

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Billing Brook Special School**

Northampton

LEA area: Northamptonshire

Unique reference number: 122164

Headteacher: Mr David Scott

Lead inspector: Charles Hackett

Dates of inspection: 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> November 2004

Inspection number: 268534

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:	3-16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	138
School address:	Penistone Road Lumbertubs Northampton Northamptonshire
Postcode:	NN3 8EZ
Telephone number:	01604 773910
Fax number:	01604 773911
Appropriate authority:	Local Education Authority
Name of chair of governors:	Major Robin Dickson
Date of previous inspection:	17 May 1999

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

Billing Brook is an all age day school for children with a range of special needs. These include pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD), moderate learning difficulties (MLD) and pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Pupils' attainment on entry is below and, in many cases, well below national attainment levels. Of the 138 pupils currently in the school there are slightly more boys than girls. Pupils come from a range of backgrounds, many from areas of social deprivation. The majority of pupils are white English with a small number from different ethnic backgrounds and there are a few pupils for whom English is an additional language. The school is run in four departments; lower, middle, upper and a senior ASD unit for pupils aged eight and over. There are also two classes, one in the middle department and one in upper, for pupils with a range of complex needs.

The school suffered an arson attack in February 2004 that resulted in the lower school being unusable and lower school pupils having to move to another building on the other side of the town for over a term. It was only at the start of this term that staff and pupils could move into the new lower school building.

Since the previous inspection in 1999 the school's population has changed and there are now more pupils with complex learning needs.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
21081	Charles Hackett	Lead inspector	Modern foreign language, art and design and physical education
31754	Charlotte Roberson	Lay inspector	
10781	Robert Thompson	Team inspector	Mathematics, religious education, history, geography and design and technology
23412	Alvin Jeffs	Team inspector	English, information and communication technology, personal, social, health and citizenship education and work related learning
20566	Mary Saunders	Team inspector	Assessment, Foundation Stage, science and music.

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## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS</b>	
<b>STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS</b>	<b>8</b>
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
<b>QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>10</b>
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
<b>LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>15</b>
Work related learning	<b>17</b>
<b>PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 1, 2, 3 and 4</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS</b>	<b>28</b>

## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

Billing Brook is a **good** school where the quality of care is very high. Teaching and pupils' achievements are good, as are the leadership, management and governance of the school. The school provides good value for money.

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

- Achievement and the quality of teaching are very good in personal, social and health education and for children of pre-school age and those with moderate learning difficulties in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils' excellent behaviour throughout the school and very good attitudes to learning are fostered by the excellent relationships staff have with pupils.
- Senior staff have overseen the changing role of the school very well but the school improvement plan and decisions on expenditure give insufficient attention to improving pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching throughout the school.
- In the lower school the management and inclusion of all pupils are very good and well supported by links with speech and language specialists.
- There is insufficient challenge in the curriculum and work for older pupils with ASD<sup>1</sup> or more complex learning needs.
- Each individual pupil is valued and benefits greatly from very high quality care and support.

Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. There has been very good improvement in pupils' behaviour and how the school monitors this. IEPs (individual education plans) have also improved as well as assessment systems overall. There have been satisfactory improvements in the work of curriculum co-ordination and information and communication technology but insufficient improvements in the integration of older pupils with autistic spectrum disorders into all activities in the school. Links with other schools have not been sufficiently developed.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	in relation to individual targets in:	
	subjects of the curriculum	personal and social education
<b>Foundation Stage</b>	<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very Good</b>
<b>Year 6</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Very Good</b>
<b>Year 11</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Very Good</b>

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

Overall pupils' achievements are **good**, although they do vary in different parts of the school. Pupils in the Foundation Stage (pre-school) and those with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) in Years 10 and 11 achieve very well. All pupils' achievement in personal, social and health education is very good. The majority of pupils within the lower, middle and senior departments of the school achieve well. The achievements of the few pupils aged 8 and over with more complex needs and those placed in the senior unit for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders are satisfactory. There are no significant differences in the achievements of boys or girls, and pupils for whom English is an additional language achieve as well as all other pupils. The overall quality of pupils' progress in English, mathematics, science and religious education is good. It is satisfactory in information and communication technology (ICT). There are also very good examples of pupils' art work on display and in their portfolios. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the report there will be reference to the three distinct types of special educational needs in the school – Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD), moderate learning difficulties (MLD) and severe learning difficulties (SLD).

cultural development, is **very good**. Their attitudes to school are very good and their behaviour is excellent. Attendance and punctuality are good.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

The overall quality of education provided by the school is **good** and it is very good for all pupils in the Foundation Stage. Staff value all pupils and do much to enhance their overall quality of life and develop their self-esteem. Teaching and learning are good overall. They are consistently very good in the Foundation Stage and for MLD pupils in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is satisfactory overall for the few pupils in the middle and senior complex needs groups and for those who remain within the senior ASD unit. Teaching and learning of all other pupils in the lower, middle and senior departments of the school are **good**. The teaching of communication skills is greatly enhanced by high quality links with speech and language specialists but would benefit from an increased use throughout the school of signing and symbols. Teaching of ICT is satisfactory but under the guidance of the new subject leader is being improved. The curriculum is good, although for pupils in the middle and senior classes for pupils with more complex needs and for pupils in the senior ASD unit there are restricted opportunities to study all subjects in sufficient depth. There are also limited opportunities for pupils to follow vocational courses, although, the approach taken with MLD pupils in Years 10 and 11 is very appropriate in preparing them for the world of work. For all pupils the extra activities and events (enrichment of the curriculum) are very good. The quality of care throughout the school is very good and a major strength of the school. The whole staff team are committed to doing their best to support each pupil as best they can. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. The school has established very good links with parents and the community. Links with other schools and colleges are satisfactory.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The leadership and management of the school are **good**. The headteacher has managed the difficult task of responding to the changing role of the school very well and has secured a dedicated staff team. Together with the head of the lower school he has ensured that pupils have not been disadvantaged as a consequence of the fire that destroyed the previous lower school building earlier in the year. Governors offer positive support and have a well structured set of committees that effectively monitor the school's work. However, senior staff and governors give insufficient attention to linking the money allocated to the school to the further development of teaching and learning and the opportunities for pupils to achieve.

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

Parents are unanimous in their appreciation of the work of the school. They report how much the school has helped their children and that this has had a positive impact on their families as a whole. Pupils also express their enjoyment at being at the school and the smiles on the faces of those pupils with limited communication skills show how happy they are to be in school.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Give greater emphasis in the school improvement plan and the use of the school's financial allocation to increasing all pupils' opportunities to achieve.
- Improve the quality of teaching and the curriculum for those pupils in the senior ASD unit and the few pupils in the two classes for pupils with more complex needs in the middle and senior departments.
- Develop increased use of signing and symbols throughout the school.
- Enhance the links with other schools and colleges.

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

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

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

Overall pupils' achievement is **good**.

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

- Progress in personal, social and health education is very good for all pupils throughout the school.
- Pupils with moderate learning difficulties in Years 10 and 11 achieve very well.
- Children in the Foundation Stage (pre-school) make very good progress.
- In the lower, middle and upper school departments pupils make good progress.
- Pupils in the two classes for pupils with more complex learning needs and those in the senior ASD department only make satisfactory progress.

