

INSPECTION REPORT

**ST JOHN'S ROMAN CATHOLIC VOLUNTARY AIDED
FIRST SCHOOL**

Alnwick

LEA area: Northumberland

Unique reference number: 122304

Headteacher: Mr D Borthwick

Lead inspector: Mr D G Ford

Dates of inspection: 23rd – 25th February 2004

Inspection number: 261922

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	First School
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	5 to 9 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	77
School address:	Lisburn Street Alnwick Northumberland
Postcode:	NE66 1UR
Telephone number:	01665 602547
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr M Harrison
Date of previous inspection:	10 th November 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St John's is a smaller than average Roman Catholic Aided first school catering for pupils between the ages of four and nine. There is a voluntary nursery class operating within the school building in close partnership with the school. Of the 77 pupils in the school, around 14 per cent qualify for free school meals, which is close to the national average. Levels of special educational needs are about average; one pupil has a statement and one has English as an additional language.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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1576	Mr G W Stephenson	Team inspector	Mathematics Geography History Physical education
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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	10
Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	12
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	16
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING AND SUBJECTS	18
AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE	
SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 AND 2	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	26

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **very effective school that, rightly, prides itself on its inclusive nature. Good and often very good teaching and learning** are firmly rooted in extremely positive relationships, detailed understanding of the needs of individuals and an atmosphere of respect for all. Pupils make good progress and achieve standards that are in line with national expectations. Most importantly, pupils really enjoy their learning and parents hold the school in very high regard.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are

- The good and often very good teaching;
- The very good provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education;
- The commitment to inclusion that ensures that pupils' individual needs are understood and catered for;
- The effective, democratic leadership and management which ensure that all staff and governors contribute to school development;
- The very strong, active partnership with parents;
- Pupils' very good behaviour and their extremely positive attitudes to school;
- The limited time available for the head teacher and his deputy to undertake monitoring and strategic review of planned initiatives.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has made very good progress since it was last inspected. There is no unsatisfactory teaching and around eight out of 10 lessons are good or very good. The curriculum is well planned to ensure appropriate provision for all year groups and there is very good coverage of the multicultural aspects. There is a systematic approach to monitoring teaching and the outcomes help to support the school's improvement planning.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Year 2 results

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

*Key: A - well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average
Similar schools are those with similar percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals*

Achievement in this small first school is good. There are relatively low numbers in each year group and this explains why the results in the National Curriculum tasks and tests taken by seven year olds can fluctuate considerably from year to year. Pupils enter the school with below average skills in language and number and this was particularly true of the group of pupils who took the national assessments last year. Children make good progress in the reception class and the majority attain the early learning goals by the beginning of Year 1. This progress is built upon steadily, and by the time that they leave most pupils attain standards in English, mathematics and science that are in line with national expectations. This is also true of the standards attained in design and technology, history, geography and art. They are higher than expectations in information and communication technology (ICT), music and physical education, and in personal, social, health and

citizenship education they are much higher. The school reviews pupils' progress effectively, sets suitably challenging targets and achieves well against them. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well.

The very high standards attained in personal, social and health education and citizenship are a strength of the school and reflect the **very good provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**. This results in very high standards of behaviour and excellent relationships across the school. Attendance is satisfactory and punctuality is very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good. Fundamental to this are **high quality teaching** and a comprehensive and well-planned curriculum. In the reception class children are skilfully supported in developing good learning habits that not only result in good progress in their first year but also ensure that they obtain maximum benefit from the learning opportunities provided across the school. The high proportion of good, very good and excellent teaching in the school helps pupils to achieve well, promotes enjoyment of learning and ensures that the individual needs of pupils are met. Planning and provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.

Teaching is well supported by a comprehensive system of assessment and individual pupil tracking which not only enables teachers to set realistic targets for pupils but also supports the evaluation of their teaching. These systems of assessment are supported by a conscientious approach to marking which, at its best, provides clear and detailed advice for pupils on how to improve. However, there is some variation in the level of detail provided and marking is not always as helpful as it might be.

The curriculum is good; all subjects are carefully planned to take account of the mixed age organisation of the school. There are good links between subjects with pupils given opportunities to use literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in other subjects such as science, design and technology and art. However there are relatively limited opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills in other subjects. The planned provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education is particularly good and the ICT curriculum is enhanced by the use of the computer suite at the local middle school. Both of these initiatives result in high standards. A wide range of after-school clubs and educational visits and visitors further enhances the curriculum.

The school is at the heart of its local community. Links with parents are very good and the school is very welcoming. As a result a small army of voluntary helpers work hard to support the staff in all aspects of school life.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are very effective. The head teacher's very strong commitment to inclusion supports a clear vision focused on supporting the needs of individuals. An extremely democratic approach to leadership and management ensures that all staff contribute to the school's development agenda. Governance is very good. The governing body is committed to the school's mission. Governors are well informed about key areas of school life and actively involved in planning for improvement.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents wholeheartedly support the school. They particularly like the quality of teaching, the support for good behaviour and the standards that their children achieve. These positive views are reflected in the large numbers of parents who help in the school. Pupils are very enthusiastic about the school and their teachers; they enjoy their work and look forward to coming to school.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

In order to improve still further the high quality provision the head teacher, staff and governors should:

- Seek to create more time in the working week for monitoring and strategic review of planned initiatives;
- Ensure that all marking details what pupils need to do to improve;
- Take forward the pupil tracking system in particular to target pupils who can achieve higher levels in national assessments.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects

Pupils achieve at least the expected standards in all subjects of the curriculum. Standards in personal, social, health and citizenship education are well above this.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are very high standards in personal, social, health and citizenship education.
- Pupils achieve high standards in swimming.
- Pupils with special educational needs achieve well.
- Fewer pupils than average achieve the higher levels in national tests.

