupils develop a satisfactory knowledge about the immediate locality and the wider world. In years 3 - 6 enquiry and fieldwork skills develop as the pupils investigate how they can improve their journey to school. As a result the pupils observe, question and hypothesise before making considered suggestions for safety improvements. The extensive school grounds are well used for opportunities to learn outside the classroom. Year 1 have created - and are maintaining - a seaside garden and have compared their own holidays with those of their grandparents.

70. In **history** pupils learn about the chronology of historical events and the heritage of Britain. Younger pupils study the life of Florence Nightingale. Older pupils acquire an understanding of life in England in Tudor times and Britain since the 1930's through well-chosen visits. The pupils compare life now and then as well as the differences between rich and poor. They write diaries as if they were Anne Boleyn or Jane Seymour and present accounts of life under rationing. Researching for information, pupils develop skills in using books and the Internet for research, and evaluating sources of evidence.

Religious Education

Provision in Religious Education is **satisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have improved and are now satisfactory
- There is a good scheme of work and the subject is very well resourced
- Subject leadership and assessment are underdeveloped

Commentary

71. No lessons exclusively focused on religious education were observed during the inspection because of the organisation of the curriculum where subjects are taught in specific blocks of time and are often linked with other subjects. From discussions with pupils and from analysing their work it is evident that standards are now satisfactory in Year 1 and 2 and Years 3 - 6. This is an improvement since the previous inspection where standards at the end of Year 2 were unsatisfactory. Achievement is satisfactory.

72. The younger pupils talk with confidence and enthusiasm about religious education lessons. They enjoy their lessons, especially when they have the opportunity to learn from first hand experiences. Pupils accurately recall much of what they have been told about the life of Jesus and compare it with that of the Buddha.

73. Older pupils have benefited from visits by the local minister and Rabbi. The pupils identify similarities and differences in a range of world faiths. Religious education is suitably linked to art and design: lessons on the creation story involved good-quality class discussions. Pupils designed and

made attractive sculptures in clay through which they expressed thoughts and feelings about the creation story.

74. The school's new scheme of work, based on the Hertfordshire locally agreed syllabus, is good and meets statutory requirements. Resources, judged insufficient at the last inspection, are now very good and well organised. They enable pupils to learn well from a range of books and artefacts that illustrate all the major world faiths. The assessment of pupils' progress is underdeveloped and does not give enough information to guide teachers in planning work to match pupils' needs. The subject leader is newly appointed to the school and is comparatively inexperienced and so has yet to have an impact on provision. For example, there have been few opportunities for her to monitor the quality of the pupils' work, or develop portfolios of evidence to help teachers assess pupils' achievements against expected standards.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

75. Too few lessons were seen for a firm judgement to be formed about standards and achievement and the quality of provision in design and technology, music or physical education.

76. Work seen in **design and technology** indicated close and beneficial links with the high quality work in art and design, which is a strength of the school. Furthermore, the Year 1 lesson observed on making paper bags was very good: it was fast, productive and purposeful, and every pupil was very well involved and well supported. The outcomes – different for different groups - were good; some pupils created new bags, incorporating the refinements previously discussed, whilst others re-designed them, labelling and colouring the various parts of their diagram. Other aspects of design and technology are being appropriately taught in different year groups, such as the design and construction of a moving object using axles.

77. **Music.** The quality of pupils' singing is mostly good. It is usually tuneful and rhythmic though the tone can get harsh if the pupils are over-enthusiastic and forget the vocal techniques they have been taught. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 worked well together on a composition based on a four-bar rhythm in quadruple time. Helped by the teacher's strong subject knowledge, they worked well with groups of different tuned and un-tuned instruments to prepare a performance, which successfully and musically combined the separate elements.

78. **Physical education** is seen as important both by teachers and the pupils who systematically develop a range of skills. For example, by the age of eleven around 90 per cent are 'swimmers' and over a half can swim 400 metres. In the three lessons observed teaching was good; it was characterised by the enthusiasm both of teachers and pupils and by good planning that ensured that pupils warmed up properly and were taught appropriate skills in carefully graded steps. In all three lessons, pupils' ball skills (two lessons) and gymnastic skills (one lesson) were markedly better at the end of the lesson than at the start.

