

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **MEREFIELD SCHOOL**

Westminster Drive, Southport

LEA area: Sefton

Unique reference number: 104979

Headteacher: Ms Alison Foster

Lead inspector: Adrian Simm

Dates of inspection: 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> September 2003

Inspection number: 258947

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 – 19 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll;	42
School address:	Westminster Drive Southport
Postcode:	PR8 2QZ
Telephone number:	01704 577163
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr I Gailbraith
Date of previous inspection:	November 1999

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Merefield School is for pupils who have severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Around one quarter of pupils have autism. Pupils come mostly from the north of the borough of Sefton and mainly from privately owned accommodation. Twenty two per cent of pupils on roll claim free school meals, which is lower than the last inspection. Pupils' attainment on entry is very low in comparison to their chronological age. All pupils come from white British ethnic backgrounds. All pupils have statements of special educational needs. Around one quarter of teaching staff and a third of support staff are new to the school in September 2003. Pupil turnover is very low. The school received a School Achievement Award for the improvement in pupils' achievement during the school year 2001/2002. The school places great emphasis on opportunities for its pupils to work alongside pupils and students from local primary and secondary schools, units and a college of higher education.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
21138	Adrian Simm	Lead inspector	Science, geography, history and religious education.
9348	Mary Le Mage	Lay inspector	
31167	Sharon Jefferies	Team inspector	
10781	Bob Thompson	Team inspector	Special educational needs, English, information and communication technology, art and design, and citizenship.
7994	Pam Weston	Team inspector	Foundation Stage curriculum, mathematics, design and technology, music and physical education.

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is a good school** that is well led and managed. Pupils achieve well because of good teaching and learning in all age groups regardless of individual pupils' learning difficulties. Part of this success is the very good relationships pupils have with staff who know their needs. Income per pupil is very high and is not used as effectively as it should be. **The school offers satisfactory value for money.**

#### The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Achievement is good for all pupils in communication, literacy, numeracy, science and personal development including personal and social education.
- Teaching and learning are good. There is good teamwork between teachers and support staff.
- Leadership and management are good. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses. It recognises that systems to record pupils' achievement in information and communication technology (ICT) and religious education are not well developed.
- Governors are beginning to find out more for themselves about how well the school is doing but still rely on the headteacher for some information. The school's approach in using its budget to best effect is unsatisfactory. The school has a recent history of significant under spending but because of very high-income levels pupils have not suffered significantly because of this.
- There are no changing rooms and showers for physical education lessons. Current arrangements for changing do not protect pupils' privacy and dignity.
- Pupils work and socialise effectively with pupils and adults from other schools and colleges.

The school has responded well to the previous inspection. Teaching and learning has improved well because of the staff development offered by the school. This has resulted in raised standards. Ways of checking on how well pupils are doing has continued to develop well in literacy, numeracy, science and personal development, including improvements in individual education plans (IEPs). Staff are not as far on with this in ICT and religious education. Improvement in governors' financial management and in finding out first-hand how the school is developing could have developed more.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

**All pupils, regardless of their differing special educational needs, achieve well** in each stage of the school as shown in the table below.

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	in relation to individual targets in (*):	
	Subjects of the curriculum	personal and social education
<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Year 6</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Year 9</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Year 11</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Year 13</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b>

*Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor.*  
(\* ) Communication, reading, writing, numeracy and science.

Children in the Foundation Stage achieve well in the goals they are expected to reach by the end of reception. Achievement in ICT is satisfactory. No judgement was made in religious education because of insufficient evidence. Achievement in art and design, design and technology, geography, history, music and physical education was not part of the foci of the inspection. **Pupils' attitudes to work and each other, their behaviour and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Attendance is very good** in comparison with similar schools. Pupils try

their best throughout the day. The behaviour and concentration of pupils with severe autistic tendencies are improving because of good teaching.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education provided by the school is good for all pupils regardless of age or special educational needs.**

**Teaching is good** because staff have very good knowledge of pupils and understand their individual needs. This understanding shows in lessons that are well planned for pupils of different abilities. Pupils are expected and encouraged to join in and as a result, they do well. Interest and motivation are sustained by pupils appropriate to their capabilities. **This means that pupils learn well.** Staff are developing the sophistication of ways of finding out and checking on just how well the pupils are doing in their work. The good information staff have from this leads to lessons that are increasingly matched to all pupils' needs. Good teamwork between teachers and learning support assistants means that pupils frequently benefit from individual or very small group support as well as their opportunities to socialise with other pupils, at times from mainstream schools.

Pupils experience a good breadth of learning opportunities within a well-designed curriculum. This includes good links with other schools and colleges, visits to places of interest, sport activities and art and music workshops. Literacy and numeracy are built well into all lessons but the use of ICT, whilst appropriate is still in need of further development. Students in Years 10 to 13 benefit well from a vocational curriculum through which they gain accreditation at different levels in the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). Pupils have very good and trusting relationships with staff. They are cared for well. Pupils' views are valued and taken well in to account in Years 10 to 13. They are involved in setting their own targets. Individual education plans with Year 9 pupils incorporate a clearly visible method of recording success so pupils know just how well they are doing. This is an example of very good practice. Businesses in the local community support the school well financially. Links with parents are good and the school values and acts upon their views very well.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are good. Governance is satisfactory.** Staff and governors are committed to school improvement. Checking on how well school priorities are developing is good but more effective systems are needed for monitoring and using school finances because the school has not spent significant amounts of its budget in four of the last five years. Several new teachers have started recently and are being well supported by the headteacher and senior staff. Their role as subject co-ordinators is being developed appropriately as part of good induction packages.

## **PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

**Parents are very satisfied** with the school and those pupils able to express an opinion are happy attending the school. Parents are particularly pleased about the quality of information and the number of opportunities they receive to find out how their children are doing.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Establish what each pupil knows or does in ICT and religious education as a starting point. Build on this by monitoring progress and adjusting teaching and learning to raise standards.
- Ensure governors rely less on information given to them by the headteacher in evaluating the school's effectiveness and find out more for themselves. In particular, implement more effective ways for the governing body to monitor the school's spending so that it is clear just how much money is available to adjust its spending in year on the school's priorities.
- Ensure pupils' privacy and dignity are preserved when they are changing and showering for physical education.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

#### **Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses**

***Boys and girls, regardless of their differing special educational needs achieve well.***

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils starting in the reception class make a good start to their school life in working towards the goals set for them in the nationally recognised areas for learning.
- Achievement is good for all pupils in the school's core areas of communication, literacy, numeracy, science and personal development including personal and social education. Good systems are in place for measuring pupils' knowledge and understanding of their learning, including in their individual education plans.
- School systems for checking pupils' progress in these core areas show an improving trend in achievement.
- Achievement in ICT is satisfactory but hampered by staff not being fully clear about pupils' current knowledge and understanding in the subject. Detailed assessments have not yet been carried out.
- Achievement in religious education could not be judged because of insufficient information about pupils' progress in relation to their prior learning. Co-ordination of the subject has been hampered by staff illness in the last 12 months. Ways of working out and recording pupils' progress are only coming into place this year.
- Pupils' success in accreditation of their vocational and personal development through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN).

