

INSPECTION REPORT

OAKTREE SCHOOL

Southgate London N14

LEA area: Enfield

Unique reference number: 102069

Headteacher: John Harrison

Lead inspector: Steven Parker
13033

Dates of inspection: 22nd – 25th September 2003

Inspection number: 258961

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 special
Age range of pupils:	5-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll;	89
School address:	Chase Side Southgate London
Postcode:	N14 4HN
Telephone number:	020 8440 3100
Fax number:	020 8440 4891
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Michael Lazarus
Date of previous inspection:	23/2/1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Oaktree School provides education for up to 100 pupils with complex learning needs. There were 89 pupils on roll at the time of the inspection and, whilst the school is designated as five to 18, there were only two students aged over 16. This was because the previously strong 16+ unit had been reduced in size to take account of other more suitable local provision for students with moderate learning difficulties. The unit is likely to build in size in the future, as pupils with more complex needs come up through the school. The three principal areas of need catered for in the school are moderate to severe learning difficulties, speech, language and communication disorders and emotional and/or behavioural fragility. There are an increasing number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. Pupils arrive at the school with attainments significantly below those for average children of their age. There are regular transfers of pupils from mainstream schools throughout the year into the secondary department. During the last year, 10 pupils joined the school other than at the usual time of entry and many of these had emotional and behavioural difficulties, which had made it difficult for them to cope in their mainstream schools. Three quarters of pupils are of white United Kingdom heritage. Of those from ethnic minority groups, 14% are of black Caribbean or African extraction and 7% are from Asian backgrounds. There are three pupils from refugee/asylum seeker families. A quarter of the pupils have English as an additional language. The school's population reflects the wide-ranging socio-economic circumstances of the community from which it draws its pupils, with 38% of pupils eligible for free school meals (just above average for this type of school). There are structured links with one primary, one secondary and three further education mainstream settings. The school has Healthy Schools status. At the time of the inspection there were four members of staff on long term sick leave, including the deputy headteacher. This represents a quarter of the teaching establishment.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
13033	Steven Parker	Lead inspector	Science Art and design Physical education
19693	Sally Hall	Lay inspector	
17182	Dr Michael Farrell	Team inspector	Geography History Music Religious education Special educational needs English as an additional language
30071	John Pearson	Team inspector	Mathematics Information and communication technology Design and technology
18461	Vanessa Wilkinson	Team Inspector	English Citizenship Modern foreign language Personal, social and health education

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Oaktree is a good school with some very strong features. Pupils achieve well in their learning and make very good progress in their personal development, as a result of good teaching and very high quality relationships. The school is well led and managed by the headteacher, working in a successful partnership with his two acting assistant headteachers. It provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The very effective partnership between teachers and learning support assistants (LSAs) ensures pupils' successful learning and achievement, helping them to develop confidence and maturity.
- The headteacher has inspired a strong commitment from all his staff throughout a period of significant staffing difficulties.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good and their cultural development excellent, because of the school's very well structured and positive approach to supporting these aspects.
- Very effective support and guidance ensures that pupils feel safe, secure and respected as individuals, knowing that their views will always be valued and responded to appropriately.
- Curriculum arrangements do not always fully ensure that all pupils build effectively on their learning as they move from class to class, especially in the early secondary years.
- Parents and carers are encouraged to work in a productive partnership with staff, feeling welcome and well informed. The school's links with the wider community have a valuable impact on pupils' personal development.
- The wide range of information gathered about pupils' learning, teaching and the work of the school is not used as well as it could be to judge their effectiveness or to inform planning for future developments.
- The governing body has not worked in an effective partnership with the school, particularly in planning to meet the needs of the school's increasingly complex population.

Overall, the school has made good progress since its last inspection in 1998, having been particularly successful in improving the quality of teaching and pupils' learning and resources for science and design and technology. It has addressed the issues relating to development planning, improving approaches to finding out how well pupils are getting on and curriculum planning, but recognizes the need for further work in these aspects of the school's work.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	in relation to individual targets in:	
	Subjects of the curriculum	personal and social education
Year 2	Good	Very good
Year 6	Good	Very good
Year 9	Good	Very good
Year 11	Good	Very good

Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor.

Achievement is good overall. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds make good, steady progress as they go through the school, because everyone is committed to inclusion and, consequently, there are no significant differences in standards or pupils' achievements. Pupils do well in reading, speaking and listening and mathematics across the school. Standards in practical subjects are particularly good, most notably in art and physical education. Achievement at 16 is good, with most pupils gaining creditable passes in a range of certificates of educational achievement. The

exceptions to this general pattern are in standards of writing across the school and in information and communication technology (ICT) for pupils under 11, where progress is only satisfactory. **Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is very good and their cultural development is excellent.** They are, therefore, very well prepared for life after school. Attitudes and behaviour are very good. Pupils are very enthusiastic and interested in their lessons and respond very well to the school's positive culture. Attendance is satisfactory, but expected to improve as the result of new, very good procedures to follow up unexplained absences.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Good overall. This enables all pupils to learn successfully and achieve well.