#### **Commentary**

1. The school rightly places considerable emphasis on developing pupils' personal qualities and the work in personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons plays a key role in this. Pupils' very good progress is demonstrated by their excellent behaviour and their development of greater independence. Pupils acquire an understanding of social and moral issues and the school's achievement in receiving the Healthy Schools Award at a gold level illustrates the very high achievements of pupils.
2. Pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) have achieved very well in external examinations. For example, last year seven out of eight MLD pupils in Year 11 passed entry level certificates in English, mathematics, food studies, science, life skills and technology. Five of these pupils also passed the bronze level of the external course they have followed. (ASDAN) These results are very similar to those achieved by pupils in the previous year. The pupils have also achieved well in completing work experience placements, college taster courses and in achieving the targets in their education plans.
3. Children in the Foundation Stage benefit from very good teaching and carefully planned induction programmes. School records show their improvements and observations of the children show they are settling in very well, listening to the staff and happily engaging in a range of activities. Particularly impressive is their control of a mouse when using a computer and the way all, including those with ASD, can join in group work, for example, when using sticks to tap out their names in the starter sessions with other children and staff at the start of each day.
4. In the lower, middle and senior department pupils are taught well and all make good progress in English, mathematics, science and religious education. Pupils in the lower school make particularly good progress in their communication skills because of the links staff have developed with speech and language therapists. End of year tests in reading and spelling in the senior department demonstrate the good progress pupils make. In mathematics, annual assessments illustrate good progress from pupils who have statements for MLD and severe learning difficulties (SLD). The eight pupils for whom English is an additional language achieve as well as their peers.
5. Progress in information and communication technology (ICT) is satisfactory overall but recent improvements following the appointment of a new subject leader have resulted in pupils now achieving well in lessons. Although, there is insufficient information to make an overall judgement on achievement in art, there are very good examples of pupils' art work on display

and in school portfolios. These demonstrate that a few pupils reach national standards for their age by the end of Year 9.

6. The programme for pupils in the two small groups for those with more complex learning needs is based on providing a less challenging learning environment. There are not the same high expectations for them to achieve as there are in other parts of the school. As a result pupils, although making satisfactory progress, do not develop their skills in English and mathematics at the same rate as pupils in other groups. Similarly the progress of senior ASD pupils is affected by a restricted curriculum and insufficient links with the subject specialists elsewhere in the school. Many of these pupils achieve their individual targets and the whole school targets set but many of these are not sufficiently challenging and at times they are repeated year on year. It is unsatisfactory that both ASD and SLD pupils have no opportunities to take externally accredited courses.

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

The behaviour of pupils is **excellent**. Their attitudes to school and towards each other are **very good**. Their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is **very good**. Attendance is **good** and punctuality is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils feel happy and safe in a school where everyone is kind and 'looks out' for each other.
- Pupils' very good attitudes are nurtured by the excellent relationships there are throughout the school.
- Within a school where moral values are very clearly developed there is also a very good focus on enhancing pupils' self-esteem and confidence.
- The enjoyment pupils have for being in school is demonstrated by the above average rates of attendance.

### **Commentary**

7. Pupils arrive cheerfully in the mornings despite, for many, having had long journeys. They try hard in most lessons especially where teachers plan many interesting activities. Behaviour is excellent throughout the day. Older pupils socialise during breaktimes very well with each other and with adults, and younger pupils play calmly and behave excellently. During assemblies pupils behave very well and when they go on outside visits to shops, the library and swimming pupils show they know how they are expected to behave. Very little disciplining is necessary because routines are well established and levels of trust and care so good that pupils naturally behave well. Pupils do not feel threatened because there is no evidence of bullying and incidents of misbehaviour are very rare. Exclusions are very rare and during last year were not used. Pupils in the ASD unit co-operate well with adults to complete tasks but have limited opportunities to mix with other pupils in the school.
8. Many incidents of pupils helping each other occur daily. Those without spoken language are given a lot of support from their friends. Pupils say they think "this is the best school around" and that this is because they like their teachers and all the adults who support them and they also value their friends. Relationships are excellent and contribute to huge strides many pupils make over time in many important personal skills. Pupils are friendly towards visitors and many will engage in quite long conversations. Pupils have growing self-confidence. This quality is worked on from day one when pupils join the nursery because adults know that children need to be encouraged to have a sense of self-worth without which they cannot reach their full potential. Many older pupils have had hard times in mainstream schools and arrive feeling hurt and vulnerable but they soon thrive in the secure and warm environment where they learn to trust adults and other pupils. Those on the school council love their role and demonstrate good levels of responsibility. In many lessons independence and choices are promoted and

encouraged although there is still scope for teachers to look for even more opportunities for pupils where possible to do things unaided and to use their own initiative even more.

9. Assemblies in lower school reinforce the important skills of listening and joining in as part of a large group. Prayers and songs are carefully chosen to meet the varying needs of all pupils. A good emphasis on respect is always evident. Displays around the school, as well as in classrooms, demonstrate very well the very good ways the curriculum is enriched. Pupils gain an appreciation of other cultures and faiths, for example, Chinese New Year celebrations. Pupils' moral development is well supported; pupils are involved in the setting of class rules and learning the difference between right and wrong.
10. The majority of pupils have a very good attendance rate and whole school figures are above similar schools and good overall. A new computer programme is improving the system for tracking and monitoring pupils' attendance and support from the Education Welfare Service is always sought should any pupil not attend as often as possible. Figures are consistently good, although unauthorised absences were higher in 2002-2003 than might normally be seen because of very small incidents of pupils remaining on roll who did not attend. A few medical difficulties also affect attendance figures. Punctuality is good and few transport problems are reported.

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	4.3	School data :	1.4
National data:	8.2	National data:	2.1

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

Last year's figures as reported do not include data from September 2003 to February 2004 for the lower school as registers were destroyed in the fire.

**QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The quality of education is good overall. Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Standards of care and the quality of support and guidance are very good. The curriculum is good and the ways in which it is enriched are very good. The school has worked very hard to establish very good links with both parents and the community. The links with other schools and colleges are satisfactory.

**Teaching and learning**

The overall quality of teaching and learning is **good**. Assessment procedures are also **good**.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The teaching of personal, social and health education is very good and links very well with the school's very high quality of care.
- The teaching of pupils in the Foundation Stage and MLD pupils in Years 10 and 11 is very effective.
- Often the very good subject knowledge of teachers and the emphasis on practical activities engage pupils in learning effectively.
- In the majority of subjects and areas of the school the planning of what pupils will be taught is good.
- The excellent relationships staff have with pupils and the effective work of learning support assistants has a positive impact on pupils' learning.
- Specialist teaching strategies used to support ASD pupils are integrated very well in the lower school but are not so effective in the senior ASD unit.
- In parts of the school there is insufficient attention to what it is that teachers want pupils to learn.

- Speech and language therapists link very well with teachers to improve pupils' communication skills but the use of signing and symbols is not as well developed.
- The targets in pupils' individual education plans (IEPs) are closely linked to the information gained from assessments.