Commentary

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
reading	15.3 (16.9)	15.7 (15.8)
writing	14.1 (15.0)	14.6 (14.4)
mathematics	17.0 (17.0)	16.3 (16.5)

There were 10 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

1. This small first school has relatively low numbers in each year group and therefore the results obtained in national assessments tend to fluctuate significantly from year to year. In the Key Stage 1 tests and tasks undertaken in 2003, results were below the national average for reading and writing but above the average for mathematics. This pattern was repeated when the school's results are compared with the average for similar schools, largely because fewer than average pupils achieved the higher levels. Pupils build well on relatively limited early learning skills and achieve well. By the time that they leave, the majority of pupils attain standards that are in line with national expectations. In personal, social and health education and citizenship, swimming and instrumental music the standards that children achieve are above average.

Foundation Stage

2. Most children enter the reception class from the voluntary nursery provision that is associated with the school. Many children's pre-school skills are below average. They make good progress in the reception class, building successfully on the gains in the partner nursery. By the time that they are in Year 1 the majority of pupils attain standards that are close to the nationally defined early learning goals. This good progress is as a result of the carefully structured provision in the reception class that not only supports children in reading, writing and mathematics but also helps them to develop physically, creatively, and personally. They improve their knowledge and understanding of the world, and most importantly of all skilful teaching and very good routines lay important foundations for the development of the children as learners.

Key Stage 1

3. Results in the Key Stage 1 tests and tasks fluctuate considerably from year to year due to the small numbers of pupils in each year group. However, by the time that they are seven the majority of pupils reach the nationally expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics although fewer than average achieve the higher levels. Pupils are confident readers and are developing the ability to write in a good range of contexts. Their basic number skills are good and they are competent users of ICT.
4. Standards attained in science, design and technology, history, geography and art are average. They are higher in music and physical education with particularly high standards achieved in swimming. Pupils achieve particularly well in the development of personal, social, citizenship and health related skills.

Key Stage 2

5. In this first school there is no comparative national data for Key Stage 2 because pupils leave before the tests in Year 6. Pupils in the two Key Stage 2 year groups build well on the levels achieved in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, continuing to achieve standards in English, mathematics and science that are in line with national expectations. This consistent progress is a result of the good and very good teaching which the pupils receive, that in particular develops their ability to learn independently. Standards in geography, history, design and technology and art are in line with those expected but in music and physical education they are higher. Pupils also achieve higher than expected standards in ICT due to the well-planned partnership with a neighbouring school that enables pupils to have access to a very well resourced ICT suite in which their teacher can deliver very imaginative and challenging lessons. As in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, pupils develop significantly above average understanding in personal, social, health and citizenship education.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities are all very good and a strength of the school. Attendance is satisfactory and provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships are very good.
- Behaviour is very good.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.
- Minority ethnic pupils are very well integrated.

Commentary

6. Pupils' very good attitudes, behaviour and relationships contribute to the very good, positive climate for learning and impact on their achievement. All adults provide good role models, respecting and valuing the pupils. They create a very caring, safe and secure learning environment, consistently boosting pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Consequently pupils enjoy school and their relationships are very good with each other. Older pupils are polite to adults and visitors, taking initiative and showing willingness to help. They regularly care for younger pupils. Pupils are given many opportunities to take responsibilities doing tasks around the school. Behaviour in and out of lessons is very good. Pupils display very good ability to work independently and collaboratively in groups.

7. Attendance is satisfactory and punctuality is very good. Last year attendance was below the national average. The school suffered from a serious illness epidemic, which had a marked effect on attendance levels.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.7	School data	0.0
National data	5.4	National data	0.4

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

8. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. These aspects are fostered through the strong ethos throughout the school and opportunities in collective worship. Pupils are helped to become more mature and this prepares them well for the next stage in their learning. There is a strong moral code and pupils value fair play greatly. Cultural development has improved since the last inspection when there were too few opportunities for pupils to extend their understanding of other cultures. This aspect has been very well addressed and is now a strength. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds are well integrated and teachers make very good use of their family members and relatives. They visit to talk about their cultural experiences, backgrounds and religions.

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	75	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British - Caribbean	1	0	0

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is good

Teaching and learning

Teaching is good; much teaching in Key Stage 2 is very good. The quality of learning reflects that of teaching. Very effective assessment systems have been developed and overall assessment is good. However, not all aspects of the approach have yet been fully implemented across the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lessons are well planned and involve active whole-class sessions.
- Pupils are very well behaved and collaborate very well when working in pairs.
- Teaching assistants and other adults in school give good support to individual pupils.
- Pupils with special educational needs make good progress.