Teaching is good, with no significant variation in quality across the school. This is impressive in the context of the considerable problems with staffing that the school has experienced. The curriculum is satisfactory overall and is enriched by a good range of additional activities, some of which take place in mainstream settings. There has, however, not been enough attention paid to planning for pupils with increasingly complex needs to build effectively on their earlier learning as they move through the school. Care and welfare are good and guidance and support are very good, ensuring that pupils can make the best use of their time in school. Staff know pupils very well because there are very effective systems for monitoring their behaviour and personal development. There is a good partnership with parents, other schools and the wider community.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Good overall,

Leadership	Good. The headteacher provides focused leadership to ensure the development and maintenance of good quality educational opportunities. Pupils' achievements have, consequently, improved to their current high standards. Governance of the school is unsatisfactory, because the governing body has relied too heavily on the headteacher and their work has lacked focus and influence. The newly appointed chair of governors is already providing very strong leadership to remedy this situation.
Management	Good. Day to day management by the headteacher and his acting assistant headteacher colleagues is very effective, so that pupils achieve well and make very good progress in their personal development.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very satisfied. They particularly value the fact that staff are very approachable and communication between home and school is very good.

Pupils are very happy. They feel very well supported and able to ask for help, because staff are kind, friendly and always ready to listen.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Review and adapt curriculum planning, better to meet the needs of the changing population;
- Make better arrangements for the use of the comprehensive range of available information to inform planning for pupils' learning and the school's future;
- Develop the role of the governing body to ensure that it becomes more effective.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils' achievements are **good overall** and **very good** in their personal and social education.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils of all abilities make good steady progress.
- Pupils do well in reading, speaking and listening, mathematics and science across the school.
- Standards in practical subjects, most notably art and physical education, are particularly good.
- Most pupils gain creditable passes at 16 in a range of certificates of educational achievement.
- Pupils are well prepared for life after school.
- Pupils do not make the progress that they could in writing, across the school, and information and communication technology in the primary department.

Commentary

1. The school has made significant improvements across most subjects since the last inspection, which has resulted in pupils making good progress and achieving well in most subjects. Continued high standards in the support provided by all staff have ensured that pupils make very good progress in their personal development.
2. Pupils meet the appropriately challenging targets set for them in English, mathematics, social development and behaviour. Consequently they go on to the next stage of their learning within and beyond school, well prepared to gain full benefit from it.
3. A sensibly strong focus on encouraging and developing pupils' practical skills results in their making especially good progress in those subjects where these are of value. Standards are, therefore, noteworthy in physical education and art, where pupils' achievements occasionally meet national expectations. A similar 'hands on' approach to teaching science has also resulted in impressive improvements since the last inspection.
4. The changing needs of pupils referred to the school are very apparent in the primary department and in the early part of secondary. There is no apparent difference in the achievements of those with more complex needs during their primary years, and, indeed, some with particularly challenging communication and behavioural difficulties make such good progress in the early stages of their learning that they are well placed to achieve well later. The only exception to this pattern is in the Year 7 group, where there is some slowing of progress, in English, as the result of the curriculum not being appropriately planned fully to meet their needs.
5. The school recognises the need to improve standards in ICT during the primary phase and of writing across the school, but pupils still achieve satisfactory results in these aspects of their learning. Standards are not as high as they could be because teachers' planning does not always incorporate opportunities for these skills to be used in other subjects.
6. A few older, higher attaining pupils do not achieve as well as they might because they are not always stretched, especially in writing. The majority of pupils do, however, gain good results in a range of certificates of achievement at 16. There is no discernable difference in the achievements of boys and girls or pupils with English as an additional language, because the school has an inclusive philosophy and available resources are well deployed to focus appropriate attention on those pupils who need extra help in their learning.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes, values, personal development and behaviour are **very good**, because of **very good** provision for their spiritual, moral and social development and **excellent** provision for their cultural development. Attendance is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are very successfully encouraged to develop positive attitudes and values. This results in their working and playing together very well.
- Pupils are highly motivated by the school's ethos and many benefit from the very good range of therapies available to them.
- Behaviour is very good because of the very effective approaches to encouraging and supporting it.

Commentary

7. Very good attitudes, values and personal qualities of pupils are a result of the very effective support provided by all staff. This is an improvement on the previous inspection. Pupils enjoy and are absorbed in lessons, concentrate well and are very well motivated. They work very well with other pupils and listen with respect to others. Pupils respond very well to opportunities to work independently. The school does a great deal to develop very good behaviour. For example, behaviour targets are used very effectively in lessons and a pleasant ethos is created in the very well organised lunchtimes and break times. There is very good monitoring of behaviour.

Exclusions

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	48	2	
White – any other White background	18	1	
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1		
Mixed – White and Asian	1		
Mixed – any other mixed background	1		
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1		
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1		
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	7	1	1
Black or Black British – African	5	1	
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1		
Any other ethnic group	4		

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

8. The relatively small number of exclusions reflects the school's sensible approach to using this ultimate sanction sensitively and carefully to deal with extremes of unacceptable behaviour.

9. Good assemblies, in which there is often rapt attention to the messages, help pupils to reflect on their own place in the world and to develop their own spiritual sensitivity. Self-awareness and feelings of self-worth are very well developed through such means as the student council and the behaviour system, which depends to a great degree on the pupils being encouraged to remember and consider the impact of their own behaviour. Pupils understand right from wrong and appreciate the consequences of their actions very well. This is encouraged by a very well understood and manageable code of behaviour in the school and by an impressive ethos of caring for others. Play therapy, music therapy and counselling all make valuable contributions to pupils' development.
10. Pupils are courteous, take responsibility such as doing monitor jobs and representing classes on the student council. They work and play together very well and this is very well nurtured through, for example, the carefully considered arrangements for lunchtime. Pupils have a strong sense of belonging to the school.
11. Pupils are exposed to a very rich variety of cultural traditions in art, religious education, music, and other areas of the curriculum. Feast days and festivals are very well celebrated and the cultural backgrounds of pupils are greatly valued. Records indicate that International Week was excellently celebrated by visits outside the school, visitors to school and a great variety of stimulating and worthwhile activities, aimed at raising the cultural awareness of pupils.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	8.3%	School data :	1.1%

