

Magdalen Court Victoria Park Road Exeter, EX2 4NU

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Information about the school

Name of the school:	Magdalen Court School
Type of school:	Day
Status:	Independent
Age-range of pupils:	2 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 49; Girls: 58; Total: 107
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 23; Girls: 28; Total: 51
School address:	Victoria Park Road, Exeter, EX2 4NU
Telephone number:	01392494919
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Headteacher:	Mr Jeremy Bushrod
Proprietor:	Mr and Mrs J Jenner
DfES number:	979/6045
Reporting Inspector:	Chris Constantine HMI
Dates of inspection:	4-8 February 2002

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

Scope and purpose of the inspection

The inspection was carried out at the request of the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, who has asked for reporting inspections to be undertaken in all schools that have a number of publicly funded pupils. The purpose of the inspection was to advise the Secretary of State about the school's suitability for registration under the Education Act 1996. The report concentrates on those aspects of the school relevant to that purpose. The report covers the foundation stage and the core subjects of English, mathematics and science in detail.

Information about the school

The school occupies a purpose-built, single site, including a large sports hall. The school has attractive grounds with hard play areas and a separate outdoor area for the nursery. It has grown in the last few years and now has 158 pupils from two to 16 years of age, with roughly equal numbers of boys and girls, most of them in the nursery and the younger primary age group. There has been a significant increase in the admission, at times other than normal transfer, into the middle and upper secondary classes of pupils who have not thrived at other schools. Local education authorities and charities fund some of these pupils. At present there are no sixth-form students. There are 18 pupils on the special educational needs (SEN) register including nine with statements of SEN. There is a wide range of SEN, including some pupils with physical disabilities. There are four pupils with English as an additional language, all with Arabic as a first language.

MAIN FINDINGS

How good the school is

Since it was first registered in 1991, the school has made slow but steady progress. It provides a sound and satisfactory education for its pupils. The school meets the requirements for registration under the Education Act 1996.

What the school does well

- Breadth of choice and flexibility in the Key Stage 4 curriculum are good. Small class sizes and individual tuition, particularly in the upper secondary classes, lead to early access to, and success in, public examinations.
- Achievement and teaching in ICT are very good at all Key Stages.
- The school welcomes and includes many new entrants, often at times other than the normal transfers, and provides well for those who have not thrived at other schools, with encouraging results.

- The support and welfare of pupils and the promotion of an ethos which values individual pupils.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour around the school are good.
- The staff are committed and hard working.
- The school works well with parents and gives immediate attention to any concerns they may have.

What could be improved

- Teaching generally and, in particular, the lessons where teaching and learning are unsatisfactory.
- The length of the very short lessons.
- The variable arrival and departure times during nursery sessions.
- The management of the school including the time and opportunities for senior staff to carry out their responsibilities, including their monitoring role.
- The gathering, analysis and use of assessment data, in order to set targets and monitor pupils' progress against these targets.
- Teachers' planning and subject schemes of work.
- The quality of teachers' marking to improve pupils' learning.
- The professional development and training of staff.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs in the classroom.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

Since the last visit by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI):

- there have been some improvements in the keeping of attendance registers;
- the curriculum for primary-aged pupils has better breadth and balance;
- the library is now tidier, but it is still an under-used resource and more thought needs to be given to its greater use;
- the timing of fire drills is now satisfactory;
- the school has conducted a risk assessment exercise and incorporated components into its development plan, but some younger children still have to use unsuitable chairs.

Standards

Pupils' development up to the age of three is sound and they progress satisfactorily towards the early learning goals. Standards achieved by pupils in the foundation stage are generally satisfactory. Overall, these pupils are making good progress towards the early learning goals in personal, social and emotional development, knowledge and understanding of the world, and physical development. They are making satisfactory progress towards the early learning goals in communication, language and literacy, mathematics and creative development.

Standards in the foundation subjects in the primary years are satisfactory by the time the children reach the age of 11, with achievement in information and communication technology (ICT) being very good. However, pupils' research skills are underdeveloped.

In the core subjects, standards up to the end of Key Stage 3 are generally average, although handwriting, literacy and numeracy are not consistently developed throughout this key stage.

Standards at Key Stage 4 are generally around the national average. Early entry for General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) is a feature of the school, with an increasing number of pupils gaining good, if not usually the highest, grades at various times from the age of 12 onwards. The trend has been for most of the pupils to achieve at least five passes at C grade or better and to retake some subjects in order to gain higher grades, or to study new GCSE subjects during the remaining terms and to pass these at similar high levels in turn. The GNVQ in Health and Social Care has also produced good results in this way. All the present pupils in Year 11 have already achieved at least grade C in English Language GCSE. Together with other certificates of achievement and awards from music, poetry and speech boards, the results most pupils achieve by the end of their time in the school are above average. Although the numbers of pupils in Year 11 have been small, it is clear that GCSE results have improved over the last two years.