#### **Commentary**

1. Pupils make progress in very small steps. The school's ways of setting appropriate but challenging targets for pupils to achieve are becoming more and more precise. This supports well the good achievement being seen against IEP targets where pupils achieve on average around 85 per cent of the targets set. Also, the school plots pupils' progress against nationally recognised levels in a range of areas in the core subjects taught. This is monitored, analysed and discussed by staff to ensure good teaching and learning. Data from the introduction of this system around three years ago is showing all pupils making good progress, which is particularly strong in mathematics, science and personal development. The school's analysis of reading and writing shows correctly that, whilst achievement is still good, a review of how pupils are taught would further benefit the improvement in standards. The school is not yet able to compare its standards against similar schools but is working towards this end both locally and nationally.
2. Regardless of their age, pupils' special educational needs and levels of understanding and achievement differ significantly from one to another in their class and from pupils both younger and older. This means that a higher attaining pupil in Year 2 can be as far on as a lower attaining pupil in Year 6 or Year 9. Higher and lower attaining pupils' work sampled for the inspection shows good progress against their own prior levels at Years 2, 6, 9, 11 and 13. For example, in progress for lower attainers
  - In language and communication from showing recognition of familiar songs and stories to sustaining even greater concentration and focus;
  - In mathematics, from counting by moving their left hand on the tray of their chair to placing objects in a container with adult help;
  - In science and ICT, from showing a sense of interest in activities to indicating preferences;
  - In personal development, from eagerly waiting their turn in activities to returning themselves to tasks when distracted.

Whilst for higher attaining pupils achievement is also good because

- In speaking and listening, from sharing their news each morning and making appropriate comments on this pupils have moved onto using clear and full sentences.
  - From enjoying reading with others and predicting events they now identify increasingly the letters of the alphabet.
  - From writing on top of an adult's writing when copying words that they want to say, they now copy underneath the adult's writing.
  - In mathematics, from being able to count to 15 by rote to correctly understanding the concept of adding one more to a given number.
  - In science, from being aware animals have basic similarities such as eyes and a mouth to being able to describe successfully the difference in an egg observed when it is boiled.
  - In personal development, taking turns within a group situation when that had previously been difficult to do.
3. During the inspection, the teaching of skills related to ICT was seen only on rare occasions including within the lunchtime computer club. From pupils' previous work, satisfactory achievement was evident such as in their more independent use of a computer keyboard or mouse to access programs with reducing help from adults. However, more detailed evidence for judgements was not available. Whilst the school is clear how it wants to establish pupils' knowledge and understanding in ICT, a full assessment has not been carried out. In religious education, the position is one step back in that the school has yet to decide how it wants to assess pupils' progress and as such, has little evidence for judging pupils' achievement.
4. Pupils in Years 10 to 13 are beginning to benefit from accreditation of their work. Those working on the ASDAN Transition Challenge have achieved the 'Individual Learning Skills Award' whilst slightly older pupils working on 'Towards Independence' have achieved successes in units on the 'world of work' and 'water skills'. Other units that have been accredited are horticulture, printing and making pictures. Their achievement is good.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

***The attendance and punctuality of pupils are very good. Their attitudes and behaviour throughout the school are good. The personal development of all pupils, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.***

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Levels of attendance are very good and well above the average for similar schools.
- Pupils spontaneously demonstrate good awareness of distinguishing right from wrong, they care for each other and their environment and demonstrate good social behaviour as they mature.
- Pupils try hard to maintain concentration even when disruptive incidents occur.
- There is a daily opportunity for a small number of pupils in turn to take an important part in the whole school assembly, which they respond to well.

### **Commentary**

5. Attendance at the school is very good as shown in the table below. There is no difference between the age groups.

#### ***Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)***

Authorised absence	
School data:	7.3
National data:	9.1

Unauthorised absence	
School data :	0
National data:	0.6

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

Pupils say that they enjoy school. Parents reinforce this view. The school provides a supportive, happy environment combined with interesting things for pupils to do and this results in pupils wanting to attend. Parents play their full part in ensuring pupils' regular attendance.

6. The social development of pupils is a high priority across the school and underpins all activities throughout the school day. As a result of this pupils develop a clear awareness of what is acceptable behaviour and try their best to conform to the high standards set by all adults in the school. Pupils accept responsibility for tasks allocated to them, such as collecting class registers and keeping their classrooms tidy. As they get older, many spontaneously help younger or less-able pupils, to move around the school. They show pleasure in the achievements of other pupils in their class. Older pupils greet visitors very politely, observing all the social norms. During the inspection older pupils twice approached inspectors on the playground and asked for their names. On being told, they gave their name and shook hands very correctly. In both cases they then went on to explain the names of other pupils playing nearby. The common room for the older students displays a list of rules for use of the room drawn up by the pupils themselves. They are very clear, concise and appropriate and are the only rules displayed anywhere in the school. This points to good improvements in social development as the pupils get older.
  
7. There are occasions when the behaviour of some pupils could be very disruptive to their classmates. The school has put much effort into staff development in working out how best to deal with pupils, including those with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Teachers and support staff deal with these situations skilfully so as to minimise the disruption and affects on other pupils. For example, staff are aware of the vulnerability of pupils in wheel chairs during such incidents. In most cases, the pupils also make a major contribution by continuing to concentrate on their work to the best of their ability. Exclusion of a pupil from school in the last 12 months for very disruptive behaviour has only happened once.

**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	42	1	

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

8. The school day ends with the whole school coming together for an assembly. Each day one or two pupils lead the whole school in signing and singing their 'Going Home' song and prayer. Older pupils tend to volunteer to do this, which is a measure of their confidence and personal development. However, younger pupils are also chosen for this as a means of building their feelings of self-worth and confidence. All pupils show enjoyment of this time together.

**QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

***The quality of education provided for the pupils is good educationally and socially Because of this, pupils learn well in lessons and through other organised and supervised activities during the rest of the school day.***

**Teaching and learning**

***Teaching and learning are good with all year groups and with pupils with different special educational needs.***

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Planning for lessons is good because teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects and pupils' achievement in core subjects of communication, reading, writing, mathematics, science, and personal and social development.
- The quality of teaching and learning is helped very well because of the trusting relationships achieved by staff for all pupils based on understanding pupils' needs.
- The management of behaviour is effective and usually ensures little disruption to other pupils' lessons. Staff development has been significant in improving this element of teaching in recent months.
- Good use is made of support staff in most lessons.
- Resources for science are sound but on occasions, what is available to staff does not quite suit pupils' needs.