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

12. Attendance is **satisfactory**. Attendance rates are broadly in line with national averages but have declined slightly over the last three years. The vast majority of pupils are punctual. The school has recently introduced very good procedures to ensure that attendance is closely monitored and unexplained absences are quickly followed up.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Good overall. Teaching and learning are **good**. The curriculum is **satisfactory overall**, supported by **good** enrichment activities and learning resources. Care and welfare are **good**, supplemented by **very good** support and guidance. Partnership with parents and the community are **good** and the school's links with other schools are **satisfactory**.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching is **good overall**. As a result **pupils learn successfully** across the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers work in very effective partnerships with their LSAs.
- Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects.
- Teachers' enthusiasm motivates pupils to work hard and achieve well.
- All staff focus their efforts well to ensure that every pupil is included successfully in each learning activity.
- Pupils are encouraged to meet their teachers' high, but realistic expectations.
- Thoughtful adaptation of National Strategies has resulted in well structured lessons that have good pace and variety.

- Good leadership and management has ensured sustained high standards during a difficult period.
- Curriculum organisation lacks consistency of planning across the school.
- The comprehensive assessment information gathered is not always used to best effect in planning the next stage of learning.

Commentary

13. Teaching during the inspection was good or better in nearly three-quarters of the lessons seen and records of pupils' good progress and achievements confirm that these high standards are consistently maintained over time. This represents a considerable improvement since the last inspection and is very impressive, when it is recognised that a quarter of the current teachers are on supply contracts, covering the long term, ill-health absence of permanent staff. The headteacher and his senior managers have worked very effectively during this difficult period to monitor and guide staff in how to teach more effectively, and temporary teachers are very well supported when they join the staff, both through direct intervention and the schools strong ethos of collaboration. Good quality whole staff training has ensured that there is an increasing understanding of how best to meet the needs of the increasingly more complex needs of pupils and teachers apply their knowledge very thoughtfully to improve their own practice. This means that the needs of pupils with particular difficulties, such as autistic spectrum disorders and those with English as an additional language are all equally well supported to ensure that they achieve appropriately.

14. This good teaching is the result of individual staff making sure that they know each of their pupils very well and adapting the materials that they use and the approaches that they employ best to meet their varying needs. The school has developed a significant, but somewhat unwieldy structure to gather and record information about how well pupils are getting on. In this situation, teachers have tended increasingly to depend on their good, informal knowledge of pupils and have not always used the more formal information available to them as well as they could. This is particularly evident in ICT for younger pupils and for some older pupils in English and mathematics. The school has recognised this in its improvement planning and intend to remedy the situation.

15. Pupils are helped to learn successfully through a powerful mixture of encouragement and well focused support, well communicated high expectations of effort and good behaviour and learning experiences that engage and hold their interest. Very successful working partnerships between teachers and their impressively capable LSAs make a considerable contribution to this overall situation. Teachers' good knowledge of and enthusiasm for their subjects enables them to create engaging and motivating lessons. Lessons are effectively introduced, ensuring that pupils know what is going to happen and what they are expected to learn, and, at the end, there are usually good opportunities to discuss and celebrate what they have achieved. This, in turn, makes pupils aware of the progress they are making and helps them to feel good about themselves. This typifies the school's positive approach to planning for and recognising success.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 38 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0 (0%)	12 (32%)	15 (39%)	9 (24%)	2 (5%)	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

The curriculum provides a **satisfactory** range of opportunities to meet the learning needs of the pupils. It is enriched by a **good** range of additional activities. The accommodation and resources that support the curriculum are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses.

- Although there has been a good improvement in curriculum planning in all subjects since the last inspection, it has been focused separately on the different age groups and has not always taken account of the need to ensure a smooth progression of pupils' learning across the school.
- Subject plans are satisfactorily adapted to the needs of pupils, but the secondary department has not kept up fully with the school's changing pupil population.
- The school day provides a satisfactory amount of time for lessons, but it is still short in comparison with similar schools.
- Good use of visitors to the school and of educational outings makes lessons more meaningful for the pupils.
- The school building and grounds provide a good learning environment, and the resources available for all subjects are good.

Commentary.

16. There has been a good improvement in the curriculum since the last inspection. A good range of learning opportunities is now in place for almost all age groups, particularly in English, mathematics, science and ICT, and the curriculum meets statutory requirements.
17. The school has, though, now reached a turning point, due to its changing pupil population. Its existing curriculum arrangements, which teachers have worked hard to match to the previous pupils, now need further development to meet the more complex needs of the new pupil group. The secondary department, in particular, does not always meet the increasingly broad range of learning needs effectively to ensure consistency of achievement across all subjects. The other challenge, in this all age school that has successfully created a clear distinction between the primary and secondary departments, is to create a whole school curriculum that ensures continuity of learning across the departments.
18. For pupils aged 5-11, there is a good curriculum that is in the process of being adapted to the new intake and provides a good match of learning opportunities to the special educational needs of the pupils. Further development is needed in ICT, which, though satisfactory, is not yet used to assist pupils' learning in all subjects.
19. The curriculum for pupils aged 11-17 has to meet a very wide range of pupil need, because the changing population has just reached this part of the school. At present, the curriculum in all subjects provides a good range of learning opportunities for the majority of the pupils. To meet the needs of lower attaining pupils, teachers are making a good job of broadening its scope, by providing more practical activities, such as in mathematics and science, or by teaching pupils in groups selected by attainment, but have not yet addressed the total review that is needed, particularly in English for Year 7 pupils.
20. The needs of pupils aged 14-17, who can, for the most part, be described as belonging to the school's original moderate learning difficulties population, are met well as a result of the introduction of accredited courses, though these need further development, for example in mathematics.
21. Although the length of the school day has increased since the previous inspection, it is still only barely satisfactory for pupils aged 11-17, when considered in comparison to other similar schools. Although a satisfactory proportion of the time available is spent on the core subjects of