## Commentary

### **Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 52 lessons**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1(2%)	21(40%)	19(37%)	9(17%)	2(4%)	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.*

11. Teaching in PSHE is very well planned and puts a very good emphasis on increasing pupils' maturity and their understanding of health and safety issues. All the departments of the school give importance to the subject and as a result pupils with all types of special educational needs make very good progress. Very good teaching in the Foundation Stage is giving pupils a very good introduction to the school. They quickly become used to the very high expectations staff have for them to learn. An example of this was seen in an excellent lesson observed for two of the ASD pupils in the group.

#### **A session led by the teacher with a learning support assistant.**

Pupils put on their aprons and were presented with a tray of soil with various forms of vegetation appearing above the surface. A few plastic tools were available. Staff encouraged the pupils to use these to look to see what they could find. This grabbed their attention and both delved into the soil with their hands and the tools. Looks of amazement appeared on their faces when they pulled out vegetables such as an onion, a leek and mushroom. Staff praised them for finding them and supported them in washing the vegetables under the tap. Both pupils showed curiosity in watching staff cut them up, mix stock and cook them in a microwave. The tasting of the end product was thoroughly enjoyed by all, as was the opportunity to plant a seed in a pot to start the growing process again. A lesson that these very young ASD children enjoyed immensely and made so by the highly imaginative and innovative teaching of the two staff involved.

12. Older pupils with moderate learning difficulties benefit greatly from the structure and expectations of the Year 11 tutor. Teaching strategies are aimed at giving pupils a lot of responsibility for their own learning. They are treated as young adults and given many opportunities to develop their independence and have their work certificated by nationally recognised awards. Pupils have a good understanding of their targets and what they need to do to improve and are encouraged to evaluate their own work.
13. Often teachers use their very good subject knowledge to plan work and challenge pupils well in lessons. For example, the teaching of the new ICT subject leader is giving pupils the chance to gain confidence in a wide range of applications. This was evident in a lesson seen for Year 5 pupils where the very good skills of the teacher enabled pupils to quickly learn how to track a story on a screen and use a mouse with considerable dexterity. Planning of work to be covered is again often given very careful attention. The planning of the teacher responsible for art is an example of this. Her subject file shows very clearly how a wide range of experiences are being planned and how pupils' skills will be extended as they move through the school.
14. The atmosphere in lessons is often very positive because of the excellent relationships that exist between staff and pupils. This results in pupils staying on task and very few disruptions because of behaviour problems. Learning support assistants make valuable contributions to support pupils' learning. They are involved in the planning of lessons and, although a few lessons were seen when they were not fully effective, overall they use their initiative well and offer positive support to both individuals and groups of pupils.

15. The previous inspection report recommended that ASD pupils have increased opportunities to integrate with other pupils. Where this is the case in the lower school specialist teaching strategies for these pupils are integrated very well into other teaching approaches. This works very well and ensures that pupils' progress is good. However, in the senior autistic unit the over emphasis on a specialist teaching approach reduces pupils' chances to work with others and learn in different ways. Similarly in the two classes in the middle and senior departments for pupils with more complex special needs it is not always clear what it is that teachers want pupils to learn from the lessons. For example, planning does not show how the frequent trips to a local shopping centre will enable pupils to increase their achievements.
16. The teaching and learning in the lower school is enhanced by the impact of specialist advice and support from speech and language therapists. Staff use this to ensure that there is a clear emphasis on developing pupils' communication skills in the teaching of all subjects. A few staff use signing to communicate with pupils but this is not consistent throughout the school and staff require further training. Similarly symbols are not used as often as they could be, especially in helping pupils to communicate with adults. Overall the quality of teaching throughout the school has improved since the previous inspection.
17. There has also been good progress since the last inspection in the way that the school creates individual education plans for each pupil. Learning priorities are discussed and agreed with parents at annual reviews. Staff then set smaller steps towards these priorities and record the progress that children make over the year. Teachers are clear about what individual children know and can do because many staff are involved in recording learning on a daily basis.
18. The assessment of children when they start in the Foundation Stage is very good. This, together with the recent introduction of a national recording system for pupils working at below the expected achievement levels for their age (PACE), will assist the school in tracking the progress of pupils as they move through the school. However, the introduction of new systems has led to some duplication in recording as teachers also monitor progress against individual targets and at the end of topics.

## **The curriculum**

The curriculum is **good** overall but it does vary in different departments of the school. It is very good for pupils in the Foundation Stage and lower school, satisfactory in the middle school and upper school and very good for Years 10 and 11. There are **very good** enrichment opportunities and activities for most pupils within the school

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Throughout the school the curriculum for pupils with moderate learning difficulties is very good.
- A very good PSHE and citizenship curriculum contributes well to the development of all pupils and has a significant impact on the maturity and confidence with which they leave the school.
- All pupils experience additional activities of a very high quality, which enrich their education and contribute well to their enjoyment of school life.
- There are still not enough opportunities for pupils to be included within mainstream schools or for pupils with autism to participate in the middle and upper School.
- The curriculum is restricted for pupils in the classes for pupils with more complex needs and the senior ASD unit.

## **Commentary**

19. The previous report identified the curriculum as offering pupils a good range of experiences. This is still the case for most pupils, with many elements, such as PSHCE and ICT, having progressed significantly. The curriculum provides religious, sex and drugs awareness education for all pupils and this is well taught as class topics, often with outside experts providing specialist support. Pupils with moderate learning difficulties receive experiences that assist very

well in their social and emotional development. They are taught the full National Curriculum and follow very good externally accredited courses from 14 to 16. The work undertaken, for example, to develop the ASDAN modules is of the very highest quality and delivered with great skill. In each phase pupils are well prepared for the next stage and all leave the school for either a work or college placement. The courses and experiences related to work are good and include good advice for careers and college work. In addition, the local college courses provide a very good 'taster' week on which pupils can base their choices with regard to their future education but there are no opportunities for them to take vocational courses.

20. There is a wide range of clubs, visits and performance activities that enrich pupils' time at the school. Residential experiences are available for most pupils and the outdoor education programme is a good one, well prepared and taught. There is a strong emphasis on drama, which uses theatre visits and performances very well to develop confidence and speaking and listening skills. Amongst many other activities, pupils have recently worked with actors from the Royal Shakespeare Company, played at the Northampton Football Club and taken part in workshops delivered by visiting musicians. They are provided with rich opportunities to meet people beyond the school walls and undertake activities, which they enjoy and talk about with enthusiasm. These are very much appreciated by parents and pupils alike.
21. As part of the school's very caring and supportive practices the two classes for pupils who are vulnerable and need additional care and attention have been established in the middle and senior departments. These are well run by staff, who work well as teams and have the pupils' best interests at heart. However, the curriculum within these two classes is unnecessarily restricted. Visits, while useful, are often repetitive and there is less emphasis on the setting of targets that would contribute well to the development of pupils' key skills, including literacy and numeracy.
22. Work with senior pupils who have autistic difficulties is based on work specially programmed for individual pupils within a very caring environment. A few pupils spend time in a college setting but overall their curriculum is limited, with fewer opportunities for other activities and not enough opportunities for these pupils to work and play with other pupils in the school. Working links between teaching staff and subject leaders in the main school and the unit are very limited and the pupils are taught in a very different environment from their peers. While the use of consistent, highly structured methods is appropriate, opportunities are missed to develop pupils' exposure to situations that will assist in their relating to the everyday world, an essential skill to learn by the age of 16.
23. Overall the accommodation and resources are good. The accommodation for science and design and technology are very good and the school benefits from having a very good sports hall for pupils' physical education. However, the accommodation for pupils in the senior ASD unit is unsatisfactory and fails to provide a positive learning environment. Although, there are two small libraries, both are in need of further development. The new lower school building is good, but there are extremely narrow corridors, which make it very difficult to negotiate in a wheelchair. Although there are sufficient toilets for senior pupils, one of these toilets needs urgent attention to bring it up to a satisfactory standard.