## Commentary

9. Teaching and learning has improved well since the last inspection. At that time, teaching and learning was good or better in a half of lessons. This happens now in around eight out of every ten lessons as shown in the table below. The improvement has been in the amount of good lessons taught. The percentage of very good lessons has remained the same.

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 31 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactor y	Poor	Very Poor
	8 (26%)	17 (55%)	6 (19%)			

*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.*

10. Teaching and learning has improved and is now good in literacy, numeracy, science and PSHE because teachers know at what level to 'pitch' their teaching for each pupil in their class. This information comes from a set of detailed assessments of what pupils already know, understand and do and knowing what their next steps of development are. This works for all pupils regardless of age, complexity of learning difficulty and language level. Signing and symbols are used well and consistently for those who need it. Together with good subject knowledge, all of this ensures that teachers know realistically where they want the pupils to get to by the end of each lesson or a unit of work. Consequently, pupils are as clear as they can be about what is expected of them. The difficulty of work is carefully matched to their needs. As a result they thrive on the challenge and put everything into their learning.
11. Staff, including those recently inducted well into the school, understand and address the school's drive to improve pupil's individual communication skills. For some pupils this is done through normal literacy lessons and by including the teaching and learning of literacy skills in other subjects of the curriculum. For some children who started at the school in the reception year and used just gesture or sound and gesture to show what they wanted, joining in with songs now or building a range of early vocabulary skills or expressing themselves independently, shows good achievement. For other pupils such as those with more complex learning or behaviour difficulties, something extra is needed and provided. The staff's good use of ways of intervening and re-focusing pupils' attention exemplifies this when difficulties arise. They are well prepared for different levels of response including quickly and quietly removing other pupils to another classroom in the event of diffusing a situation, which may disrupt other pupils' learning. Where new techniques or additional staff training are required, these are immediately scheduled.

12. Throughout school, very good lessons are characterised by changes of focus by staff at just the right time. This strategy maintains a very good level of concentration and effort, including those pupils with more complex needs. These changes can be quite rapid for pupils with high dependency needs or poor communication levels. It demands close teamwork from all staff and good improvements in concentration and the pupils' ability to relate to others is the outcome. Teachers have a very good and trusting relationship with pupils in their immediate care and a good 'working knowledge' of their individual special educational needs. For all pupils, teachers present new and challenging but achievable tasks in small steps of increasing difficulty and this helps pupils' learning to build on previous knowledge and understanding. This is where the improved assessment techniques and their use in planning are really paying off. Teachers and classroom assistants work 'as one', providing good individual and small group support and this contributes significantly to the pupils' learning and progress.
13. The 'glue' that holds all of this together are the good IEPs for the pupils. These are clear and include the next important areas for development in literacy, numeracy science and personal development needs. Targets are generally precise, incorporate timescales and success expectations and are linked closely to the school's performance and assessment methods. Not only do the IEPs set out exactly what is to be taught but they are also a good measure of success. Put together as an assessment package, teachers are clear how well individual pupils are achieving, how well the school is achieving as a whole and where they need to concentrate to improve even more. This immediately feeds back into teaching and learning such as the targets for 2003/2004 in reading and writing.
14. On occasions, the use of support staff, whilst adequate, is not as effective as it might be. This results in lessons that are satisfactory rather than good. The right balance for support staff between doing too much for pupils, which hinders their personal development and doing too little so that the lower attaining pupils are not quite as involved as they might be, 'just misses the mark'. The school has worked hard on this and has been successful in the main. Also, the quality of science resources whilst sound overall, resulted during the inspection with pupils with co-ordination difficulties experiencing some problems with the small size of 'crocodile clips' available to them in their work on electricity. Whilst they gained satisfactorily from the lesson, more could have been achieved. The school recognises the need in science to match more the resources for specific units of work to pupils' special educational needs.

## The curriculum

***The curriculum is good.*** It provides a good range of activities, which helps pupils to achieve well. ***Extra-curricular activities and enrichment of provision by visits to the local community are good. The school's accommodation and resources are satisfactory in meeting pupils' needs.***

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for English, mathematics, science and personal development for all pupils.
- Effectiveness of Connexion support for older pupils. There is an allocated member of the team who works alongside the class teacher with pupils in Years 10 to 13 in teaching the modules of the 'World of Work' for ASDAN achievement awards.
- There is a good range of extra curricular activities, which enrich the pupils' learning experiences although not many of these are 'fitness' based.
- There are no changing and shower facilities for physical education. Pupils change in classrooms. This does not protect their privacy and dignity.

### Commentary

15. The school has an appropriate number of teachers and support staff to cover the curriculum. There is an individual record of each pupil's achievements, completed regularly, which enables staff to plan the curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils, particularly in communication,

reading, writing, mathematics, science and personal development. Main programmes of work and how these will be turned into effective lessons are reviewed regularly and updated to take account of the needs of the pupils. Information from parents and from therapists and other professionals is valued when planning for pupils' individual needs. Links with the adjoining primary school are good. Pupils from both schools visit each other to work together. For the nursery and reception class pupils during the inspection, many were only in their first few days in school and were still 'finding their feet'. School evaluation of these activities point to real strengths in social development and independence. There are good links with local colleges and links with the high school are developing which will enable older pupils to access for example, the high school's science facilities. Older pupils benefit from the introduction of ASDAN achievement awards and the well co-ordinated courses necessary to achieve these awards. There are good approaches to the teaching of English language and literacy, and mathematics across the curriculum. Information and communication technology and religious education still requires further development.

16. There are good opportunities for the pupils to extend their experiences through extra-curricular activities. These are interesting and relevant and are available for all pupils of all ages and gender, including those with additional special educational needs. Examples of this are the lunchtime clubs such as ICT, pottery, yoga and gardening. Pupils exhibit their work in the Ainsdale Flower Show, with some receiving commendations. Older pupils in particular attend residential visits such as the Youth Hostel Association in Liverpool town centre, which enables them to visit for example the Tate Exhibition. However, there are insufficient fitness-based lunchtime activities.
17. Accommodation and resource provision is good in the Foundation Stage and satisfactory overall. There have been great strides taken to improve the accommodation and resources within the school by providing for example specialist rooms such as a food technology room and a sensory garden. However, some of the equipment available in the food technology room is dated and needs to be replaced. When taking part in physical education there are no designated changing areas provided for the pupils and no shower facilities.