- Pupils would benefit from the challenge of having more independence in some tasks.
- Assessment and marking need to support all pupils' understanding of how they can improve their learning.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 23 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
1	6	12	4	0	0	0

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

9. In general lessons are well planned and pupils are actively involved in learning throughout the lesson. The 'Thinking Skills' initiative is having a very positive impact on the pupils' ability to discuss their thoughts and ideas as lessons progress. Teachers use a range of very good teaching strategies to ensure all pupils are able to develop their understanding, skills and knowledge. Teachers use well-planned questions that ensure pupils remain involved in their learning because they have to think carefully before answering. Pupils of differing abilities respond very well to challenging questions and are keen to explain their ideas, methods of working, or reasons for their views. Teachers are well prepared and make effective use of practical resources that stimulate and engage all pupils so they are keen to learn. The pace of work supports learning. Tasks are clearly explained so pupils know exactly what they have to do and time is well used.
10. Teachers demonstrate high expectations of behaviour and attitudes at all times which ensures that pupils meet them. Because pupils are very well behaved, work hard and concentrate well they make good progress in their learning. Pupils collaborate very well when working in pairs; this is an important feature of keeping all involved in whole-class sessions. Pupils are frequently asked to discuss ideas with their partner for a short period of time prior to sharing them with the whole class. This ensures ideas are very well thought out and learning develops. Pupils enjoy learning and have very good attitudes towards each other, their teachers and other adults in school.
11. Teaching assistants and the other adults who support pupils in school are well informed about their tasks. They maintain the high expectations of the teachers. Their work is well planned in both class sessions and group work. They are therefore able to give good learning support across the curriculum to individuals within a group as well as teaching small groups. In reception a small group of children working with a teaching assistant were able to develop their understanding of control technology in ICT as well as their skills in estimating distance, due to her clear instructions and sensitive questioning.
12. The quality of teaching for pupils with special educational needs is good and they are fully included in lessons. Work is carefully matched to pupils' particular needs and teaching assistants effectively support pupils' learning. Because of the support provided by a teaching assistant a pupil with special educational needs was able to make a good contribution to a class discussion about stereotyping in a personal, social and health education and citizenship lesson in Year 3/4. This is an inclusive school where pupils with special educational needs make good progress.
13. Tasks are well matched to the needs of different ability groups within classes. However, all pupils would benefit from having more independence in recording their work. The use of duplicated worksheets, in subjects such as geography as well as English, limits pupils' development of skills in writing. In subjects such as science, older, more able pupils could usefully be challenged to devise their own methods of recording. Increased independence in recording would support the development of both thinking and writing skills across the curriculum.
14. A very good system for monitoring the progress of individual pupils has been developed which is being used effectively to indicate clear targets for improvement. This system now needs to

be developed for use with all year groups and across all curriculum areas. Generally marking of work in books is good. Praise is used effectively and there are comments that help pupils improve their work. However, this is not yet implemented across all subjects and year groups. Even where supportive comments are included pupils would benefit from a greater understanding of how they can improve further. Where this is being developed successfully, as in writing in Year 3/4, pupils are much clearer about what they need to do to make progress.

The curriculum

The curriculum provided by the school is **good**. All subjects are effectively covered and the curriculum is enriched by a good range of extra-curricular activities. Resources and accommodation are used well to support the curriculum.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is very good provision in personal, social, health education and citizenship.
- Physical education is very good, particularly in swimming and games.
- An extensive range of activities and visits enriches pupils' experiences.
- Excellent support and care by all adults ensure that all pupils are included and their needs are met.
- There are good curriculum links with the middle school and excellent relations with the voluntary nursery.

Commentary

15. All of the subjects of the National Curriculum are taught and sufficient time is allocated to each subject within a broad range of curricular opportunities. The curriculum is well planned with strong emphasis on numeracy and literacy. The real strengths of the curriculum are: the provision for personal, social, health education and citizenship; physical education, particularly swimming and games; and the extensive range of activities and visits which enriches pupils' experiences. Children in the Foundation Stage have good opportunities for all-round development towards the early learning goals. The family ethos of care by all adults and excellent support provided ensure that all pupils are included and that the school meets their needs.
16. The literacy hour and numeracy hour of the National Strategies have become well integrated into the curriculum. Also literacy is used well across the curriculum within other subjects, but numeracy and other aspects of mathematics less effectively.
17. Provision for ICT is developing well and is used effectively to support learning in other subjects. There are good curriculum links with the middle school, particularly for ICT, and pupils visit to use its computer suite. As well as the benefits gained in ICT, this good link is useful in helping to acclimatise pupils before their transfer after Year 4. At the opposite end of the age spectrum, the school has excellent relations with a voluntary nursery located within the school. Very good support is given to the nursery. Joint activities and sharing resources and routines help children to integrate very quickly into school life.
18. Recently more emphasis has been placed on the arts and creativity through the involvement of artists and musicians. Two good initiatives have been introduced, Thinking Skills and the Healthy School Standard. These initiatives feature in some teaching and learning and are having a positive influence on the curriculum. A very good range of visitors and school visits is used to support and extend learning outside of the classroom. These include sporting events, and visits to historical sites, museums and theatre, all of which enrich pupils' experiences.