### Care, guidance and support

The school provides **very good** support, advice, guidance and care. Procedures for the health and safety of pupils are **effective**. The school's arrangements for seeking and acting on pupils' views are **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff are dedicated and committed to meeting the varied needs of pupils and ensuring that they are safe.
- Pupils' personal development is given considerable priority and is carefully monitored.

- Child protection policies are very good and close links maintained with other agencies.
- The school council is well organised and has representatives from throughout the school.

## Commentary

24. This is a very caring school, where all adults have great empathy with pupils and work together in pupils' best interests. Routines are well established; adults know what their individual responsibilities are and follow procedures. Training in many important areas, for example, in TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic Related Communication in Handicapped Children), safe physical handling and first aid are regularly undertaken. All staff are committed to supporting each pupil as an individual what ever their very different needs. Governors oversee health and safety very well, including ensuring that regular risk assessments are undertaken.
25. Excellent relationships help promote pupils' personal development. Through the Healthy Schools programme planned topics are covered to encourage the development of pupils' independence in readiness for when they leave school. Opportunities to encourage pupils to gain valuable life skills are a feature of every day for all pupils as they progress through the school. Pupils calmly settle into school because time is taken to really get to know them as an individual. Many outside agencies support the school and links with the health service remain very strong. Therapists include those for speech and language, play and music all make valuable contributions to the support provided for pupils. Close liaison has also been established with the Connexions service.
26. A very experienced senior member of staff oversees pupil welfare across the school and her knowledge and understanding, together with her compassion, mean that pupils and especially the most vulnerable, are very well looked after. She very effectively undertakes her role as child protection officer and ensures that all concerns raised by staff are followed up very well. Effective links with other services support this.
27. There is a large school council. Pupil representatives are voted onto the council from all areas of the school. The council has been enlarged this year to ensure that representatives included a boy and a girl from each area. This was achieved through school elections, enhancing pupils' understanding of citizenship. Their views are listened to by school management and acted on, for example, developing seating in the playgrounds and swings and play equipment. At present the council is conducting a survey of the adequacy of boys' and girls' toilets and what needs to be done to improve them. Pupils are looking forward to developing the council through receiving a grant of money from the school and are also fund raising themselves for various projects.

## Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents and within the community are **very good**. There are currently **satisfactory** links with other schools.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are very pleased with what the school is doing for their children.
- A very good partnership develops from the time initial contact is made with families.
- Very good community links have developed over many years, which effectively support many activities and opportunities for pupils.
- There are fewer links with mainstream schools than are normally found in similar schools but the local re-organisation of schools is contributing to this.

## Commentary

28. Parents trust the school, have great confidence in it and appreciate the way that it supports them as well as their children. They say it goes 'the extra mile' and they are right. Staff throughout the school put in many hours working with and supporting parents. Parents talk of the many benefits they have experienced since their children started at the school. Several show their support and get involved as school governors. They say they especially like the way they feel comfortable in approaching the school and the very good levels of communication. Home visits, including those by therapists who work in the school, are organised especially at the time of annual reviews if families are unable to get to the school. Parents are kept very closely informed about every aspect of their child's progress and are fully involved in annual reviews. There are very strong links with parents of pupils in the senior ASD unit, which includes practical support for the behaviour management of their children at home.
29. Close links with parents and carers are established as soon as pupils join the school. Staff in the lower school, under the skilful leadership of the senior member of staff, encourage parents as much as they can to be involved and learn how they can help their children to make progress. Parents who responded in questionnaires in that part of the school were unanimously positive about all aspects of the school. Invitations to come to school, for example, to a 'bacon buttie' breakfast, help motivate parents to get involved in the school. Parents of nursery age pupils drop in daily and they cannot speak highly enough of the welcome and understanding they receive. Home-school tasks are much enjoyed, for example, families have recently made red combine harvesters at home, which are displayed in school. Family outings, which involve siblings, are arranged. Parents of pupils who join higher up the school also say that they are more than pleased with the school and the way they too are encouraged to help their children learn.
30. The school would not be able to achieve what it does without the very good links it has with the community. These have improved since the previous inspection. Many visits to support learning, especially in social and personal development, are organised for all pupils. The school knows its locality very well and draws many in to support with donations and with their expertise, for example, Park Rangers help during visits to country parks. Local businesses and organisations showed their support after the fire this year and donated many items to help out. Pupils visit nearby churches and National Trust properties as well as museums, galleries, shops and other places of interest very regularly. Visitors to school from the community include the local member of parliament and a police constable.
31. Links with local schools are currently satisfactory. The headteacher reports that with the local reorganisation of schools going on, some links have not been able to be maintained but there are plans in hand to address this weakness. Three pupils from lower school do integrate into a nearby primary school once a week and staff from the ASD unit have continued to give training to a few schools in the area.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are **good**. Governance of the school is also **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher and his senior colleagues have established a staff team with a real sense of purpose for the care for its pupils.
- The changing role of the school is being managed well and staff are being given suitable opportunities to extend their professional skills.
- Senior staff are ensuring that pupils are given a wide range of experiences but there is insufficient emphasis on increasing the achievements of all pupils.
- The governors have developed good systems to monitor most aspects of the school's work well.

- The school does not link its financial allocation sufficiently to school developments and too much money is left over at the end of each financial year.