Pupils' attitudes and learning

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good, with a few exceptions in the middle secondary years.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. At Key Stage 1 and below, behaviour in all lessons was good or satisfactory. There was some unsatisfactory behaviour at Key Stages 2 and 3.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Pupils show consideration. Older pupils help younger ones.
Attendance	Satisfactory overall, with some poor attendance in the older age groups.

A particular strength of the school is its successful integration of pupils who have not thrived elsewhere, such as those who may have experienced bullying in a previous school. Pupils exhibit a good level of confidence and socialisation, with some reported as having improved greatly since admission. Many state that they enjoy coming to school.

At Key Stage 1 and below, behaviour in all lessons was good or satisfactory. In a few lessons it was excellent. There was some unsatisfactory behaviour at Key Stages 2 and 3, mainly by a few boys, some new to the school, because the tasks set for them were undemanding or inappropriate.

Pupils' behaviour around the school is generally good, and most are dressed smartly. Pupils show consideration for each other, for staff and for property.

Attendance overall is satisfactory. However, in the two weeks prior to inspection, attendance was lower than normal, especially at Key Stage 4. This was because a small number of secondary age pupils, with a history of low or non-attendance at other schools, recorded extremely poor attendance.

Punctuality at the start of lessons is good.

Teaching and learning

Teaching of pupils	Aged 3 to 5	Aged 6 to 11	Aged 12 to 16
Lessons seen overall	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Teaching is mostly good in the secondary phase and mostly satisfactory in the primary and early years but, at all ages, there is a significant minority of unsatisfactory lessons. Features of good teaching include good subject knowledge, well-planned lessons, delivered with enthusiasm and confidence and an appropriate range of activities to challenge all pupils. Where lessons were unsatisfactory, teachers displayed weak subject knowledge and expertise, and failed to accommodate individual needs and the wide range of abilities present. A further characteristic weakness was inadequate marking, with insufficient constructive comment.

Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory overall but the very short lessons limit its effectiveness.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory provision through withdrawal but unsatisfactory support in class.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory overall, with social development stronger than the other dimensions.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils are well supported and cared for.

In the foundation stage, the staff provide a programme of activities, which is generally appropriate, although the learning objectives are not always evident and clear.

The curriculum is balanced in Key Stages 1 to 3. At Key Stage 4 the curriculum is flexible, including a good range of GCSE subjects and a GNVQ course. Early entry to public examinations is a good feature.

In Key Stages 2 and 3, lessons of 30 or 35 minutes are limiting for teachers and pupils alike. Teachers have no time to develop pupils' responses during discussions. Pupils have insufficient time to write extensively in class. There is satisfactory provision for pupils with special educational needs (through withdrawal for individual tuition), for those who are gifted and talented, and for pupils learning English as an additional language.

The school has recently developed an assessment policy document. Teachers test regularly and the results are held centrally. However, this data is not used to track pupils' progress across the key stages. Assessment procedures in the early years are inadequate and there is little evidence to show that the information is used to guide future planning and teaching. In Key Stages 1 to 3, the school uses standard National Curriculum test papers for all pupils in the key stage, which are marked internally but not moderated. In the senior school there is a common approach to assessment in the core subjects, which covers the main National Curriculum strands and records evidence, but there is insufficient analysis of this data.

Extra curricular activities, including games and chess, are a feature of the school's provision. They are mostly timetabled at lunchtimes, resulting in high participation rates. There is a wide and flexible range, defined by season and the choices and interests of pupils. Some activities, such as origami, are run by older pupils for younger pupils. However, there could be more emphasis on the learning that is intended for the participants and on monitoring their choices of activities.

How well the school cares for its pupils

The school environment is one in which pupils feel secure and valued as individuals. The school has been notably successful in integrating pupils who have not thrived at previous schools. Staff know their pupils well and the support and welfare of pupils is clearly evident throughout the school day. Pupils under the age of three are well cared for and relationships in the nursery classes are good.

The school has a clear but brief child protection policy with a named point of contact, although there has been no recent formal staff training. There are effective procedures to deal with bullying. Each case is handled well by individual staff. Staff are checked against records of suitability held by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and for criminal police records, but the school has not responded in sufficient detail to DfES requests for more information.

Fire drills are conducted regularly, at various times of day, and their effectiveness evaluated and records are kept. Supervision during playtimes is good. An accident book is kept up to date. There are designated first-aiders on site. Procedures to

identify and control health and safety risk have been initiated. Neither the admissions register nor the attendance register complies fully with statutory requirements.

How well the school works in partnership with parents

The school maintains a good range of communications with parents. A particular strength of the school's approach is the ready access parents have during the school day.

Parents of some pupils in early years' classes bring and collect their children at times other than the normal start and end of sessions. This can be disruptive to learning.

The end-of-term reports are satisfactory.