English, mathematics and science, the actual time available for them is below national averages. The combination of this relatively short day and the long duration of three out of four lessons each day produces an unsatisfactory balance to the pupils' timetable. For example, although one lesson per day for 4 days is designated to reading, pupils aged 11-14 only receive one other English lesson per week to cover other aspects of the subject. Similarly, pupils receive 3 long mathematics lessons per week rather than shorter lessons every day. Unbroken lessons of 70 minutes duration are unsatisfactory for the lower attaining pupils, who are beginning to form the school's major pupil group.

22. The school places sensible emphasis on engaging pupils in real experiences where possible. Good examples of visitors to the school who have shared their particular experiences, knowledge and skills with the pupils are illustrated on the many displays in classrooms and corridors. Pupils also engage in a wide range of educational visits to reinforce what they have learned in their lessons. The distance travelled by pupils makes it difficult to arrange after-school activities, though a breakfast club held every morning is well attended. Pupils of all ages have the opportunity to experience a residential activity each year, where they engage in an impressive range of social and physical activities. During the school year, many opportunities are provided for pupils to take part in seasonal sporting events and good use is made of a local leisure centre.
23. The classrooms and specialist areas are of an appropriate size for their purpose. Although the design and technology rooms are small they are well equipped for small groups. The building is well maintained and presents no health and safety hazards. The school grounds have good play facilities for the younger pupils and provide good opportunities for outdoor games. All subject areas are equipped with good resources for learning. Grants for ICT equipment have been well spent.

Care, guidance and support

Care, welfare, health and safety are **good**. Support and guidance for pupils are **very good**. Pupils' involvement in the school's work is **good**.

Strengths

- Adults working in school give pupils very good encouragement to develop their social and personal skills.
 - Relationships are very good and pupils feel that they can turn to adults for help.
 - There are very good arrangements for first aid and staff are very well briefed about child protection procedures.
 - The school values pupils' views and acts upon their suggestions.
24. Staff know the pupils very well and show high levels of care and concern for them. This is particularly so in relation to the wide range of pupils' needs and those with English as an additional language. Support staff, midday supervisors and the administration staff work seamlessly alongside teachers, so that all adults in school make a significant contribution in raising pupils' self-esteem and encouraging independence. Teachers set pupils' personal development targets and track their progress very closely. Pupils are very proud when they achieve their targets and parents value the way in which their children become more mature and confident.
25. The ethos of mutual respect permeates all aspects of school life. Relationships are very good and a strength of the school. The results of a pupils' questionnaire and discussions with pupils clearly show that nearly all of them feel that they can turn to adults working in the school if they need help. Many pupils said that what they liked best about school was the teachers, 'because they are kind and friendly'. Pupils are confident to self-refer themselves to the counsellor if they feel they need to discuss their concerns in confidence.

26. Staff ensure pupils work in a healthy and secure environment. Child protection procedures are well known by staff and they know to report any concerns to the members of the senior management team. Arrangements for first aid are very good. Pupils are treated in a well-equipped medical room and staff keep very good records of accidents and medication.
27. Staff give pupils good opportunities to discuss their ideas in tutor groups and their views are then brought to the school council. Pupils on the school council take their duties very seriously. They know that the staff value their ideas and enjoy bringing about improvements to school life. The school responds and acts upon these suggestions, such as recently in decisions about school uniform and markings in the playground.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's links with parents and the community are **good**. The school's links with other schools and colleges are **satisfactory**