## **Commentary**

32. There is no doubt that pupils at Billing Brook are well cared for and given considerable individual attention. Senior staff have developed an effective staff team where all staff show real commitment to the pupils. This team ethos has enabled the school to not only survive the trauma of the major fire earlier this year but also continue their efforts to develop the quality of education they offer. The headteacher is ambitious for the school to play an important role in providing for the education of pupils throughout the local education authority and, as part of this, is planning for new classes to be established that will be attached to mainstream schools.
33. The headteacher has managed very well the requirement for the school to take pupils with a wider range of special educational needs than its original brief. Additional resources and adaptations to existing facilities have been made and the new lower school building, with the exception of the width of the corridors, is very well suited to the varying needs of its pupils. Staff have been given good opportunities to develop their skills and have attended courses on specialist teaching approaches, such as for the teaching of ASD pupils, as well as a course to support staff and pupils if the physical handling of pupils is necessary.
34. Senior staff want pupils to have very positive experiences and this is reflected in the many out of school events they provide for pupils. They also give equal importance in supporting families and carers in the management of the children. However, less emphasis is placed on ensuring that pupils are achieving to their maximum. With the exception of MLD pupils in Years 10 and 11, other pupils have no opportunities to take externally awarded courses. Insufficient attention is given to ensuring that the curriculum and the quality of teaching are of a consistently high standard throughout the school. For example, although the decision was made to educate pupils with more complex needs in two small groups there is insufficient attention given to evaluating how effective this is in terms of pupils' achievements. Likewise the management of the senior autistic disorders department, whilst satisfactory overall, is not analysing or monitoring pupils' achievements with a view to looking at the strengths and weaknesses of what it provides.
35. Governors are very committed to supporting the school and the minutes of their meetings reflect their awareness of much of the school's work. They invite staff to make presentations about their areas of responsibility and take full responsibility for producing an annual report for parents. Like senior staff, though, they give insufficient attention to monitoring pupils' achievements. They do consider school targets but as these only give basic details of pupils' achievements they are not able to identify how well pupils with different special needs are achieving.
36. The school has used its financial allocation well to develop its resources, including its playgrounds and sports barn. However, in the last two years money allocated specifically for the pupils in school has not been spent, leaving large underspends in both years. The budget set for this year shows a continuing surplus of money. This is unsatisfactory when there are areas in the school, such as the senior ASD unit and boys' toilets that need immediate improvement. In addition, the school development plan does not show how each priority for development will be funded and subject development plans also lack details of the finance needed for them.

## Financial information

### *Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004*

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	1,764,069	Balance from previous year	137,990
Total expenditure	1,589,525	Balance carried forward to the next	174,540
Expenditure per pupil	11,518		

## Work Related Learning

Provision for work related learning is **very good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good work related environment established in the Years 10 and 11 classrooms.
- Positive links with the Connexions service supports pupils' preparation for life after school well.
- Very good work experience opportunities are well linked to opportunities to accredit pupils' achievement.
- Pupils can sample being in a college through well organised 'taster' courses but there are no opportunities for pupils to follow vocational courses.

## Commentary

37. The expectations for pupils in the Years 10 and 11 classrooms are very high and appropriate in supporting their understanding of what is expected in a workplace environment. Pupils have daily responsibilities, such as feeding the fish or recording temperatures. They independently register themselves and use clipboards, which have instructions to carry out and record their tasks, supporting each other as necessary. Work is very well linked to the challenges of the ASDAN programme.
38. Both Connexions officers attached to the school are developing their roles and keen to be as effective as possible. This has included one of the team spending time in the senior unit for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders to help her understand the needs of these pupils. Staff, with the support of the Connexions officers, have organised a 'Careers Fair' where parents were able to meet a range of work providers and representatives from local colleges.
39. Work experience opportunities are very well planned and linked very well to forms of accreditation, including the ASDAN award. Pupils go to a range of work places and all complete diaries of their experiences. Staff work closely with employers to ensure that there is a focus on the key skills pupils will need in employment. These experiences, though, are only available for pupils in the senior department and as a result senior pupils within the autistic spectrum disorders unit are not able to experience the same opportunities.
40. Records show that pupils enjoy and benefit from 'Taster' courses at college. These prepare them well and contribute to decisions as to which courses will be suitable then they leave school. However, there are no vocational courses offered to pupils during their last two years in school. Although work in subjects such as design and technology give pupils practical experiences, other opportunities to follow vocational and practical courses are limited.

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

### AREAS OF LEARNING IN FOUNDATION STAGE

*Five lessons and other aspects of the school day were observed. Pupils' work was analysed and discussions held with key staff.*

Provision in the Foundation Stage is **very good**

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Structured teaching approaches and careful planning are used very effectively to enable children to achieve very well in all required areas of learning.
- Very good facilities and resources are well organised to support the teaching.
- All staff contribute to detailed assessments of the progress made by children towards their targets.
- Details of children's progress are regularly shared with parents.
- The limited use of signing by staff leads to a few missed opportunities in learning.

#### Commentary

41. Teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage are very good and the school has made very good progress in developing this provision since the last inspection. Children make very good progress because planning allows them to experience all the areas of learning through guided play activities. Structured teaching approaches to meet the needs of those children with autistic spectrum disorders enable them to participate in activities and co-operate with adults. A few pupils are introduced to individual schedules using pictures and symbols. They are well supported in using these to move from one activity to another and complete individual tasks.
42. As part of their **personal and social development** most children quickly learn that the school environment is safe and secure. They separate happily from their parents. The skilled support of staff enables them to co-operate in circle time activities and to tolerate other children playing near to them. The development of **communication, language and literacy** is a priority. Children learn to look at books with an adult and to point at pictures. A few are taught to exchange a picture in order to request a toy and are assisted in following simple instructions. They are encouraged to make choices by pointing or with a single word in their play. Turn taking activities with adults using eye-contact, sounds and physical games are encouraged on a daily basis. Signing is used but the school has recognised the need to increase the use of signing by staff.
43. In circle time, individual tasks and in play children learn to join in number rhymes, sort and identify colours and to count by rote. Most can match number symbols and count 3 objects. Enthusiastic and imaginative teaching encourages the children to develop an interest in the world around them. They explore the texture of sand, handle and cut vegetables and watch balls on a ball run. Opportunities are planned to use the computer and children enjoy making pictures by clicking on shapes and colours. **Creative development** is encouraged through listening and choosing musical instruments. Children show delight and absorption in squeezing paint and selecting colours. They learn to stick with little help and to make marks with paint and crayons. Resources are very good to support all these activities and the environment is well organised to enable children to move between a well equipped play space and a distraction free area for more directed activities with an adult.
44. Planned opportunities for **physical development** are very good with children going swimming and using community play facilities in order to extend their skills. Bikes and small climbing apparatus are provided and there are plans to restore the fenced external area damaged in the fire so that children have free access between classrooms and outside.

45. All staff working in the Foundation Stage help to record the progress of the children on a day to day basis. This information is used effectively to set targets in discussion with parents once the children have settled into school. Links with parents are very effective and they are pleased with the progress that their children make.

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

### **ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

*French is only taught to pupils in the middle school department in Year 7, all other pupils are disapplied from taking the subject. There is insufficient evidence to make an overall judgement on the provision for French. Ten English lessons were observed throughout the school, together with discussions with pupils of all ages and a detailed scrutiny of teachers' and the subject leaders' work and planning.*

#### **French.**

46. An examination of Year 7 pupils' work shows that pupils are learning basic vocabulary, which includes colours, animals, information about where they live and numbers up to ten. Most pupils can recount many of the words they have learnt. For example, a Year 7 pupil spoken to could count up to ten confidently and name a number of colours on a picture he had coloured in.

#### **English**

Provision for English is **good**.

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

- Teaching is well planned, exciting and contributes well to good pupil progress throughout the school.
- Pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties are highly motivated and keen to speak and listen.
- There is inadequate use of signing and symbols for those pupils with the most complex learning difficulties.
- Leadership and management of the subject are good and provide a rich and varied curriculum.
- Staff display insufficient specialist skills in the teaching of reading within middle and upper departments.
- Very good work is carried out with the speech and language specialist staff in the lower school.
- Libraries within the school are not attractive places for pupils to read and undertake research.