19. All pupils with special educational needs are very well supported. Their learning is well structured and aided very effectively by support staff, who ensure that these pupils are involved in all lessons.
20. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. The recent development of the library is a good addition to support the curriculum. The staffing for teaching is adequate, but places tremendous pressure on the head teacher with four days teaching per week and very little time for administration, strategic planning and management. A 'small army' of support staff, students and adult helpers make a significant contribution to enhancing the curriculum and the overall quality of education provided. Progress since the last inspection is good, with all issues having been fully addressed.

Care, guidance and support

The school takes **very good care** of its pupils and provides **very good support and guidance** that encourage children to work hard and aim high. The school **involves pupils** very well in its work.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good and trusting relationships between pupils and with adults form the basis of the school's commitment to high quality care.
- The school's support for the nursery makes an excellent contribution to children's smooth induction to school life.
- The support and guidance given to pupils throughout the school day encourages them to try their best and achieve well and endeavour to live safely and healthily.
- The school has a warm, caring family atmosphere and provides a very safe environment.

Commentary

21. Staff are very good role models and encourage pupils to be helpful, considerate and polite to one another. Staff know pupils very well and pupils know who to turn to for help and advice. Consequently, pupils are very well supported through excellent relationships within the school. The school has made very good arrangements to meet health and safety and child protection obligations. Structured induction arrangements and the closeness of the nursery and reception classes give children a very good start to statutory schooling. The school is committed to continuing its partnership with the nursery through raising funds and working very closely with all parties towards a new, purpose-built unit.
22. Staff encourage pupils to do their best by making sure that they know what is expected and praising them when they do well. There are very good procedures for keeping track of pupils' personal development and their academic progress, including sharing targets for improving literacy and numeracy skills with pupils and their parents. School encourages pupils to become actively involved in a wide range of activities that enables them to share views, understand issues and make valued contributions to school life and the wider world. Pupils are taught ways of keeping safe and about people who can help them to stay safe. They work as full partners with staff and each other during reward assemblies and raise money for good causes. Older pupils take a leading role in supporting younger ones, by helping them and by providing them with guidance through keeping to the routines and behaving appropriately in various situations.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

There is a **very strong partnership** between home and school and with other schools. Links with the wider community are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are very supportive of the school's work and make very positive contributions to their children's learning.
- Pupils benefit from the school's very good links with other schools and colleges and involvement with the wider community.

Commentary

23. The school enjoys a very strong, active partnership with parents. Parents hold the school in extremely high esteem and the inspection confirms that their views are entirely justified. Staff are very welcoming and value the contributions of all members of the community. In particular, the school recognises the important role of parents in guiding their children towards success and therefore helps parents to become actively involved in their children's education. The school provides parents with information of a high quality and is interested in their views on school life. In particular, written reports for parents are very effective in telling parents how their children are progressing, both academically and in their personal development. Home/school reading diaries are very well used by parents and teachers to share information about pupils.
24. Several parents are deeply involved in the work of the school and make significant contributions to the learning and experiences of all children. A small group of hardworking parents organise social and fund-raising events and many more rally to make donations and support the events. The school benefits from the help of many parents and grandparents, either helping in school and with trips, or supporting special events. Currently, parents and staff are raising a substantial amount of money for a new nursery building.
25. The school has established a very good range of links within the local and wider community that enhance children's experiences. The school is playing a central role locally by providing space for nursery activities and by fully supporting fundraising for major new developments. The school's clearly structured and well co-ordinated links with other schools support children's personal and social education very well, especially in helping children move confidently to middle school. A particularly beneficial link has been set up to provide older pupils with high quality ICT experiences. There is good involvement with other support agencies to help meet pupils' specific needs. Pupils take part in joint projects and events with their peers in other schools and community organisations that add to their experiences and broaden their horizons. The school is very well used as a resource by other educational organisations. For instance, adult learners, such as volunteer parents and assistants employed by the school, are supported through training. In addition, school staff support teaching and childcare students in conjunction with partner schools and training institutions.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is led effectively by the head teacher through a very democratic approach that ensures the involvement of all staff and governors. Management is efficient with well-planned systems appropriate to this small school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A systematic approach to school improvement planning that identifies, costs and timetables appropriate developments.
- A deep-rooted commitment to the involvement of all in school development.

- A strongly inclusive focus on the needs of pupils and their families.
- The limited time available to the head teacher for monitoring and strategic review of planned initiatives.

Commentary

26. The school is well led by the head teacher who provides a clear vision of inclusive education that is reflected in the commitment of everyone involved with the school to the needs of all pupils. In pursuit of this vision the school has developed an extremely democratic approach to school management which makes best use of the talents of the staff and which ensures that improvement priorities are relevant and realistic. The head teacher, staff and governors are committed to high standards for pupils in all aspects of their school life and they are successful in developing pupils as responsible and self-reliant individuals as well as promoting achievement across the curriculum.
27. The governing body works closely with the head teacher and staff in all aspects of school life. There is an effective committee structure and identified governors work with members of staff to gain understanding of key areas of school life. This ensures that governors are clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the school and enables them to participate, with understanding, in the school improvement planning process.
28. Since the last inspection systems have been developed to monitor the quality of teaching and to evaluate the impact of new strategies. This process underpins an effective approach to performance management and a strong, whole-school, commitment to professional development. The organisation of the school relies upon the head teacher teaching for 80 per cent of the working week. Whilst this ensures that he is able to take an active part in the development of new teaching approaches, he would benefit from more time to undertake monitoring and strategic review of planned initiatives.
29. The school is extremely inclusive. Individual needs are carefully identified and planned for. Provision is effectively managed and targeted with any areas of weakness identified and acted upon. The budget is carefully managed, extra funds are sought where possible and the school takes due account of the principles of best value. A particularly good example of this approach to finance is the impressive approach to the planning and financing of the proposed new nursery development. Overall the school provides very good value for money.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	194,944
Total expenditure	187,307
Expenditure per pupil	2,497