## Care, guidance and support

***The school offers a good standard in the care, welfare, health and safety of its pupils. It provides good support, advice and guidance for its pupils, based on the monitoring of their achievements and personal development. The school is beginning to seek the views of pupils and act on them through the work of the school council, which is in its infancy.***

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Throughout the school, Individual Behaviour Plans are used well to guide how staff minimise disruption and re-engage pupils in learning.
- Individual Education Plans are well used to motivate pupils and monitor their progress.
- Home/School diaries are well used to promote a full knowledge of pupils and ensure a consistent approach to their development.
- The quality of relationships between adults and pupils is very good, adding to the pupils' sense of security.

## Commentary

18. The adults in the school know the pupils very well, especially those who they work with closely on a regular basis. Adults have an in-depth knowledge of the needs of the pupils, coupled with a similar knowledge of the strategies being employed to address these needs. This results in the good support and guidance pupils receive throughout the school day and enables them to make good progress.

19. Work towards IEP targets is a deliberate focus of one teaching session in most classes each day and in some classes pupils are involved in assessing their own achievements at these times. This motivates them to achieve. The good use of the home/school diary of each pupil is an aid to ensure school is kept informed on a daily basis of how pupils are coping at home and similarly informs parents and carers of the pupil's day at school. This dialogue enables school to identify patterns of behaviour and enable all adults involved with the pupil to present a consistent approach. Throughout the school pupils have very good relationships with adults and at times individual pupils will seek out a member of staff with whom they feel particularly at ease. This was demonstrated in assembly when a pupil deliberately chose to sit next to an adult who was not a member of her class team, but with whom she felt particularly secure.

## **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

*The school has established good links with parents, other schools and the local community.*

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school consults widely with parents and respects their views.
- Use of Community Service personnel in the school has improved the school environment. This is one example of the school's good links with the community.
- The school has effective means of pupils meeting and working with members of the local community both pupils and adults.

### **Commentary**

20. The school surveys parents to establish their views about major initiatives in the school. These views were a major influence on the introduction of school uniform and what it should constitute. Parents were also consulted about the organisation of the ASD class in the primary department. In addition to these major initiatives, the views of parents are also recorded at annual reviews of statements of special educational needs. These views are used to further develop how staff work with the pupils. On a daily basis there is a dialogue between home and school via the pupils' diaries. This enables both school and home to respond to daily events that they themselves have not been part of. This is clearly effective for the personal development of the pupils.
21. The school worked in partnership with Community Service personnel to decorate the entire school premises. The school was decorated at a very reasonable cost and the young people involved were accredited with a National Vocational Qualification from their involvement in the project. Since young people from the community were involved in this way there has been less vandalism in the school environment. The school and the community both gain from strong links which include community use of the school's facilities for swimming and Sunday worship for a local church. And for the school, pupils benefit from donations and financial support from a range of local businesses.
22. The school has developed an effective approach to making sure pupils enjoy working and socialising with pupils and adults from other schools and colleges. Also, within school, all pupils are planned for individually so that they benefit from the range of activities and staff expertise on offer. Pupils with additional special needs and behavioural difficulties are fully included in classes by a range of teaching and learning strategies drawn up, including individual education and behavioural plans, which ensure pupils remain in class and are fully included in lessons.
23. As the inspection took place in the second full week of term, many of the links with other schools and colleges had not started for the current year. However, evidence held in the school and discussion with staff and pupils points to much work having been done in the last year.

24. Inclusion links with other schools start in the reception class where pupils visit each other in their schools. Examples are

- In the primary department, four pupils experienced half days in a local primary school.
- In the secondary department, two pupils went to a local high school for music, ICT and art.
- Seven pupils attended the high school for French.
- High school pupils came into Merefield to help pupils to read.
- Four older pupils attended a local college to successfully pursue a drama course.
- The school joined with Merseyside SLD schools for a sports festival, which included boccia, football and swimming.
- All pupils were part of the Shoreside and Merefield Schools' Arts Festival held over a two week period.
- The school participated in the Sefton Music Service project involving Sefton Special schools and mainstream units.

These are good opportunities for pupils to enhance their social and personal skills, behaviour and attitudes as well as their academic skills.

25. The school provides short placements for students from Edgehill College of Higher Education. Local high schools and a pupil referral unit take the opportunity to place some of their students in classes for work placements. Overall, this is good practice and works well. All visits are well monitored and evaluated. There are good annotated photographic records and pupils as well as staff and parents complete evaluation sheets.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

***The school is well led and effectively managed. Governance is satisfactory.***

- Governors carry out their role satisfactorily.
- There is good leadership by the headteacher who is well supported by other key staff.
- The school is managed well.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher and senior staff are clear about how to develop the school. They listen to staff's views and include these in a comprehensive and prioritised school improvement plan. This has led to good improvement since the last inspection.
- Governors meet regularly and have a sound understanding about the school's level of effectiveness. They are beginning to find out for themselves how things are doing but still rely on the headteacher for much of their information.
- The school has introduced better ways of finding out just how well the pupils are improving in literacy, numeracy, science and personal development. This is in the very early stages in other subjects such as information and communication technology and religious education.
- Financial planning and monitoring of spending is not as good as it should be. Too much money remains unspent at the end of each financial year. Because income is very high, this weakness has not resulted in serious deficits in provision. For example, the school is well-staffed and resourced.
- Staff have good opportunities to improve their expertise through training carried out in school and elsewhere. This has contributed to pupils' improved achievement.

### **Commentary**

26. The headteacher and senior management team are clear about how well pupils are achieving in lessons and how to develop this further. This is particularly strong in the core areas of the school's work in communication, literacy, numeracy, science and personal development. This comes from

- Careful analysis of pupils' work and teachers' assessment of how well they are doing using the Performance Indicators for Value Added Target Setting (PIVATS).
  - The introduction and monitoring of more precise computerised record keeping and individual education plans for pupils based on the 'B Squared' system. This has also contributed to improved information for parents on how their children are progressing.
  - Checking on the quality of teaching and learning in lessons at regular intervals although this has not happened as much as had been planned in the last school year.
  - Identifying carefully all staff's training needs in relation to the pupils' SEN and ensuring the time and costs are made available for staff to improve well their expertise. For teachers, this works effectively within the school's policy on performance management.
  - The monitoring and analysis of the behaviour of those pupils for whom this is relevant. This has worked particularly well for pupils with autism.
27. The school is not just checking on pupils individually but is beginning to compare pupils' achievement such as by gender and special education need. This has contributed to all pupils making good progress in relation to their capabilities. Teachers can see where there are gaps in pupils' learning and the system also acts as a reminder as to the next steps that need to be taught. In relation to numeracy, science and personal development, good improvement has been made in pupils' achievement. Achievement in literacy is good. Staff are clear what else they need to do to move standards on further. Reading and writing are current priorities identified from effective analysis of assessment information from pupils' work. Staff check on each others assessments in school to try to ensure that they are all working to the same criteria. The school is conscious that they need to compare what they are doing with other schools locally and nationally and are in the early stages of working to this end.
28. This and other information on how well the school is addressing the targets it has set out for itself is provided to governors at their regular meetings. However, the minutes of meetings do not fully reflect this as a record of what has taken place. Governors are beginning to visit school during the pupil-day to see how the school works. Each governor has a particular responsibility to check and report back on to other governors once a year. Governors recognise the need to develop this further in order to carry out their role more effectively.
29. The school's budget for the last financial year is set out in the table below.

**Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003**

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	630,497	Balance from previous year	91,034
Total expenditure	616,827	Balance carried forward to the next	104,704
Expenditure per pupil	14,018		

Income per pupil is very high as it was at the last inspection. The school has a recent history of large surpluses that well exceed what is expected nationally of five per cent of their budget. Surpluses continue to exceed that expected by the Local Education Authority (LEA) which is ten per cent of budget. Due to a change-over this year in computerised financial systems within the LEA, governors found it difficult to keep track on just how high their budget surplus was becoming. No internal school system was used to predict what was happening. Apart from one year when the school did much to improve the building, furniture and computers, large surpluses have been the norm since 1998/1999. Budget monitoring is unsatisfactory and this means that strategic use of the school's budget is not as good as it should be. This reduces the value for money that the school offers and also detracts from how the school meets the principles of best value. The minutes of the governing body's finance committee do not follow best practice by including the most recent budget monitoring figures or by recording decisions taken. Governors are currently expecting to use much of the surplus in contributing to a new extension to the school, which is in the early stages of being considered.

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

### AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

*Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is good.* The children have very complex needs and all staff try their very best to make coming to school an enjoyable and worthwhile experience.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses drawn from across the areas of learning

- Lessons are well planned to meet the individual needs of the children.
- Good behaviour strategies, which enable children to begin to understand the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.
- Very good team work, so that support staff anticipate a need rather than wait to be directed.
- Care and support for all children at all times. Children are secure and constantly supported by staff who strive to extend their learning experience.
- Children achieve well.

#### Commentary

30. There are too few pupils in the Foundation Stage and insufficient evidence to make a separate judgement in each area of learning. As a 'package', provision is effective because, for example,
- In **Communication language and literacy**, the children share stories well with the staff. Good resources, well used make the stories come alive and the children begin to recognise the story-characters involved. They try hard to identify and name the characters and to make choices when asked.
  - Examples of **mathematical development** abound. Children are introduced well to number through number rhymes and singing and good use of ICT programs. Because staff persevere and encourage the children to take part in the activities, they are beginning to take turns well and use a 'big switch' to activate the programs.
  - At the start of each day in **personal social and emotional development**, children take part in a short 'welcoming' period. They wait patiently while each child is welcomed in turn. There is good use of signing and the children are becoming familiar with this. They are beginning to respond to the familiar routines of the class. Children co-operate well with staff and at snack time some are able to sign 'please' and choose which flavour of drink they want.
  - In **creative development**, when singing 'five little ducks' for the first time each child was very well supported by lots of signing by staff and good use of praise to reinforce learning. Pupils showed obvious pleasure. Some squeezed the toy pig's foot to make him 'sing'.
  - In **knowledge and understanding** pupils shared the blowing of bubbles. This was well planned so that they responded as well as they could; smiling as the bubbles landed on their arms. They tried hard to track the movement of the bubbles with their eyes. The activity was extended when the teacher moved the class outside and pointed out that bubbles moved more quickly. In response, pupils had to move their eyes and head quicker to track them.
31. Teaching and learning is good overall. The teacher has only recently started but this did not detract from effective lessons. The organisation and management of the class are good. Since the last inspection, how staff check on pupils' progress has improved well. There is very good photographic evidence to support the many experiences that the children meet. Children's files build up good evidence of how they are doing from when they started. This forms the basis for recording children's achievements as they move through the school. At the moment observational diaries are kept but there is no set pattern to their use. They are only used when it is felt that there is something useful to say. There are good links with the adjoining primary school. Children from the mainstream nursery school visit Merefield and vice versa. They listen to stories and play together. However, because this inspection was so early in the school year, social development for these particular children was in the very early stages. The national

expectations of what pupils will work towards in the reception class are now an effective basis for planning of lessons.

## **SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1, 2, 3, 4 and Post 16**

### **ENGLISH**

***The overall quality of provision for English, including literacy, is good.***

Standards in English are good for pupils in this type of school. Since the previous inspection the school has maintained this good standard despite significant changes in staffing and in co-ordination of the subject. Analysis of pupils' progress shows good achievement overall although not quite as rapid as progress in mathematics and science.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good across the school.
- The National Literacy Strategy, suitably adapted and modified, is successfully working throughout the school.
- The quality, quantity and use of resources to help pupils' learning are good.
- Progress by pupils with additional special needs, such as ASD, challenging behaviour and medical conditions, is good.
- The newly appointed co-ordinator has good plans to investigate the differences between the rate of pupils' progress in English to that in mathematics and science. This is an example of the school's good approach to constant checking on how things are going.

#### **Commentary**

32. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good across all ages. This is as a direct result of good planning, work matched to the needs and ability of individual pupils and very good relationships to which the pupils respond positively, and try their best to succeed. The National Literacy Strategy has been well implemented across the school. Teachers modify and adapt the strategies to suit their pupils and this has had a positive impact on standards.
33. Teachers spend much time and effort either making or adapting resources, which are then tailored to meet individual pupils' needs. For example, with Year 2 pupils, the teacher ensured that the resources matched the 'big book' story of 'the train ride'. Pupils were dressed in costumes to match the characters of the story and had prompts, such as hooters, whistles and genuine rail tickets to use during the story. One pupil's 'talker' was programmed with symbols to match the story so that he could press the appropriate symbol during the story and 'speak' to the class.
34. Pupils with ASD are taught as a discrete group at primary level and integrated into classes at secondary level. This works well and pupils are making as good progress as their peers. Some individual pupils require an 'individual behaviour plan' (IBP). For example, one secondary pupil with extremely challenging behaviour has an IBP which is being implemented successfully to enable him not only to attend school and be taught in his class, but ensures he is also making good academic progress. This particular pupil is being closely monitored and his behaviour and progress evaluated carefully to enable him to continue making progress both in his behaviour and academic studies.
35. Leadership and management of English are satisfactory. The current co-ordinator has just been re-appointed. She had been co-ordinator in the past and had ensured that English was making good progress. However, due to illness of a subsequent co-ordinator, developments in the subject need time to be re-established. The fact that good standards have been maintained is to the credit of the staff. The co-ordinator has already established there is a difference in the rate of

progress, measured by PIVATS, as compared to mathematics and science. Discussions are taking place between the three co-ordinators to investigate this apparent anomaly.