#### **Commentary**

47. The previous inspection report identified teaching and progress in speaking and listening skills as good and satisfactory in reading and writing. They are now good in all three strands of the English curriculum. Lessons are well planned and most teachers successfully motivate and challenge pupils. Teachers have excellent relationships with pupils and use this to ensure that standards of behaviour in lessons are very good. This, in turn, assists pupils in persevering with tasks and producing good quality work. Many pupils lack confidence in reading and writing. However, because teachers provide sensitive support pupils have the security to attempt tasks they might otherwise avoid. Thus, in a very good Year 10 lesson on a production of 'The Tempest', the teacher recorded pupils' comments on a tape and engaged them in an informed and enthusiastic discussion, which indicated the considerable amount that pupils understood and had retained from lessons and the theatre visit. Where teaching is less effective, the teachers are not clear about what the pupils should learn and as a result, progress is not as good.

48. In discussion, pupils indicate that they enjoy English as a subject and this is reflected in the good progress made. It is most noticeable in the case of pupils with moderate learning difficulties and becomes apparent in the good results these pupils achieved in accredited courses in English by the end of Year 11. Those with severe learning difficulties do not always receive the same consistent and clear teaching, because the school does not use signing and symbols in a suitably thorough way. The opportunities for success are further reduced by the lack of accredited courses for pupils with complex learning and autistic spectrum disorders.
49. Pupils make good progress in speaking and listening skills throughout the school. Many pupils arrive unable to listen carefully and express themselves coherently. As the result of good attention to these skills in all lessons, they develop well in turn taking, using appropriate vocabulary and speaking to visitors and in performances. Books are readily available in all classes and progress for most pupils in reading is good. However, within a few lessons, insufficiently detailed attention is paid to pupils' reading development, relying too often on reading a story and discussing it. A few teachers and learning support assistants do not look for and systematically develop skills such as phonic clues or deriving meaning from combining the use of pictures, first letter sounds and the structure of a sentence.
50. Achievement in writing is good, but the restricted access to computers as working tools within many classrooms means that word processing and programmes that help pupils predict the words they want to write are limited and as a result opportunities for self-expression missed. In all classes observed pupils were keen to write, complete worksheets and label diagrams. Once again, learning support assistants provided very good support in this.
51. Good developments in English result largely from the good leadership provided by the English co-ordinator. She is a very good role model in her relationship with pupils, the precision of her work and the careful attention she pays to individual needs. She is well assisted by two co-ordinators in the middle school and this contributes well to ensuring that teaching is consistent and the progress made by older pupils is good. Management of English teaching with younger pupils is good, with often very good progress being made by pupils with complex language and communication difficulties. This is assisted significantly by the very good teamwork between the teachers, learning support assistants and speech and language therapy staff. The work carried out by the latter is of a very high standard and clearly achieves very good results for the most vulnerable pupils. Progress is recorded well in all departments and there is good, consistent use of profile sheets and small step assessments to identify what pupils have and have not accomplished.
52. In the middle and upper school library although there are sufficient books they are not well displayed. Good lessons were observed which encouraged pupils to use the library areas and develop rudimentary reference and book location skills. However, the library areas do not lend themselves to active reading and investigation in a pleasant and stimulating area.

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

53. Literacy and language skills are well developed in most lessons. Planning pays close attention to the development of specialist vocabulary and the regular use of questions and stimulating activities to encourage pupils to take part in class discussions, put forward their ideas and demonstrate what they have retained. There are particularly good examples of this in mathematics and PSHCE, where pupils' views were actively encouraged and new vocabulary introduced, practised and reinforced in a methodical way. In other subjects, such as religious education and science, the use of large texts, and tasks involving completing diagrams and tables, assist pupils to develop their literacy skills.

## **MATHEMATICS**

*Six mathematics lessons were seen. Evidence was also collected from looking at pupils' work, assessment records and curriculum documents and from discussions with staff and pupils.*

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers plan their lessons well to ensure that the needs of pupils are well met.
- MLD pupils have good opportunities to pass examinations but this is not the case for other pupils.
- Teachers use a wide range of activities that successfully ensure that pupils can participate fully in lessons.
- ICT is used well in mathematics lessons.
- Good progress is being made in developing the subject through the work of the subject leader.

### **Commentary**

54. Teaching and learning are good in most areas of the school and, as a result, the achievement and progress of the majority of pupils are good. These judgements represent an improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils' good progress is demonstrated by the successes of Year 11 pupils in gaining entry-level certificates in mathematics. Pupils in the two classes for those with more complex needs and pupils in the senior ASD unit make satisfactory progress rather than good because there is an insufficient emphasis on achievement in the planning of the programmes for these pupils.
55. The National Numeracy Strategy has been adapted effectively and the results of the checking of pupils' work are used well to plan work that meets the individual needs of pupils. Teachers plan lessons in great detail and ensure that there are frequent changes of activities. This sustains pupils' interest and enables them to work hard for long periods of time. This was the case in a very good Year 4 lesson where pupils through working practically with an electronic robot (Roamer) were quickly able to understand the concept of half and quarter turns. Due to the very good relationships and high expectations staff have with pupils, pupils respond very positively and their enjoyment in lessons is obvious. Humour, praise and encouragement are used well. Because of this, pupils are keen to participate and this enhances the progress they make.
56. The effective use of ICT in mathematics lessons helps stimulate pupils' interest. This was the case when a group of lower school pupils visited a local superstore. They used calculators to check their spending and when they were in the shop they used the 'shop scanners' to check prices before they got to the till.
57. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The subject co-ordinator is working hard to develop the teaching of the subject to meet the needs of the pupils the school is now admitting. A good range of resources has been acquired and staff have been given good opportunities for further training. The subject planning file is well set out, although the development plan lacks details of how future developments will impact upon pupils' achievements. The subject co-ordinator has recognised the need to find appropriate external accreditation for the work of SLD and ASD pupils.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

58. Mathematics is used well in other subjects. For example, pupils use size and shape well in art and in the ASDAN course Year 11 pupils measure accurately and take outside temperatures for their charts. Year 10 pupils keep their own attendance records in their personal and social

development lessons and by colouring their attendance blue and absences red. They then look for trends by analysing the charts.

## SCIENCE

*Four Science lessons were seen during the inspection. Additional evidence was obtained from samples of pupils' work, teachers' planning and recording, and discussions with staff and pupils.*

The provision for science is **good**

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- MLD pupils make good progress because the programmes they follow are well planned and taught well.
- The achievement of SLD pupils is limited by the lack of the use of signing and symbols to aid their understanding and that of older ASD pupils by the restricted curriculum they follow.
- Pupils are enthusiastic and interested in the practical activities used to teach them.
- The school has very good resources and accommodation to support teaching and learning in science.