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	3,458
Balance carried forward to the next	11,094

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good. Children's attainment on entry is generally below average. They are well supported in starting their education by the excellent partnership between the reception class and the voluntary nursery that is based in the school building. By the time that children leave the reception class their attainment is **close to the nationally agreed early learning goals**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent arrangements to ensure that children make a good start to school.
- The very good provision for children's personal, social and emotional development.
- The good quality of teaching and learning.
- The excellent routines that lay a very good foundation for future learning.
- The difficult access to the outdoor play area that limits opportunities for physical development.

Commentary

30. The reception class provides a very good start to children's education. All areas of learning are well covered and provision builds well on children's early experiences in the partner nursery. Planning and teaching are good with activities well matched to the range of needs. Children from minority ethnic backgrounds are very well supported and their cultural backgrounds are used well to develop very good understanding of different ways of life. The establishment of very good routines helps to ensure that children are well prepared for the later stages of education.
31. **Personal, social and emotional development is very good.** Learning takes place in an atmosphere characterised by positive relationships and a sensitive use of challenge and praise. Children start to develop as independent individuals in a safe and caring environment. The reception class teacher and all those involved in the Foundation Stage use their knowledge of the children very well to ensure that children are properly supported in their work as well as being encouraged to try new ideas. The excellent classroom routines and procedures are well understood and through them children learn to work sensibly together and start to understand how to listen to each other's point of view.
32. **The development of communication, language and literacy skills is satisfactory.** Many children enter school with underdeveloped language skills. In the reception class they build effectively on these. The majority speak with confidence and enthusiastically provide sensible responses to questions. Most children listen carefully to stories and enjoy re-telling familiar tales. They recognise letters and use sound basic phonic skills to read simple words. Most children can form letters accurately and some are able to write simple phrases.
33. **Mathematical development is good.** Children make good progress in the reception class. From a below average starting point they achieve the nationally defined early learning goals by the time that they enter Year 1. This good achievement is a direct result of carefully managed and well-planned teaching. A good range of play activities and more formally structured learning opportunities are well used to promote mathematical understanding. So, for example, after a visit to a pet shop children produced individual charts showing the prices of different pets. The majority of children have well-established basic counting skills and can add on and subtract along a number line. They also recognise and describe simple two-dimensional shapes such as circles, triangles and squares. Children's learning is well supported by effective interventions by the skilled learning assistant who is well briefed by the teacher.

34. **Physical development is good.** Children develop good movement skills and can play simple games. They are effectively encouraged to use simple equipment such as pencils, crayons and scissors correctly and they develop good fine control of such equipment. A notable strength of the school's approach to physical development is the provision for swimming. All reception class children have a weekly swimming lesson. They are very well supported by their teacher, learning assistant and the pool staff. They enjoy all the activities, demonstrating real confidence in the water and making very good progress. It is difficult for staff to fully develop some aspects of the physical curriculum because access to a reasonably sized outdoor play area is limited by the layout of the school site.
35. **Children develop good knowledge and understanding of the world.** They have a sound understanding of key elements of the local environment and are aware of the variations due to the seasons. They know about key aspects of their own and other cultures through good use of their own and their parents' backgrounds. So, for example, they understand about Chinese New Year through activities based around the family experience of one member of the class. All children have good experiences of modelling and can talk simply about design ideas. They are confident in their use of computers and the teacher ensures that children have the opportunity to apply those skills in many areas of their work.
36. **Creative development is good.** Children have sound drawing and painting skills. They use pencils, crayons and paints confidently in their play and most use knowledge of colours well. Children enjoy singing, using musical instruments and developing simple dramas, particularly through the imaginative role-play activities provided by staff.
37. The standards achieved in the Foundation Stage are the result of good teaching. The team of teacher and learning assistant supported by voluntary helpers are very effective in planning interesting and involving learning activities for the children. Sessions are brisk, well organised and focused on learning and there is a very good balance between teacher-directed activities and learning through children-led play situations. In both cases the use of the room and the deployment of learning resources are carefully managed to guide children to the intended learning.
38. Progress is further enhanced by the very positive links with parents, many of whom help in the class and the excellent professional partnership with the voluntary nursery located in the next-door room.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 AND 2

ENGLISH

Six lessons were seen in English. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work and heard pupils read. **Provision for English is good.** Standards are in line with national expectations at the end of Key Stage 1 and Year 4.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The 'Thinking Skills' initiative is have a very positive impact on pupils' speaking and listening skills.
- The improvement of writing skills is planned through a whole-school approach.
- Writing skills are not always taught consistently to all year groups.
- Pupils make good progress in reading, with good involvement from home.
- Teaching and learning are good overall.
- Pupils are insufficiently involved in assessment of their own work.