Strengths

- Staff are very approachable, and day-to-day communication between home and school is very good.
 - Parents express positive views about the school and support its work.
 - The school does its best to support mainstream teachers in their work with pupils with learning difficulties.
 - Links with local employers provide good quality work placements.
28. The school works hard to reach out to parents and communication on a one-to-one basis is very good. Parents value the way in which they feel able to talk with staff about their worries and the home-school diaries are a very good means of communication between parents and teachers. The school is receptive to issues raised by parents and follow up any concerns. Overall, formal information about pupils' progress is satisfactory. At open evenings and annual review meetings parents have appropriate opportunities to meet with staff and discuss how well their children are doing. Pupils' annual reports are satisfactory. They contain details of what their children have been doing and some information about how they can improve their work. There is, however, very little information about how the pupils are getting on. Most parents have positive views of the school and support its work. Some parents are governors, but no parents help in school or organise fundraising.
29. Links with the local community have a positive impact on pupils' personal development. Valuable links with local employers enable pupils to prepare for the world of work through beneficial work experience. Visitors enrich the curriculum, for example the police school liaison team lead highly successful sessions on drugs education. Pupils gain useful academic and social skills from a good range of trips to local places of interest and through residential visits.
30. The school provides good opportunities for other special needs co-ordinators from mainstream establishments to meet with the school's teachers and share expertise. Very few pupils take part in activities alongside their mainstream peers, and the school recognises the need to develop pupils' experience in this area. There are appropriate links with local colleges and older pupils develop their independence and make informed choices about life after school through attending link courses.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership by the headteacher and key staff is **good**, but governance is **unsatisfactory**. Management of the school by the headteacher and senior managers is **good** and enables staff to support pupils effectively so that they achieve well and make very good progress in their personal development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The governing body is not fulfilling its responsibilities as well as it should but the newly appointed chairman is providing strong leadership.
 - Day to day management of the budget by the headteacher, the bursar and the governors' finance committee is extremely efficient.
 - All staff are fully committed to meeting the needs of their pupils and improving what the school offers to them. New staff are always well supported.
 - There is no overall strategic plan to help identify, more clearly, how the school needs to develop to meet the complex needs of the pupils being admitted.
 - Available information about pupils' learning, teaching and the work of the school is not used to best effect to inform developments and to judge if the school has been effective.
31. Over the past two years the school has experienced considerable staffing problems, but throughout this time the headteacher has inspired a strong commitment from staff, even from those who are new to the school and those who are only in the school for a short time. The school improvement plan shows that the school is striving continually to improve the learning opportunities provided for pupils and it is clear that individual staff are working hard to develop a more suitable curriculum for those pupils with more complex needs who are now being admitted. However, the headteacher and senior managers have not established a clear overall plan of how these changes will be managed and this has led to fragmented development.
32. Strong management by the headteacher and senior teachers has enabled the school, despite significant disruptions, to function effectively so that pupils have achieved well academically and made very good progress in their personal development. Whilst the budget is well managed, and appropriate decisions are made about the allocation of money to support developments identified in the school improvement plan, there are not sufficiently clear links made in the plan to information about pupils' achievements for them to be checked in terms of their impact on improving standards.
33. Effective systems to support new staff have ensured that pupils continue to make good progress in key areas of their learning, despite significant staff changes. Performance management of teachers and support staff is good and enables them to continue developing their skills. The planning of professional development opportunities are not, however, sufficiently well linked to a whole school plan for developing the school to meet the changing needs of pupils. Neither are subject co-ordinators sufficiently well informed about how well their subjects are being taught across the school. There is a significant amount of information gained through checking different areas of the school's work, for example pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching, but this information is not used effectively to plan the next steps in learning for all pupils, to adapt the curriculum, to inform decisions about developments or to check how effective it is.
34. The headteacher delegates responsibilities well and provides effective support, and encouragement, for staff. Senior managers, who are new to their posts, are still developing their leadership roles but they manage the responsibilities they have been given exceptionally well. They have created effective teams within their departments and have a good understanding of how the curriculum and teachers' skills need to be developed.
35. The governing body does not fulfil its roles and responsibilities well enough. It is not sufficiently aware of the school's strengths or areas for development and, because it does not understand

the amount or type of work the school will need to undertake to meet the changing needs of pupils, it is not able to challenge the school or know if it is providing a good enough standard of education. However, the newly appointed chair of the governing body is already providing strong leadership and has established good plans to improve the skills of governors in managing the school.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	1,180,800	Balance from previous year	122,234
Total expenditure	1,159,346	Balance carried forward to the next	143,689
Expenditure per pupil	12,282		

36. There are appropriate plans in place to spend a significant proportion of the balance carried forward from last year. There were some outstanding building works that still have to be carried out in the current year, but the major proportion will be allocated to appointing additional staff to meet the increasingly complex needs of pupils being referred to the school.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

Throughout the following commentary, overall judgements about provision relate to the effectiveness of teaching and learning, curriculum leadership and any other significant aspects.

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Lessons in English were seen in each year group. One lesson was seen in modern languages.

English

The provision for English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and, as a result, pupils achieve well in speaking and listening and reading and their achievement is satisfactory in writing.
- The National Literacy Strategy for primary age pupils has been well adapted to meet the needs of the changing population.
- Learning opportunities and accreditation for older secondary age pupils are good
- The curriculum and teaching methods for pupils who have more complex needs, particularly those of secondary age, require further development
- Information about what pupils know could be better used to help plan learning, particularly for older pupils with complex needs.

Commentary

37. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

38. The majority of pupils develop good speaking and listening skills, because teachers provide plenty of opportunities for them to answer questions and take part in discussions. Teachers and support staff are particularly supportive and patient with pupils who have difficulty expressing themselves and this helps them to develop confidence. There is good support from the speech and language therapists for those pupils who have specific problems and this contributes effectively to the good progress they make. The school uses signing to reinforce communication for a small number of pupils with complex needs in the primary department, but it is not being used consistently in all classes and there are no clear or specific plans to develop the use of this strategy by other teachers, particularly in preparation for pupils' transfer to the secondary department. The co-ordinators are aware of this and have identified it as an area for development, which they will need to plan for in order to meet the more complex needs of the pupils now being admitted to the school.

39. Pupils enter school with very low levels of ability in reading, but the outcomes of annual reading tests indicate that the majority begin to make rapid progress and this is maintained as they move through the school. Teachers place a suitable emphasis on developing pupils' phonic skills, teaching them how to tackle unfamiliar words and providing them with good opportunities to read during lessons. This emphasis is continued in the secondary department with well structured reading groups, which provide good opportunities for pupils to practise and develop their skills further.

40. In the primary department, teachers provide consistent and well planned opportunities for pupils to practise their handwriting and develop spelling skills, and this enables them to make satisfactory progress. When they transfer to the secondary department these opportunities continue and pupils build steadily on their past achievement. By the time they leave school the majority of pupils produce work that is neat and tidy and they are confident to attempt the spelling of simple words independently. There is a satisfactory emphasis on teaching punctuation and

pupils work indicates progress in the consistent use of simple punctuation, such as capital letters and full stops. Across the school, pupils' achievement would be better if teachers provided more opportunities for them to record their learning and to write in other subjects.