### Commentary

59. The school has adapted the National Science Curriculum to provide good plans to guide teachers in what they will teach. This allows MLD pupils and all those in the lower school to make good progress in all aspects of science. While younger pupils learn to connect a basic circuit, older children develop this knowledge to measure electricity and read circuit diagrams. Children learn to name parts of the body then move on to labelling the bones in a skeleton and learning about the function of muscles. They show interest in the work of famous scientists, such as Edward Jenner, and recall aspects of their lives. Older children are encouraged to make predictions and understand whether a scientific enquiry is a fair test. The Welsh Joint Education Board entry-level certificate provides a very good structure for teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11. Eleven pupils successfully completed this certificate in July 2004. The achievement of pupils with severe learning difficulties is limited by the lack of signing and symbols. This inhibits their understanding of the lessons and limits their ability to recall and record information. Pupils in the senior ASD Unit, especially those with greater understanding, have restricted access to the science curriculum, which limits their achievements. There is no final accreditation in place for either of these groups of pupils.
60. Teaching and learning in science is good because pupils are enthusiastic and interested by the practical activities planned for them by their teachers. Younger children enjoy tasting and labelling fruit and learning about electricity by using battery operated toys. Older pupils work with good concentration to dissect flowers and identify the reproductive parts. Pupils achieve well because teachers have high expectations of what they can achieve. Teachers know what pupils have learnt by a good system of assessment at the end of each topic. The level achieved by each pupil working at National Curriculum levels is recorded annually and the introduction of the PACE assessments for those working within P levels will allow the progress of individual pupils as they move through the school to be monitored more effectively.
61. The school has developed a laboratory for older pupils and has a specialist room to support the teaching of science in middle school. This encourages the interest of the pupils in the subject and means that a very good range of resources and displays are immediately available to support teaching and learning. A member of learning support staff has a specialist responsibility in the laboratory and ensures that all health and safety rules are followed. Senior pupils respond to this with a mature approach to their learning.
62. Leadership of teaching and learning in science is good. The subject leader is working hard to ensure that there is high level of consistency in the quality of teaching throughout the school,

although this has not been extended to the teaching in the senior ASD unit. Monitoring of pupils' achievements has identified the need to look at recording of pupils' progress in scientific enquiry. The recent purchase of additional software should lead to increased use of ICT to support learning in the subject. The science curriculum is extended through such activities as science weeks and by visits into the local community.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

*Four lessons were seen and samples of work from pupils of all ages were looked at. Teachers' planning, together with the subject leader's plans and records, were examined.*

The provision for ICT is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The teaching of ICT is now good throughout the school and staff confidence in using ICT is developing well.
- Although over time pupils have made satisfactory progress they are now making very good progress in ICT lessons.
- Pupils enjoy all aspects of ICT and, as a result, their confidence is high.
- Leadership in ICT is very good and is moving the subject forward rapidly.
- ICT is not yet fully used to support pupils' work in other areas of the curriculum.

### **Commentary**

63. The school has improved its provision since the last inspection. It now has a better curriculum, a good framework for assessing pupils' work and is about to install very high quality hardware in the computer suite and classrooms. Many of these improvements have been recent and as a result pupils are starting to make progress at a better rate. These improvements have, and will continue to, contribute well to teacher and pupil confidence in using computers.
64. All teachers and learning support assistants now feel comfortable using the software available and a few staff have developed specialist ICT skills, which set a very good example to all classroom staff. These staff with active support from the LEA specialist teacher, are introducing and demonstrating good practice in the use of interactive whiteboards, control technology and new and exciting software. For example, in one good Year 8 lesson, the teacher used the interactive whiteboard very effectively to provide back-up discussion and activities related to 'The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch', a book read in class. Not only did the technology provide colourful and stimulating texts and pictures, but pupils have the opportunity to fill in missing words within a passage. In another very good lesson with lower school ASD pupils, a learning support assistant used a range of very good teaching skills to support the mathematical development of pupils. One pupil showed excellent progress. He had been too anxious to touch the computer screen but within a few minutes he was doing this and making a number of deliberate movements. This demonstrated that his confidence in computers and his ability to make use of them was beginning to take on a new, and positive, dimension.
65. Much of the recent improvement in ICT has arisen from the high quality leadership provided in the subject by the subject leader. She has very good teaching skills and detailed technical knowledge, which have assisted in the development of a very relevant and imaginative development plan. Although the new curriculum and assessment schedules are only just being implemented, they are very effective models of their kind and indicate that the very good progress now being demonstrated in lessons will develop very quickly throughout the school.

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

66. Overall teachers make satisfactory use of ICT in their teaching. Many class teachers show good skills in the teaching of ICT and this is being supported by the purchase and use of

imaginative programmes. However, the current limitations on computers within classrooms and the recent introduction of a detailed plan of the work means that practice varies from class to class. Teachers vary in the degree to which they feel able to include and teach ICT within their subject lessons. In practice the use of ICT varies from insufficient to very good.

## **HUMANITIES**

*Judgements on history and geography were not made because they were not part of the main foci of the inspection. It was not possible to see a history lesson but three geography lessons were seen. Policies and subject planning were examined as well as work displayed around the school.*

67. An examination of the history documents shows that there is a range of topics covered and good links with other subjects of the curriculum. However, an analysis of pupils' history books reveals an overuse of worksheets, which was identified in the last inspection report as a weakness. In geography pupils are encouraged to investigate the environment as well as develop geographical skills and terminology. In the lessons seen pupils were positively engaged in learning and there were good relationships between staff and pupils. In a satisfactory lesson seen Year 5, pupils show they understand what products can be recycled. In a very good lesson for Year 8 pupils, pupils can compare aspects, such as the weather, of Sri Lanka with that of England. In an unsatisfactory lesson for older ASD pupils, pupils watched a schools' geography programme for too long without sufficient guidance on what they should look for and the tasks given to them after the programme failed to provide sufficient challenge for the more able pupils in the group.

### **Religious education**

*Three lessons were seen during the inspection. Evidence was collected from documents and pupils' records. Discussions were held with staff and pupils.*

Provision in religious education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching ensures that pupils of all abilities are fully included in lessons and achieve well.
- Teachers use imaginative resources well in order to make religious ideas and messages meaningful to pupils.
- Work covered in lessons supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- An appropriate curriculum based on the Locally Agreed Syllabus meets pupils' individual needs well.

### **Commentary**

68. Teaching and pupils' overall progress in religious education are good. The subject is taught in an imaginative way, which enables pupils to learn at a pace well matched to their needs. For example, in Year 2 pupils learnt about 'emotions and feelings' through the teacher using hand puppets and inter-active stories. Pupils in Year 4 learn about other religions and their customs such as Divali and making Diva lights. They act out the stories and role play characters. Teachers use a variety of methods to help pupils understand and learn. For example, they use artefacts with symbolic significance such as incense burners. They also use textiles, costumes and music to recreate religious ceremonies of other faiths. Older pupils have researched on the Internet to find out about Judaism and their customs and beliefs. By the end of senior school older pupils have a good understanding of different religions around the world and compare their customs with Christian customs.
69. Since the last inspection the subject has been developed well. Leadership and management are good and the subject leader sets a good example to her colleagues in the quality of her teaching. Teachers base their lesson plans on the school's planned programme of work derived

from the Northampton Agreed Syllabus. This provides an appropriate range of experiences that meets the differing special needs of pupils. The subject continues, as was reported in the previous report, to support the very good ethos of the school and pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils' understanding of religion is enhanced by imaginative assemblies, particularly in the lower school.