Art and design

Provision in art and design is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' standards are above expectations for their age and achievement is good
- The subject is very well led and managed
- The subject is often central to exciting links with other subjects

Commentary

79. Art and design is a strength of the school, which is a reversal of the position at the last inspection when provision, and pupils' standards and progress, were all judged to be unsatisfactory. Central to this improvement are very effective leadership and management. The subject leader is

enthusiastic and experienced, and has high aspirations for the subject and for pupils' individual success. Analysis of strengths and weaknesses has resulted in a clear action plan for continued development and improvement in pupils' standards, and the school is working to gain the Artsmark award by the end of 2004. The subject leader's approach has involved the local and wider community and has extended the school's and pupils' horizons; the unusual and dramatic art work around the school is testimony to this. She is keen to support the less artistically talented, and extend the more able and gifted so that all pupils can develop their creativity to the full. For example, a lunchtime club 'The Art House Café' for artistically talented pupils in Years 3 - 6 has enabled them to work on a piece over time, including at home, inspired by music, in the media of their choice. The results are very good.

80. The art room is very well resourced and equipped both for ease of access to materials for pupils, and also to provide a wealth of resources to support staff. The curriculum, judged unsatisfactory in the previous inspection, is now very good and imaginatively taught by a largely confident staff. The teaching observed was good, and made full use of available resources to motivate and interest the pupils. Sketchbooks are used very well from Year 1 and show clearly how pupils' skills are built up systematically. Visits to galleries, such as the Tate Modern, visiting artists and events such as Arts Week enrich the curriculum further as pupils come to understand how art can be extended into a wide range of media and situations. Art has become an important part of the school's innovative cross-curricular approach to teaching and learning; in fact, at times, it assumes too much prominence at the expense of the other subjects with which it is taught. Observations of history, science, design and technology, and religious education lessons during the inspection, for example, showed art and design as the main focus of the lesson.

81. As a result of this very positive promotion of art, pupils' skills are above expectations for their age throughout the school. Some excellent work by Year 1 pupils on the theme of 'Can buildings speak?' consisted of an exceptional display of polystyrene tile prints of buildings in blue and white, enhanced very tastefully by the minimum of collage and glitter, and surrounded by blue painted clay gargoyles. In the same year group, close observational drawings of historical artefacts and shells confirmed the advanced level of pupils' skills. Older pupils' work, too, is well-developed. The art room holds a display of Year 5 pupils' work in the theme of 'Take a seat'. This involved designing a chair after carrying out extensive research, and then creating the chair in a range of media. Each step of the process had its own learning objective, with pupils of differing skills having different objectives. Both the designs created and the models – including remodelled 'real' chairs - were beautifully executed, full of colour, detail and the use of a wide range of media.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

82. Good planning for personal, social and health education is part of the overall curriculum and features in the plans for every class over the school year. Provision is good, and contributes to improving the attitudes and behaviour of the pupils and the creation of an appropriate ambience in the school. It is supplemented by opportunities for discussion where issues from pupils' work and play can be shared, listened to and resolved. For example, one teacher reports spending much time at the beginning of the year with her class in a circle discussing matters of importance until pupils were ready to accept each other and concentrate on what they needed to learn. The school policy aims to enable pupils to become effective learners and incorporates the development of citizenship skills and knowledge.

83. The School Council is prominent among the opportunities pupils have to serve the school and take responsibility for aspects of its daily life. In addition, pupils in all the classes are nominated to set out and supervise playground equipment, and look out for children who are unhappy or in distress. Year 6 pupils have a rota of appropriate tasks which help the school at registration, in assembly, at lunchtime and in the playground.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	4
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4
Value for money provided by the school	4
Overall standards achieved	4
Pupils' achievement	4
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	3
Attendance	4
Attitudes	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	4
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The quality of education provided by the school	4
The quality of teaching	4
How well pupils learn	4
The quality of assessment	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	4
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	3
Accommodation and resources	2
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	4
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	4
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	2
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).