Commentary

39. The implementation of the 'Thinking Skills' initiative by the teachers has ensured very good development of pupils' speaking and listening skills. Pupils learn to give simple reasons for their views and explain their ideas. Pupils are also encouraged to comment on each other's views. This supports learning to listen to each other as well as adults and gives a very good preparation for future education across the curriculum. By Year 3/4, pupils are able to engage in good class discussions because of very good teaching in these skills. They listen attentively to each other, developing another's ideas or putting forward a different point of view. They can explain the reasoning behind their views. Pupils speak with confidence and ask sensible questions of each other. Because of the level of these skills pupils make very effective use of 'response partners', a strategy which allows pupils time to have discussion with each other prior to sharing ideas with the class. This very good emphasis on the development of speaking and listening skills across school through the 'Thinking Skills' initiative provides an essential basis for the development of writing skills.
40. The whole-school approach to developing pupils' skills in writing also involves close collaboration with partnership schools to ensure a coherent development for pupils in Key Stage 2. Handwriting is systematically developed through reception and Key Stage 1. Handwriting in Key Stage 2 is legible and joined with more able pupils using a neat, well-formed script. In Key Stage 2 pupils have the opportunity to develop their writing skills for different purposes in a wide range of contexts. In Key Stage 1 the contexts are narrower and the use of worksheets can limit progress. An effective system for assessing and monitoring progression in writing is in place and by the time pupils reach Year 3/4 pupils they are informed of the steps needed to improve their writing and make progress. More able pupils in Key Stage 2 are achieving well in writing. They can apply spelling conventions well, use a range of punctuation correctly and use well-structured phrases and sentences. By the end of Key Stage 1 most pupils attain satisfactory standards. However, for more pupils in the school to reach above average standards, greater consistency is required across the school in planning, monitoring and assessing progress.
41. There is a good range of books, both fiction and non-fiction, for pupils of all abilities to read. The library van also visits the school and pupils select books for their class. The books pupils take home to read are well matched to their ability, ensuring they retain the very positive view they have of reading. Parents are very supportive and hear children read regularly. Records of the pupils' reading are maintained in diaries that travel between home and school. Parents, teachers and sometimes children make regular comments. Pupils make good progress in developing reading skills. Younger pupils are able to apply phonic knowledge well and older pupils have developed a wider range of strategies to help them read unfamiliar words. In Year 1/2 the teacher provides good modelling of reading and pupils learn to read clearly, with expression. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils can discuss a story, expressing views on characters and events. By the end of Year 4 many pupils are starting to use inference and deduction when talking about characters and events, sometimes referring to the text.
42. Overall teaching and learning are good and in Year 3/4 they are very good. Where teaching is good or very good lessons are well planned, group activities are clearly differentiated and teachers use a range of strategies successfully. In a very good lesson in Year 3/4 the teacher modelled how to construct a poem based on the use of similes using the pupils' suggestions. Teaching assistants and other adults are well used to support groups or individuals. All pupils, including pupils with special educational needs, make good progress. Teachers make very effective use of questions that support the development of learning by ensuring all pupils think carefully. In a good Year 1/2 lesson the teacher ensures pupils think carefully about the development of the story by asking questions that encourage pupils to make predictions. Where teaching is satisfactory tasks have less challenge and there is less scope for pupils to develop their own ideas. In a Year 1/2 lesson a worksheet used to support understanding of verbs inhibited the development of constructing and writing sentences.

43. All pupils need to be more closely involved in the assessment of all their work in English. Except for writing in Key Stage 2, the steps that pupils need to take to improve their work are not made sufficiently clear to them. Pupils' involvement in assessing their own work has yet to be developed.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

44. Speaking and listening skills are used well across the curriculum, specifically through the 'Thinking Skills' initiative. In Key Stage 2, pupils develop writing skills in history. However, in general opportunities for teaching writing across the curriculum are not being taken. A planned approach to teaching and reinforcing writing skills using the whole curriculum will support the school focus on improving writing.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make good progress and achieve well.
- Good use is made of the national strategy to develop numeracy skills.
- The quality of teaching and good use of support boost the achievement of low ability pupils.
- Too few of the more able pupils achieve higher levels in national tests.
- The school has a very good system for recording pupils' progress.