## **CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS**

*It was not possible to see art taught during the inspection and, therefore, there is insufficient evidence to make a judgement on provision. However, it was possible to look at pupils' work, discuss the development of the subject with the art co-ordinator and consider planning documents. Music was not a focus of the inspection and it was not possible to observe a lesson. The planning of work for pupils in Years 8 and 9 was considered and a video of their performance in composing a piece of music was observed. Although two lessons involving senior pupils were seen, there is insufficient information to make a judgement on provision in physical education throughout the school.*

### **Art**

70. There are very good examples of pupils' work on display. These include very impressive African masks, where pupils have experimented using pastels and charcoal and then used the design to make clay models. Excellent self-portraits in the style of Picasso are also on display. The art co-ordinator has done much to enhance the subject and this has included a project involving an artist in residence. In workshops pupils made models of their hands using plaster of paris. The portfolios of art work are very well set out and show work up to standards to those expected nationally from pupils in Years 8 and 9. The art department planning file is exemplary and shows clearly how the subject is managed and will be developed further, including giving pupils the opportunity to take GCSEs.

### **Music**

71. Year 8 and 9 pupils are composing a piece of descriptive music and making use of video and the digital camera. Good awareness of musical vocabulary is being introduced, such as 'beat' and 'rhythm'. Through recording their performances pupils are also able to appraise their performances and look at how they can change and improve aspects.

### **Physical Education**

72. Groups of senior pupils were observed in a swimming lesson using the pool at a local sports centre. In what was a very well planned lesson all pupils are making very good progress in swimming. The more physically able, including a few older boys from the ASD senior department, can swim widths using a range of strokes. Other pupils, through good coaching from staff, are making progress in using their legs effectively to swim in a breast-stroke style. Older MLD pupils are following a course as part of their ASDAN work and complete set tasks such as going under water to collect an item from the base of the pool. In the session seen a few pupils who were reluctant to get into the pool soon gained in confidence and by the end of the lesson happily lowered themselves to their shoulders into the water and splashed around.
73. In the other lesson observed, Year 8 pupils made good progress in developing gymnastic sequences of movement. They can hold balances and either on the mat or on simple apparatus move in different ways. High quality teaching is bringing about these improvements, although the lesson observed would have been more effective if there had been a greater emphasis on pupils being more physically active.
74. Evidence shows that pupils in the senior department also have very good opportunities to take part in outdoor education. Activities include canoeing, orienteering, climbing and caving and taking part in an annual residential trip to an outdoor centre. MLD pupils also take the Duke of Edinburgh award and last year five pupils passed the bronze award. Work is also very well

linked to the ASDAN course and the development of work related skills. In addition the responsibility for managing the outdoor equipment store is taken on very well by Year 11 pupils.

## **Design and technology**

*Four design and technology lessons were seen. Discussions were held with staff and pupils. Evidence was gained from documents.*

Provision for design and technology is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Design and technology skills are developed well because teaching and learning are good in the lower and middle school and very good in the upper school.
- Lower school pupils are not always challenged by the tasks set for them
- Good opportunities are provided to enhance pupils' personal development, literacy and numeracy skills in lessons.

### **Commentary**

75. Provision for design and technology has improved since the last inspection. Teaching is very good in the upper school due to the subject expertise of the co-ordinator and very good accommodation and resources. Lessons are well planned and prepared. For example, in a lesson for Year 9, pupils benefited from the detailed planning of the lesson and the subject knowledge of the teacher to learn how to use a template to draw the outline of a shape and mark off waste material. Pupils are expected to be as independent as possible, especially in the design and technology workshop. Here they collect and return the tools they use and routinely evaluate their effectiveness.
76. Because of the very good relationships in class, pupils behave very well but in the lower school staff do not always challenge and stretch them in their work. For example, in a food technology lesson for Year 2, pupils enjoyed mixing the flour and butter with their fingers but because staff did too many of the other tasks, such as breaking the eggs, there were missed opportunities for pupils to be more independent. In the upper school, the specialist teacher has created a very good working atmosphere. Pupils enter the workshop keen to work hard and many of the skills they learn are of value in preparing them for the world of work. Pupils gain skills in technology such as identifying and naming tools, understanding what they are used for and how to use them. They take great pride in their work and their achievements are recognised through pupils' successes in external examinations.
77. In the design and technology workshop every opportunity is taken to enhance pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Cupboards are clearly labelled and pupils read these when fetching tools and equipment. They use their number skills in lessons measuring, weighing, counting and timing and looking for shapes and designs. The subject is well led and managed and work undertaken in the subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP (PSHCE)**

*Nine lessons were observed at all stages. In addition, teachers' planning was examined and a detailed scrutiny made of the co-ordinator's records and the subject development plan.*

Provision throughout the school for PSHCE is **very good**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- PSHCE underpins the work of all staff within the school and the school deserves the achievement of the Healthy Schools Gold award.
- Teachers identify good opportunities to develop pupils' personal and social skills within lessons.
- The subject co-ordinator demonstrates very good practice and ensures that pupils have a wide range of learning experiences.
- Work in citizenship is still being developed, but has already borne fruit in the work of the School Council.

## **Commentary**

78. Work in PSHCE lessons complements the very positive support provided for pupils' personal development throughout the school. The overall quality of teaching is very good. Lessons are very effective at increasing pupils' knowledge of safety and awareness of issues within society. For example, in a good Year 10 lesson pupils gained a good awareness of the dangers of drugs. Similarly in a very good Year 4 lesson pupils show an understanding of the importance of hygiene. Thus, much good work is carried out on health and safety, the environment and cultural differences and as a result, overall, pupils achieve very well. However, pupils are not always challenged as much as possible and better use could be made of resources. For example, lower school pupils in a lesson looking at the dangers of electricity were not stretched by the questions and the lack of the use of resources made it difficult for pupils to sustain their attention.
79. The external awards the school has gained for work in the subject are thoroughly deserved. Much of the success arises from the very good leadership and management of the subject co-ordinator. She is very committed to the development of the subject and has ensured that all departments within the school have good planning, review the subject well and add to the resources available to stimulate pupils. Lessons often involve discussions and through these pupils develop skills such as 'turn taking' very well. Relating to visiting specialists also add to the development of their personal skills.
80. The introduction of citizenship into the personal, social and health education curriculum is developing slowly, but well. Citizenship skills are noticeable in the work of the pupils on the school council. The inspection team was impressed not only with the Council itself, but also with the way that decisions and recommendations are relayed, by class representatives, to all pupils and staff.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
<b>The overall effectiveness of the school</b>	<b>3</b>
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4
Value for money provided by the school	3
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>	<b>3</b>
Pupils' achievement	3
<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>	<b>2</b>
Attendance	3
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>	<b>3</b>
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	3
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	4
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>	<b>3</b>
The governance of the school	3
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).*

\* In a special school such as this, 'standards achieved' are judged in relation to pupils' individual targets and not in relation to national standards.