36. The good standards attained by pupils by the end of Year 2 are closely linked to the effective strategies used to promote learning. Pupils develop their speaking and listening skills well through the use of language, signs and symbols. They enjoy listening to stories and respond positively when involved in the stories. In their writing, they are beginning to make marks on paper, trace over tactile letters and recognise symbols. They understand the routines of the classroom and express choices and preferences. They respond in different ways, some use pictures or symbols, while others use signs or spoken language. Pupils with little language use a 'Big Mac' and a 'talker' effectively to allow them to make good contributions to their stories.
37. Pupils in the primary ASD class used sign, symbols and puppets effectively to enhance their communication skills. Through play they improve well their literacy skills and develop an understanding of letter shapes and sounds. They find and match magnetic letters shapes to recorded words starting with the same sound such as the 'g' sound in geese, gaggle and garden. Pupils underwrite and overwrite adults writing on prepared sheets. Higher attaining pupils begin to copy write and write some words for themselves.
38. By Year 9, pupils continue to develop good literacy skills through drama. Through well timed changes of activities, such as discussing the characters in Romeo and Juliet, acting out the parts interspersed with watching the play on video and discussing how they could improve, they enhance their performance of the characters in the play and improve their speaking and listening skills. Lower attaining pupils continue to improve their writing skills by underwriting and overwriting, Higher attaining pupil copy write thoughts set down for them by staff and begin to use effectively a simple symbols computer program.
39. In the class for pupils in Years 10 to 13, they become more confident in their English and literacy skills. This is evident in the morning news and current affairs session. They read morning newspapers and discuss events. Higher attaining pupils pick out items in the newspapers that they have heard on morning television news. They differentiate between good news, such as births and weddings and bad or sad news. Lower attaining pupils 'read' through their paper. One identified the Prime Minister's picture. Adults are skilled in promoting interaction and communication with pupils who have severe communication problems. Lower attaining pupils continue to copy write prepared work and higher attaining pupils use writing with symbols and word processing to record their work. The good progress is closely linked to the high quality of teaching. ASDAN modules have been successfully introduced over the last two years. These have contributed via 'Transition Challenge' for 14 -16 year olds and 'Towards Independence' for 16-18 year olds to pupils and students making good progress in their literacy skills.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

40. Progress towards meeting the school's literacy targets has been good. Pupils are encouraged to use their literacy skills in others subjects. For example, in a physical education lesson with Years 10 to 13, pupils responded well to the use of descriptive language to describe their movements. When asked how they were moving they replied in a range of ways, such as 'heavy', 'light', 'fast or slow'. They interpreted the music to match their movements. One pupil said she was frightened by some of the 'dark' music. In a science lesson with Years 7 and 8, pupils increased their use of vocabulary and surprised the teacher when they were looking in a small hand mirror and asked 'How do you know who is behind you?' One pupil replied 'By the *reflection* in the mirror'. Some younger pupils in Years 3 and 4 in a mathematics lesson used correct mathematical language when describing shapes such as squares, circles or triangles.

## **MATHEMATICS**

*Provision in mathematics is good and the pupils achieve well.*

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers plan their lessons to ensure the needs of pupils of all abilities and those with additional special educational needs are well met.
- The quality and range of activities available are good and enables the pupils to participate fully in the lessons.
- The ability of teachers to tread the fine line between having high expectations and setting challenging work for pupils, yet allowing for and understanding their difficulties.
- The quality of support assistants who manage pupils well and are sensitive to their needs.
- Pupils work hard and enjoy their lessons.
- Insufficient use of ICT to reinforce learning in some lessons is a weakness.

### **Commentary**

41. Teaching and learning is good overall and pupils achieve well. This is an improvement since the last inspection when provision and achievement were judged to be satisfactory. The curriculum is now well established and the checking of pupils' work enables lessons to be planned to meet the individual needs of the pupils. The subject co-ordinator has a clear picture of how the subject is improving across the school.
42. From joining in with and showing some understanding of number songs in their early days in school, by Year 2, higher attaining pupils are showing a better understanding of the numbers one, two and three. They count and recognise the numbers they are counting with adult help. Other pupils are now responding more positively and showing awareness of the numbers in simple number rhymes. By Year 6, some pupils count to 10 correctly and recognise the number shapes. There is a very happy atmosphere and pupils participate well and are happy to 'have a go' when challenged. These are examples of good progress and of the very good relationships built up by staff with the pupils. Teachers and support staff are skilled at knowing how best to match the work to the pupils' individual and differing needs. Planning for learning takes account well of what the pupils know and understand and what is the next achievable target to set. Pupils' IEPs work well in tying this all together.
43. By the end of Year 9, higher achieving pupils successfully count and understand numbers to 15 whilst lower achieving pupils successfully count aloud to 5. Pupils enjoy lessons because they are fun. They know they are succeeding because of constant positive feedback from staff. Some Year 9 pupils have a clear understanding of right angles and by using a template, correctly identify right angles in and around the classroom. Lower achieving pupils cut circles to make a teddy bear, becoming more involved as the activity proceeds. One pupil chose to record his work on the laptop computer. He was well able to switch it on and whilst initially he recorded letter by letter with adult direction, he soon gained in confidence and moved onto copying single words. By the end of Years 11 and 13, pupils have progressed well. They are taught in two groups appropriate to their age as well as their individual needs being met well. Lessons are well planned and resources are matched to each pupils' learning needs. For example, younger pupils set a table to a plan, recognise numbers one to four and work both independently and co-operatively with another pupil. Older pupils recognise the names of supermarkets, prepare shopping lists using the computer and match words to items, finding the cost of each item up to £1. Whilst ICT is used well at times to reinforce learning, it did not feature significantly in many lessons during the inspection.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

44. Mathematics is used well in other subject areas. A good example of this is the recent trip by train made by some of the younger pupils to Southport. The ticket office and the need to buy

tickets created quite an interest with some of the pupils. Pupils identify shapes when they investigate the school environment and become familiar with the language of mathematics as they use vocabulary such as bigger and circle. They use a variety of shapes to create models and paint pictures.