Commentary

45. Standards are broadly in line with expectations by Year 2 and these standards are maintained in Years 3 and 4. In the 2003 national tests Year 2 pupils' attainment was above average with boys' performance better than girls'. Over the last three years, national test results show above average performance, again with boys' better than girls'. However, during the inspection there was no evidence of significant differences in attainment between boys and girls. Attainment in national tests at higher levels is below average with fewer pupils than might be expected achieving these levels. These results show a decline in performance since the last inspection, but as the numbers of pupils taking tests are low, results can fluctuate widely from year to year and any interpretation of data has to be read with caution.
46. Learning skills are below average when pupils enter the school, so reaching the levels they do shows good progress and they achieve well. Pupils with special educational needs benefit from good levels of support in class and good teaching, resulting in their achievement being good.
47. The National Numeracy Strategy is used well as the focus for teaching and learning, with pupils' numeracy skills developed effectively. However, there is insufficient practice in other aspects of mathematics, particularly in using higher order skills of applying what pupils have learned for problem solving. In Year 2, mental agility in counting is developed through well-practised routines such as clapping, chanting and using a number line. These pupils show good ability in counting forward and backwards in twos, fives and tens. One good example of pupils applying what they had learned was demonstrated in a Year 4 lesson in the school hall. Pupils applied and reinforced their understanding of compass points and basic co-ordinates.
48. Teaching is good for Years 1 and 2, is satisfactory for Year 3 and very good for Year 4. Lessons are well prepared and organised. Teachers know and manage their pupils well, carefully targeting support through good use of teaching assistants, students and adult helpers. This helps to boost the achievement of lower ability pupils. Sometimes there is insufficient challenge in tasks for more able pupils and they do not achieve as much as they

are capable of. In the best lessons there is good challenge for all pupils and skilful, carefully directed questioning ensures very good learning. This is particularly evident in some lessons with other pupils. Day-to-day assessment varies in quality with the best giving pupils good feedback about their work and clear guidance on how to improve. The school has a very good system for recording pupils' progress and teachers know the National Curriculum level at which each pupil is working at any time.

Mathematics across the curriculum

49. The provision for developing mathematics across the curriculum is satisfactory. The planned experiences for using and applying mathematics in the Foundation Stage are built upon as pupils progress through the school. Pupils use mathematics, particularly in science and ICT, helping pupils to develop understanding of the place of mathematics in everyday life.

SCIENCE

One science lesson was seen. Inspectors looked at science displays and samples of pupils' work.

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All aspects of the subject are fully covered.
- Pupils develop good understandings of fair tests in investigative science.

Commentary

50. Standards in science are in line with national expectations at both key stages. All areas of science are covered through a carefully planned curriculum that is well matched to the mixed-age class structure of the school. Through this provision pupils develop sound understanding of living things, the main parts of animals and plants and the conditions required for life. They know about forces and they can make sensible judgements about the likely impact of forces such as magnetism and electricity. Pupils have a good knowledge of a variety of materials and they can classify them using simple criteria such as hardness or porosity. They understand about the differences between solids, liquids and gases and how changes of state occur.
51. Science teaching is good. Teachers have good scientific knowledge and use a good range of resources to stimulate pupils. Thus in a Key Stage 2 lesson on materials the teacher ensured that all pupils were able to work directly with a large assortment of rocks and thus learn how porous they were at first hand. This commitment to first-hand experience is a feature of the science curriculum and as part of this approach pupils are encouraged to learn through investigation. They can formulate their ideas and decide how to test them through experiments. Teachers encourage pupils to consider how to ensure that their investigations are based on fair tests and, by the time that they leave the school, pupils have sensible ideas about how to control variables.
52. Pupils respond well to science lessons. Their work is well presented and they make good use of charts and graphs. A particular feature is the very good collaborative work in science and the thoughtful responses to teachers' questions that arise from shared discussions. Support staff work well as part of the teaching team and play a particularly important role in practical lessons, supporting pupils in group working. They also work very well with pupils who have special educational needs who, as a result, enjoy the subject and make good progress.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve standards that are above national expectations.
- Teaching is of a very high standard.
- The subject benefits from very good links with a neighbouring middle school.
- The subject is well led and carefully organised.

Commentary

53. Standards in ICT at the end Year 2 and when the pupils leave school are above national expectations. All pupils make good progress, and a number of them very good progress, in the acquisition and application of ICT skills. By the end of Year 4 pupils use word processing with confidence and are familiar with simple spreadsheets. They can develop a logical sequence of instructions to operate a programmable toy and they are very skilful in their use of text and pictures to construct attractive and well-presented documents. Pupils in Key Stage 1 develop good basic keyboard skills and in Key Stage 2 they are able to load, print, copy and save their work.
54. Teaching is very good and sometimes excellent. Teachers, particularly the teacher in Key Stage 2, have very good subject knowledge and are, therefore, confident in their ability to support pupils as they encounter difficulties in their work. Lessons are extremely well planned and contexts for developing ICT skills are interesting and related to pupils' own experiences. Introductions are extremely clear and staff use questions carefully to review pupils' existing knowledge and develop new understanding. Explanations are very clear with teachers being careful to explain why things need to be done as well as how. The school has developed its own resources very well and, in addition, makes excellent use of the ICT suite in their partner middle school. The use of this resource enables all pupils in the Key Stage 2 class to work on computers at the same time as well as enabling the teacher to inspire and inform them through developing and displaying ideas to the whole class on an interactive whiteboard.
55. Pupils respond very well to the high quality teaching and the interest and enthusiasm that the teaching generates ensure that they work hard and learn actively through experiment and discussion. In an excellent lesson at Key Stage 2, which was based around designing a poster, all pupils had the confidence to develop imaginative ideas combining variety of font, colour, size of type and the positioning of text to create designs that were attractive and eye-catching. The most able pupils took the process further, discovering new features of the software package, such as the ability to invert text, and having the confidence, if necessary, to delete what they had done and start again.
56. This subject is very well led. Planning for the acquisition of new resources has been developed as part of the school's approach to the curriculum. All staff are kept up to date with new developments and the partnership with the local middle school has been well thought through.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

57. ICT is well used across the curriculum. Pupils word process work on English and other subjects. They develop the ability to use charts in science and they use the control aspects of programmable moveable toys to explore mathematical ideas.