41. Lessons are well planned and interesting, so that pupils are keen to participate. The three part lesson, recommended by the National Literacy Strategies, has been implemented effectively in both the primary and secondary departments, but teachers do not always remember to share the learning objectives for the lesson with pupils, or remember to identify and share key vocabulary with them. This means that opportunities to reinforce learning are sometimes missed. Teachers have a significant amount of information about pupils' achievement from formal tests, but it is recorded in too many different ways. This makes it difficult to gain a clear picture of pupils' attainment. In the primary department information about pupils' achievement is used effectively to plan learning for individual pupils, but it is not used to check if pupils have made enough progress or to check if different groups of pupils make the same progress as others. In the secondary department, information is not always used effectively to plan lessons, so that enough account is taken of individual needs, although they do address the broad needs of different groups of pupils. This frequently results in work that does not sufficiently challenge the most able pupils and is too hard for others.
42. Subject plans, for the primary department and for the majority of pupils in the secondary department are of good quality and include good opportunities for pupils learning to be accredited. The primary plans are well linked to the National Literacy Strategy, which has been adapted well to ensure that it reflects pupils' abilities. Currently the learning opportunities and teaching methods used for pupils in Year 7 are not suitable and limit them to making only satisfactory progress in all areas of the subject, except speaking and listening.
43. The school provides good opportunities to promote pupils' literacy skills through other subjects of the curriculum. However, these opportunities are not part of an overall plan and rely on individual teachers identifying and providing opportunities to promote learning. Teachers frequently give insufficient thought as to how activities, for example in history, can be used to promote pupils' literacy skills and writing is frequently limited to one word answers or single sentences on a work sheet. Furthermore, the text of worksheets is occasionally too difficult for pupils to read independently.

Modern foreign language - French

Provision is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school provides satisfactory learning opportunities for pupils in Years 8 and 9.
- The school needs to develop more appropriate learning opportunities for pupils with complex needs.

Commentary

44. The subject has been re-introduced recently following a period when it was not taught because of staffing problems. In the one lesson observed, pupils in Year 8 were confident to use French to greet the teacher and they were able to answer simple questions about where they live and how old they are. Teaching was very good because the lesson was well planned to reflect pupils' abilities and there was good support for lower attaining pupils which enabled them to participate as well as others. Activities were fun with the teacher effectively using action songs such as 'Heads and shoulders, knees and toes' to help pupils learn the names for parts of the body. There has been good support for the teacher from the local education authority's language advisor and this is helping the school to develop a suitable curriculum and teaching strategies. In discussions with teachers, it is clear that the school needs to consider how it will develop a

suitable programme of learning for pupils in Year 7 who have more complex needs and for pupils who will transfer to the secondary department in the future.

MATHEMATICS

Lessons in Mathematics were seen in each year group.

Provision is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good range of learning opportunities suited to the special educational needs of the majority of pupils.
- Teaching is of good quality and all pupils achieve well in relation to their prior attainments.
- Planning the curriculum separately for each age group restricts the smooth flow of pupils' learning as they move through the school.
- Although teachers know the pupils well, a confusing range of assessment procedures does not adequately identify the pupils' achievements over time.

Commentary.

45. In each section of the school, a good selection of learning opportunities is chosen from nationally available planning documents, particularly from the National Numeracy Strategy. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. For pupils aged 5-11 years, learning opportunities are matched well to their increasingly complex needs. The curriculum for pupils aged 11-17, does, however, rely too much upon national schemes of work and has been adapted more slowly to the changing level of need. Despite this, pupils aged 11-13, who represent a distinct change in the pupil population in the secondary department, have their wide range of needs met successfully by being taught different versions of the curriculum in groups selected by their attainment level. Pupils aged 14-17 have their needs met well by teaching that enables them to gain nationally recognised accreditation.

46. Assessment procedures, though satisfactory, are over-complicated and provide a confusing array of data that does not make comparison over time easy. Teachers provide good encouragement to pupils and successfully engage them in activities, to which they apply themselves persistently and with interest. Pupils aged 5-11 receive a high level of challenge from their teachers, while the satisfactory level of challenge for some pupils aged 11-17 reflects shortcomings in curriculum planning. All pupils benefit from their teachers' insistence on high standards of behaviour and from the very good support provided by learning support assistants.

47. Since the previous inspection, curriculum planning has improved, though this has since been taken over by events relating to the school's changing population. There has been an improvement in the standard of teaching for pupils aged 5-11 and their level of achievement has increased accordingly. Standards for pupils aged 11-17 have reduced slightly but not significantly considering the staffing changes that have taken place.

SCIENCE

Whilst only two science lessons were seen, inspectors were able to look at evidence in planning records and samples of pupils' work.

Provision is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching, especially in the secondary department, ensures pupils' good achievement.

- A strong focus on teaching key concepts through practical activities.
- Good specialist accommodation and resources for secondary pupils.

Commentary

48. Standards in science have improved considerably since the last inspection, because of the new science laboratory and better resources for secondary pupils, and better planning informed well by good assessment procedures, all of which has resulted in much more effective teaching.
49. In the primary department, pupils experience their learning through a well structured integrated topic approach, which introduces scientific ideas through experiential activities focused on meaningful aspects of the world around them. In this way, pupils are excited by what they see, hear and touch and can make logical connections with other learning. Secondary aged pupils benefit from teaching by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable specialist, who adapts the formal syllabus very successfully to teach often quite challenging scientific concepts through engaging practical activities. Follow up written work is always well structured to enable pupils to record their results in a way that consolidates their learning. It also helps them at a later stage to get creditable results in National Certificates of Achievement. All approaches are well planned to enable every pupil to engage in lessons successfully at their level of ability, ensuring that there is no significant variation in their progress.
50. The curriculum is well structured in both parts of the school and incorporates good systems to assess pupils' achievements and progress. There is, however, no overall co-ordination or structured liaison between primary teachers and their secondary counterpart to ensure that pupils' knowledge builds effectively on their prior learning when they transfer between the two departments.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Whilst only 1 lesson was seen for Information and Communication Technology, inspectors were able to look at evidence in planning records and samples of pupils' work.