## **SCIENCE**

### ***Provision in science is good.***

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Boys and girls achieve well in all of the various elements of the subject. This is the same for higher and lower attaining pupils because staff are clear about what each pupil understands and what the next step in learning is.
- Whilst teaching and learning are good across the school, provision for pupils' use of ICT is only satisfactory.
- Provision has improved well since the last inspection although more suitable resources are needed to help pupils experience more successfully some of their work.
- The co-ordinator is well aware of what else needs to be done to move achievement on further such as the recent purchase of an electronic microscope that will enliven learning and contribute to pupils' ICT development.

#### **Commentary**

45. The good quality of teaching and learning is rooted in staff checking on and recording regularly what pupils have understood or done in response to stimuli or pieces of work. Then knowing what the next step is in learning for each pupil. For example, in a very good lesson with Year 9 pupils about plants and their growth, one pupil was successful in his naming of different plant parts such as roots, stalks, flowers and leaves. The teacher knew that the pupil was capable of this. At the same time, another pupil with no verbal communication was encouraged to focus with increased attention in experiencing the smell and touch of a variety of plants. Each pupil achieved well in his or her own way. It is this individuality of approach, which is the basis of the good teaching. The good quality of teamwork between teachers and support assistants is central to organising lessons to meet pupils' needs. Good quality communication through signing and symbols, the opportunity for higher attaining pupils to spell words as well as read them and the clear knowledge of pupils' literacy and numeracy targets from their IEPs means that lessons serve a variety of purposes, which is good.
46. Pupils achieve well. This is not a reflection of their age but of how well their individual special educational needs are being met regardless of age. As such, pupils can be found throughout the school working on similar levels even though there is significant age difference between them. For example, a lower attaining pupil in Year 2 achieves well in building on showing a sense of interest in what is happening, to indicating a preference between two items or having the dexterity to repeatedly press a switch when requested. This is equally the case for a lower attaining Year 6 pupil. Another Year 2 pupils who is further on with his understanding that animals have basic features such as eyes and a mouth is learning well to sort animals by given criteria or to comment on differences such as how an egg changes during boiling. Some Year 9 pupils are working on the same type of work but are equally achieving well.
47. Pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching and learning have come on well since the last inspection. This is because the subject co-ordination is effective and has been helped by the school's approach to checking on and measuring pupils' success and progress using PIVATS. Alongside this, the school has introduced well another system, which helps staff set more accurate IEP targets. As a total package, this is still in its infancy and will take a while to show, for example, areas of learning that pupils are either strong in or where extra focus is needed. The co-ordinator is clear on the strengths of the subject and weaknesses such as a shortage of

appropriate resources to back up some areas of the subject such as the work on electricity. In one lesson during the inspection, whilst satisfactory overall, the quality of teaching and learning was affected detrimentally by pupils not being able to use small clips successfully. The co-ordinator is clear that higher attaining pupils would benefit from appropriate accreditation of their work.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

Standards are satisfactory and have been maintained at this level since the previous inspection. The school makes appropriate provision for pupils with additional special needs who make satisfactory progress.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The good improvement in the quality and quantity of hardware and software to enhance pupil progress.
- The appointment of a knowledgeable ICT co-ordinator has begun to improve provision and staff development well although this has not had time yet to improve pupils' achievement.
- Staff have not yet worked out what pupils currently know or are able to do with the equipment and as such, cannot work out how well they are progressing.

### **Commentary**

48. The quantity and quality of learning resources have been much improved since the previous inspection. There is now a room devoted to ICT. All classes have computers that are networked across the school. Resources include such equipment as Big Macs, large and small switches, roller balls, sound beams and 'talkers', which are used well to help pupils with communication difficulties to access the curriculum. The co-ordinator has identified the need to check that all pupils who should benefit from this type of equipment are making progress via its use. This is another example of the school's good approach to evaluation.
49. The co-ordinator has been in post for 18 months. In this time he has
  - checked the strengths and weaknesses of the school's resources and ensured new resources have been developed which are appropriate for the needs of the pupils.
  - bought into an ICT support system, which gives the school good 'cover' for extra help when required.
  - ensured all teaching staff have completed their NOF (New Opportunities Fund ICT training). Staff report this was very useful and helpful. The co-ordinator has plans for the more advanced training for support staff who have basic ICT skills.
50. Although planned for, staff do not yet know pupils' knowledge in the subject and as such, cannot measure if they are making progress. The system is in place for this but the initial assessments have not taken place. The co-ordinator is well aware of this and intends to carry this out in the near future. Also, the school has several 'interactive white boards'. These are very new. Staff are not yet trained to use the equipment effectively. There is also a need for the co-ordinator to evaluate the impact of the recent teacher NOF training and prepare a further programme of training.
51. Pupils make satisfactory achievement. Examples of this are that by Year 2, pupils use a variety of ICT programmes, such as 'draw' and 'dazzle'. They use 'touch screen' programmes effectively, which allows them to interact well with the programmes. Large switches are connected to computers and this means pupils have better 'control' of the programs. By Year 6, pupils build their confidence to use computers. They use computers and ICT from time to time in other subjects, such as music, science, English and mathematics. One pupil has recently

acquired his own 'talker' and staff are working hard to prepare templates for him to use in a range of subjects. By Year 9, higher attainers, with adult help, use digital cameras to record their work and download into a computer to prepare presentations. They activate a touch screen and have used the interactive white board as a large touch screen to interact with programs. Lower attaining pupils successfully use 'sound beams' to play music, and use Big Macs to make verbal contributions to lessons. By Year 11 and 13, pupils and students use computers to word process their work. One higher attaining pupil with ASD, regularly helps his friends by preparing key word lists and recording some of their work for them. Pupils use 'writing with symbols' to help record their work and this enables them to read back their work to the class. Lower attaining pupils as elsewhere, use equipment such as a Big Mac to contribute to lessons.

52. Progress in ICT is enhanced by a computer club twice a week for pupils of Year 7 or older. Pupils have a free choice of games, programs and Internet access under staff guidance. Many skills are consolidated and both staff and pupils enhance their ICT knowledge.

### **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

53. Equipment is used satisfactorily in cross-curricular activities. For example, the younger and lowest attaining pupils are encouraged to use sound beams to create music. They respond positively when they manage to make musical sounds. Writing with symbols is used effectively across the curriculum to help pupils record their work, and where possible, read it back. Touch screens are used in all age groups and subjects to enhance pupils' access to the curriculum. The school has recently acquired interactive white boards, which are just being introduced into classrooms. Where they were used, staff helped pupils use the screen as a large touch screen to enhance pupils' work. Lower attaining pupils in Years 10 to 13 use 'Big Macs' to communicate whilst the highest attainers use word processing to record their work. Where it is used, it is used effectively but overall, more is yet to be done if ICT is to support pupils' work more strongly.