HUMANITIES

HISTORY and GEOGRAPHY

No lessons were observed for history and geography, but evidence was gained through discussion with the subjects' co-ordinator and from examining teachers' planning and pupils' work.

Provision in history and geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A good range of visits is provided to support and extend learning.
- Older pupils produce some good creative writing in history.
- Pupils' work at Key Stage 1 depends too much on duplicated worksheets.

Commentary

58. Standards are broadly average in both subjects. In Years 1 and 2, pupils' classroom work in history and geography is basic, covering a limited range. In history a few famous people, such as Florence Nightingale, and some important events are briefly written about. In geography pupils learn in which months of the year the seasons occur. Pupils colour outline maps to show the countries of the United Kingdom and four main countries in Europe. Work is heavily dependent upon duplicated pictures and maps and this limits opportunities for pupils to research and think independently.
59. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 study World War II and their work shows some good examples of creative writing on evacuees. In geography they study world climate and begin to consider environmental issues. In marking pupils' work, praise is well used to encourage them and some comments indicate how they can improve.
60. The strength in history and geography is the use of the local area and visits to places of historical and geographic interest to support and extend learning. A good range of visits is provided to museums, castles, a river and the beach.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

ART AND DESIGN, DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY, MUSIC and PHYSICAL EDUCATION

One lesson was seen in art and design, two in physical education and one in music. No lessons were seen in design and technology. Pupils' work in books and displays were looked at in art and design and design and technology. Singing was observed during assemblies.

Provision for music, physical education and art and design is **good**. Provision for design and technology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in music and physical education are well above average.
- Teaching in music and physical education is good and often very good.
- There are weekly swimming lessons for pupils of all ages.
- Singing is good.

Commentary

61. By the end of Key Stage 1 and Year 4 standards in art and design are in line with national expectations.

62. Through the use of paint and crayon, pupils develop sound representational skills. By the end of Year 4 pupils can use line, tone and shading well to incorporate depth into their work. Good use is made of sketchbooks to explore line, tone, representation and texture. These are then used well to support further work. There is less emphasis on three-dimensional work. Links are established with other subjects. In a Year 3/4 ICT lesson pupils used good visual skills to evaluate the design of posters. They are able to make good use of skills in colour, shape and form when using a computer to design a poster. In this excellent lesson the pupils improved their skills in using computer graphics in a stimulating design context.
63. **Standards in music are above the national expectation** by the end of Key Stage 1 and Year 4. Singing across the school is good. Pupils can sing songs with several verses from memory with accurate pitch and rhythm. They articulate the words clearly and sing with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Pupils in Key Stage 1 develop good skills in performance using tuned percussion instruments. Due to good teaching they are able to start to recognise how sounds can be combined and develop skills in maintaining a simple part within an ensemble. They have an awareness of the effect of working with several layers of sound. Pupils enjoy playing within an ensemble and are keen to perform to a wider audience.
64. **Standards in design and technology are in line with national expectations.** Pupils develop satisfactory skills in designing. They can use a good range of construction techniques using paper, card, wood and plastic, as well as modelling clay and papier-mâché. They can discuss their ideas and evaluate the success of what they have made.
65. **Standards in physical education are well above national expectations.** In dance pupils demonstrate good skills in performing to music, showing good ability to communicate and express ideas. Years 1 and 2 pupils demonstrate good gymnastic skills in moving with control and speed when practising rolls and putting together a sequence.
66. Teaching is very good. Instructions are clear and demonstration provides a good model for pupils. Good brisk pace and activities keeps pupils involved, enjoying the lesson.
67. The physical education curriculum has great strengths in swimming and games. All pupils have weekly swimming lessons and achieve at well above average levels. They develop good team skills and very successfully participate in a wide range of events, including tennis, 'Kwik Cricket', cross-country running and football. There is a good link with Sunderland Association Football Club whose community officer coaches older pupils.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Provision for personal, social, health education and citizenship is very good and a strength of the school. The overall 'family' ethos ensures the school gives high priority to personal development as an integral part of its work. Very good, positive, supportive relationships underpin all activities and learning. Sensitive teaching, respecting pupils and valuing their contributions ensure pupils gain in confidence and self-esteem. The positive effects of this can be seen in the enjoyment pupils gain from attending school. They demonstrate mature and responsible attitudes, working independently or in groups and in supporting and caring for others.

School assemblies make a significantly positive contribution to this curriculum area. Pupils are encouraged to think about issues of right and wrong and to consider others' points of view. Older pupils are given responsibility for taking younger children out of assembly at the end and they fulfil this duty with sensitivity and care.

The school is in its first year of working towards the Healthy School Standard and this initiative is developing well. Already work has been done on healthy eating and exercise. Further development of policies and plans for implementation are under way.

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	1
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2
Value for money provided by the school	2
Overall standards achieved	4
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	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2
The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	2
The leadership of the headteacher	3
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	2

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