Provision is **good** for pupils aged 11-17 and **satisfactory** for pupils aged 5-11. ICT is a rapidly developing subject in the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good for pupils aged 11-17, ensuring that older pupils make good progress and achieve well.
- The subject is well developed for pupils aged 11-17 but needs further development for pupils aged 5-11 years.
- The use of ICT as a tool to promote learning in other subjects is satisfactory but under-developed.
- Subject leadership is good.

Commentary

51. Pupils aged 11-17 receive a high standard of teaching in lessons held in the specialist ICT suite. They respond very well to the high level of resources, are motivated by the equipment and by the clarity of instructions and support. They therefore reach a good level of achievement.
52. Most emphasis is placed currently upon developing the subject for pupils aged 11-17 in their specialist lessons. Less emphasis has been given to developing the use of ICT to support pupils' learning in other lessons, across the whole school. However, some satisfactory use of ICT in other subjects for pupils aged 11-17 was seen during the inspection. Computers are used in this context mostly to provide work that is additional to the focus of the lesson, rather than as a means of directly supporting the lesson objectives.

53. Resources for the subject are good and government development grants have been spent productively. When considering that national expectations of ICT provision have increased in the years since the previous inspection, a high standard has been maintained. Leadership and curriculum planning has improved.

54. Pupils aged 5-11 years use ICT to aid learning in all subjects of the curriculum and classrooms have good resources to enable this. No evidence of ICT use in other lessons was seen during the inspection, though samples of pupils' word-processed material and computer-generated artwork suggest that the teaching of ICT skills is at least satisfactory.

HUMANITIES

Whilst only one history lesson was seen in Key Stage 4, inspectors were able to look at records and evidence in planning records and samples of pupils' work for both history and geography. Two lessons were seen in religious education.

Geography and history

Provision is **satisfactory overall**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Careful assessments of history and geography elements of achievement for older pupils
- The introduction of formal accreditation for pupils when they reach 16.

Commentary

55. In the single lesson seen for pupils in the age range 13 to 15 years, concerning developing knowledge of jobs and buildings in Mountfitchet community, very good teaching with well conceived and motivating activities and the very good attitudes of pupils to work led to pupils achieving very well. Behaviour was very well supported through the use of behaviour targets. The teaching assistant provided very good support in extending the pupils' vocabulary.

56. Planning for pupils aged 5 to 11, which involves a 'two year 'rolling programme' including humanities provision as 'knowledge and understanding of the world' expressed in topics such as 'shops in our locality', is appropriate.

57. For older pupils aged 12 to 14, there is a good policy to aid consistency and a 'topic grid' focusing on historical and geographical aspects of topics such as 'my own town' is complemented by good individual pupil assessments. A group of older pupils have very recently started a history entry level certificate course, which the school anticipates will be extended, and this is entirely appropriate. Leadership of the subject is satisfactory.

58. In the previous inspection, humanities were judged to be satisfactory.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Provision is at least **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' own experiences are well used in lessons.
- Assemblies contribute very well to religious understanding.
- Religious artefacts and visual aids to learning are not used sufficiently in lessons.

Commentary

59. In lessons for pupils aged 12 to 14, teaching was satisfactory, eliciting good responses from pupils when they are asked about their own experiences, but not using artefacts and visual aids to learning sufficiently. Pupils listened attentively and behaved well.
60. Assemblies contribute very well to religious understanding. For example in a very good assembly for pupils aged 5 to 11 years, the notion of 'special' items associated with religious practices was vividly conveyed to the great enjoyment and interest of the pupils. Volunteers acted as members of a Jewish family having a meal and by the very effective use of artefacts and food.
61. There is appropriate planning of work for younger pupils aged 5 to 11 and for older pupils the present scheme of work is being further developed.
62. The leadership of the subject is satisfactory and responsibility is divided between primary and secondary phases, but there is at present no overarching scheme of work across the whole school.
63. At the previous inspection, religious education was judged to be satisfactory.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

Four lessons were seen in art and design, one in design and technology, two in music and three in physical education, inspectors were able to look at evidence in planning records and samples of pupils' work.

Art and design

Provision is **good**.

Main strengths.

- Teaching is consistently good, ensuring that all pupils experience a very wide range of activities and techniques that excite and motivate them to achieve high standards.
 - Pupils' work is celebrated in vibrant displays around the school.
 - There is a well structured curriculum and pupils' achievements are appropriately evaluated.
64. The high standards seen at the last inspection have been sustained and many pupils attain good results in Certificates of Educational Achievement at the end of their time in school.
65. In the primary department, pupils are encouraged to use a wide variety of materials and approaches to make marks, express their ideas, and produce pieces of good quality art. As a result they become increasingly competent and confident in art activities, surrounded by their own and others' portraits, pictures and models. When they go into the secondary department they benefit from inspiring teaching in an assigned room, using a range of good quality resources. They are encouraged to develop their thoughts in well used sketch books and to experiment with a variety of techniques. The supportive and enabling atmosphere helps them to build successfully on their earlier learning or, in some cases to overcome their anxiety and low self-esteem in relation to their capabilities. They are able to explain the development of their ideas, often related to the work of famous artists or other cultures that their well travelled teacher has experienced and told them about. The impressively high quality pieces they produce are often of a standard comparable to national averages and are displayed with pride around the school, for the enjoyment of their peers, staff and visitors.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

2 lessons were seen in Design and Technology, inspectors were able to look at evidence in planning records and samples of pupils' work.