## **HUMANITIES**

Judgements on geography and history were not made because they were not part of the main foci of the inspection and insufficient lessons were timetabled during the inspection for observations to be effective.

### **Religious education**

*Provision is satisfactory.*

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching and learning with autistic pupils in Years 2 to 6 and with students in Years 10 to 13 during the inspection were good. This was because of good teamwork between teachers and support assistants in meeting the objectives of the lessons, which were matched to the different needs of the pupils. Religious education was not timetabled in other classes during the three days of the inspection.
- Co-ordination of the subject during the last school year was affected by staff illness. As such, the subject has not improved as much as it should have done since the last inspection. The headteacher has now taken on the role of co-ordinator and an appropriate plan for improvement has been put in place recently.
- The improvement plan recognises that ways of checking on how well pupils were doing were not precise enough to show the extent of pupils' progress. Because of this, the low number of lessons seen during the inspection and the limited amount of other evidence, no judgement has been made about pupils' achievement.
- The improvement plan also recognises that whilst the curriculum is satisfactory, it could be far stronger particularly for pupils in Years 10 to 13.

## Commentary

54. Recognition by the school that the development of religious education had lagged behind other subjects has led to the headteacher and governing body putting in place very recently a plan to improve the subject. The headteacher is researching different approaches in place in different parts of the country to help build on the locally agreed syllabus, particularly to improve the effectiveness of the curriculum for pupils in Years 10 to 13. Because of the extended absence of the previous co-ordinator through illness, checking on how successfully the subject was being taught was not as effective as it should have been. Also, very little staff development has happened recently to help build staffs' expertise and confidence in teaching the subject.
55. Teaching and learning observed in two classes during the inspection were good. With pupils in Years 10 to 13, they built their understanding of symbols and words related to celebrations and their favourite ways of celebrating. The lesson had a strong literacy content in communication, speaking and listening and reading. In the same way that some pupils responded well to working out answers by being given the initial sound of a word, good 'signing' by staff gave the same encouragement to other pupils. Pupils with ASD in the Years 2 to 6 class benefited well from staff who provided ample opportunities for response to discussion and as much independent response to questioning as possible in pursuit of supporting their personal development. Opportunities to make choices in colours, the matching of shapes and the counting of objects in making their 'cress heads' for the Harvest Festival was just one example of how numeracy is built well into lessons like religious education. However, the systems to ensure that teaching and learning and pupils' achievement is consistent across the school and in particular, knowing that pupils are progressing by use of a more precise assessment system is part of what is still needed.

## CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

Judgements on art and design, design and technology, and music were not made because they were not part of the main foci of the inspection and insufficient evidence was gained during the inspection. Physical education was inspected from the viewpoint of judging how well staff development had been put to use in improving provision and pupils' achievement. Physical education was sampled with autistic pupils in Years 3 to 6 and with students in Years 10 to 13.

### Physical education

In the one swimming lesson and a physical education/drama lesson observed,

- Teachers had good knowledge of the pupils.
  - There was a high expectation of physical effort.
  - Whilst the hydrotherapy pool offers very good provision that is also used well by the community, provision for changing for physical education lessons does not offer pupils privacy as they have to change in their classrooms.
56. Swimming has a high profile within school. All pupils have at least one lesson per week in the hydrotherapy pool. In the one lesson observed with ASD pupils in Years 2 to 6, they used a lot of physical effort and obviously enjoyed it. A reluctant pupil became more confident over time because the teacher used the most able pupil well to demonstrate what could be achieved. This was very good practice. There were good links to numeracy for example, counting objects retrieved from the water. In a lesson linked to drama with the pupils in Years 10 to 13, the stimulating and enthusiastic teaching resulted in very good learning and achievement. The older pupils were instantly challenged, but demands were matched to their ability because the teacher knew the pupils well. There was very good individual and collaborative work with music used very effectively. The school has taken part in the Top Play initiative and as a result of the

training, staff feel more confident in teaching the subject. This is paying off in the good quality of work seen.

57. The school is clear about the changing and shower provision and are looking closely at how this could be included in their new building project, which is at the planning and funding stage.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

*Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is good.*

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils achieve well in all age groups because teaching and learning are based upon clear knowledge of what the pupils know and what the next steps are in development.
- The school uses an effective mix of specific PSHE and citizenship lessons and day-to-day activities to enhance pupils' personal development.
- In supporting personal development in all lessons, staff generally get the balance right between direct help and standing back to see what pupils achieve for themselves.

### **Commentary**

58. PSHE as a subject and pupils' personal development in general is a very important part of school provision. In importance, it is on the same level as literacy and numeracy and as such features strongly in pupils' IEPs. This is very good practice. This means that staff are clear just how well the pupils are doing and what the next step is in development for each pupil regardless of their different special educational needs.
59. In the early stages of development, which can be for any age of pupil because of their needs, pupils begin to seek out adults by eye contact or gesture, which develops to enjoying appropriate contact with adults and other pupils. By the end of Year 2, higher attaining pupils take turns in group situations that are controlled by adults although they can find it difficult without that extra adult help. By Year 6, whilst some pupils are reliably able to do jobs such as fetching the class register from the school office, they still find it difficult to play co-operatively without adult encouragement. By Year 9, higher attaining pupils form viewpoints about environmental issues and make decisions such as the need to clear litter from around the school grounds. This was organised for the following week's lesson. Home-school diaries well used by both staff and parents give good opportunities for pupils to be supported well in discussing important points that are relevant to them socially. With Year 9 pupils, the preciseness of IEPs in tracking pupils for example, who can undo buttons but who find it difficult to fasten them, provides the framework for very relevant activities. By Year 11 and 13, pupils work well on their accredited work for their ASDAN awards. World of Work lessons supported well by the school's Connexions adviser gives pupils opportunities to build on their understanding of different jobs. Pupils match different symbols correctly to a range of jobs. They are given time to respond, which encourages them to make decisions for themselves. This build-up of skills and understanding throughout the school shows good achievement.
60. The last inspection concluded that 'too much adult supervision at times hinders initiative and independence'. Staff have worked very hard on this and in the main, have succeeded well. Only on rare occasions now is the fine balance not quite found. However, it tends to be in making the decision between not doing enough to ensure that lower attaining pupils are fully involved in lessons rather than doing too much.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
<b>The overall effectiveness of the school</b>	<b>3</b>
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	4
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>	<b>3</b>
Pupils' achievement	3
<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>	<b>3</b>
Attendance	2
Attitudes	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>	<b>3</b>
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	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	4
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	3
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>	<b>3</b>
The governance of the school	4
The leadership of the headteacher	3
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).*