Provision in design and technology is **good**. Judgements are based upon a small sample of lessons seen during the inspection, discussions with teachers and samples of pupils' work seen in classrooms and good corridor displays.

Main strengths and weaknesses.

- Teaching is consistently good and all pupils achieve well.
- The subject motivates and engages pupils of all abilities.

66. Accommodation, learning resources and the curriculum have all been improved since the last inspection, and this has had a good effect on standards. Pupils enjoy the subject in the primary department as part of a structured topic approach that links well with art and design. They learn to use construction toys imaginatively and apply a wide variety of materials in engaging design and make activities. When they go on to the secondary department pupils are helped to build on this earlier work through effective teaching. They develop wide ranging skills to produce work of good quality, using resistant materials in the small workshop to solve design challenges, learning to evaluate their own and others' work on its fitness for purpose. During the inspection, there was a concentration on food technology in the attractive, well equipped specialist classroom. Pupils applied themselves enthusiastically in these successful lessons, encouraged by the well focused teaching. Records across the school show that work is planned appropriately to ensure that all pupils can engage productively in the activities, because there is well structured curriculum planning and sound use of, often informal but nonetheless effective, assessment information.

MUSIC

Provision for music is **satisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and achievement for younger pupils.
- The good capacity of pupils to work collaboratively in lessons.
- There the planning to show progress between primary and secondary phases is not sufficiently developed.

Commentary

67. Pupils aged 8 to 11 listen and respond very well and enjoy controlling sounds. They are good at taking turns. Older pupils aged 15 to 16, recognise and explore the way that sounds can be arranged and make improvements in their work and develop a simple lyric accompanied by tune percussion.

68. Teaching is very good for younger pupils, where it is characterised by brisk pace and tight structure that engages the pupils' interest and attention. Teaching is satisfactory for older pupils. Younger pupils achieve very well and older pupils achieve satisfactorily.

69. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils is very good and they enjoy the subject, for example showing great pleasure in performing.

70. The leadership and management of the subject is satisfactory and there is an appropriate policy and schemes of work which support planning, but links in planning between primary and secondary phases are not sufficiently developed.

71. At the previous inspection, music was judged to be good and it is now satisfactory representing unsatisfactory progress

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning in a wide variety of good quality settings are good, and consequently pupils achieve well.
- Pupils experience a good range of activities.
- Good quality assessment information is used consistently to inform planning.
- Pupils are encouraged successfully to be constructively critical of their own and others' performance.

Commentary

72. The high standards seen at the last inspection have been maintained. Staff are capably led and teach a well structured curriculum that ensures pupils' progressive learning. The school's achievement of Healthy School Status reflects wider thinking behind the subject's focus and outdoor activities on educational and residential trips extend those objectives.

73. Pupils across the school are highly motivated and try hard to succeed, because teachers plan carefully to provide appropriate challenges that stretch them, but are achievable. All lessons start and end appropriately with warm up and warm down activities.

74. In the primary department, pupils are successfully taught to explore the potential of their bodies and how to control their limbs. They improve from a low level of co-ordination to being confident in moving around spaces and learning a range of skills. Activities like soft play and climbing on frames provide a firm foundation and then, for example, by teaching pupils how to develop control of a football, first individually and then in pairs, one teacher helped a group to make good progress in learning to kick accurately and then receive and return a ball. Swimming provides similar opportunities to succeed, through careful planning to ensure individual success and sensitive, encouraging support from all staff.

75. In the secondary department, teachers build on this firm foundation. Many swimmers continue to make good progress in a local leisure centre pool and a number achieve average standards, whilst others, who are non-swimmers, are supported very effectively to develop the necessary skills through the effective combination of good quality coaching by the teacher and empathetic support from LSAs. Ball skills are equally well developed through structured basketball and football activities. Team playing is taught well through graduated progression from pair and small group work to whole teams.

76. Teachers' enthusiasm, combined with a highly developed ability to demonstrate and communicate important teaching points from individual pupils' achievements are crucial elements in the success of this subject.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

2 lessons were seen in Personal, Social and Health Education and Citizenship, inspectors were able to look at evidence in planning records and samples of pupils' work.

Provision is **good**.

Main strengths

- Teaching and learning are good and pupils achieve well.

- Learning opportunities are good.
- Visitors to the school enhance pupils' opportunities to learn.

Commentary

77. Pupils' learning is enriched well by visitors to the school such as drama groups and during the inspection the police provided good opportunities to promote pupils' awareness of drug use and misuse. The school groups pupils by ability for these activities and this ensures that learning is appropriate to the needs and abilities of all pupils. There is a good range of topics which cover areas such as sex education, school and class rules, health and nutrition as well as topics which promote pupils' understanding of their role in the local and wider community. Subject plans, and teachers' records indicate that teaching and learning are good and that pupils achieve well. The programmes of learning are enhanced by a very good focus, by all staff, on promoting pupils' personal and social development and their behaviour throughout the school day and the effect of this is evident in pupils' very good personal development. Leadership and management of the subject is good and co-ordinators are aware that they need to establish a whole school plan for the subject which will ensure that the curriculum is developed to reflect the more complex needs of pupils, particularly as they transfer from the primary to the secondary department.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3
Value for money provided by the school	3
Overall standards achieved	3
Pupils' achievement	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	4
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
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	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
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	4
The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	5
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).