Parents are invited to a range of school events throughout the year and a small number make valuable contributions to work in the classroom. An active Friends of Magdalen Court School group raises funds.

How well the school is led and managed

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership by the headteachers is good, in developing a strong ethos, which values individual pupils. Management is too informal, without enough time devoted to it and is unsatisfactory
How well the proprietors and the board of trustees fulfil their responsibilities	The proprietors and trustees give good pastoral and administrative support to the school but have not provided sufficient non-teaching time for the head of the main school to carry out his management responsibilities. The admissions and attendance registers are not fully completed. Action is not complete on all findings of a risk assessment.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Systems for monitoring teaching and learning and for developing staff and the curriculum are weak. Gathering, analysing and using data for performance management and for setting targets for both pupils and staff are unsatisfactory.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are generally satisfactory and ICT development has been good. The library is, however, underused and poorly organised.

Leadership is good but management is unsatisfactory. The heads of the lower school and the main school work closely on everyday issues of care and provision for the pupils. They have shown great flexibility in adapting to the school's rapid growth in numbers, and have developed a strong ethos, which values individual pupils. They recognise that a more structured form of management is now required, and to this they

now aspire. At present, there is insufficient non-teaching time available to the head of the main school and other senior staff, which hinders progress. Consequently, systems for monitoring teaching and learning and for developing staff and the curriculum are weak. Gathering, analysing and using data for performance management and for setting targets for both pupils and staff are unsatisfactory. Senior staff certainly have the potential to manage the school effectively, but need time to put the appropriate systems in place and to monitor them. The SEN co-ordinator does not exercise any formal managerial role but co-ordinates the provision informally.

The staff is well balanced in terms of age and experience. The deployment of staff is generally appropriate, except where they are teaching outside their specialist subject or age group. Better staff development and training are required, including elements for the most senior staff and for national strategies and initiatives.

Resources are generally satisfactory. The library is, however, underused, largely because books are outdated and shelves poorly labelled, and it is inaccessible when locked or used for tuition. The school could make more effective use of technology to record and analyse data.

The premises are appropriate and the purpose-built accommodation supports learning satisfactorily, except where rooms are too small for groups or furniture is inappropriate. A risk assessment and health and safety audit was conducted. In science recommendations have been followed. Those for the design and technology room have yet to be acted on.

Parents' and carers' views of the school

What pleases parents most	What some parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the positive ethos and high expectations of the school • the approachability and caring attitude of staff • the progress made by pupils, who like coming to school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • homework • leadership and management • information about how their children are getting on

Overall most comments were very positive. The amount of homework set concerned about ten per cent of parents, as did the school's management, and information about how pupils were getting on, but to a lesser degree.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

GCSE results have improved over the last two years, and the practice of entering pupils selectively early is working well. Pupils have generally achieved at least five good but not the highest grades in their last three years at the school. The GNVQ in health and social care has also produced good results in this way. All the present pupils in Year 11 have already achieved at least grade C in English Language GCSE. Numbers entered are small as yet, but larger numbers of pupils in the middle secondary years are already taking early examinations with a good degree of success. However, the school does not record pupils' results and achievements systematically enough so as to be able to set whole-school targets and then track trends in achievement.

Standards at Key Stage 4, as seen in lessons, are generally at around the national average. The small numbers of pupils in Key Stage 4 and the late transfer of most of them into the school, sometimes without detailed records from previous schools, make it difficult to give an overall judgement on their progress and achievement. However, the individual and small-group tuition they receive does enable a proportion of them to do well and to achieve above what had previously been expected of them, for example in English lessons and in smaller groups in modern foreign languages where standards seen were above average.

National Curriculum test papers have been used to test all pupils in the relevant classes, not just those at the end of the key stages. The papers have been marked internally but not moderated and not submitted. Parents have been informed of the levels awarded by the school. There were too few pupils at the end of each key stage in 2000 and 2001 to publish the results in this report.

In the core subjects, standards up to the end of Key Stage 3 are generally average. In English, pupils do well in public examinations such as English Speaking Board, Guildhall School of Music and Drama and Poetry Society, but a significant minority is underachieving in lessons. Standards of handwriting vary across and within classes; there is no clear progression in the development of a clear and consistent style. In mathematics where pupils focus on quantity of work rather than quality, progress is unsatisfactory. In science pupils' levels of knowledge are adequate and sometimes good; though some present their work unsatisfactorily.

There are insufficient planned opportunities for pupils to apply their skills, particularly of literacy and numeracy. An exception was provided by a teacher who used work on 'our favourites' to reinforce pupils' phonic knowledge and counting skills. Pupils make at least satisfactory and in some cases good progress with literacy in Key Stage 4 in those sessions where they receive one to one support with GCSE course work.

Standards in the foundation subjects in the primary years are satisfactory by the time the children reach the age of 11. Achievement in information and communication technology (ICT) is very good. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to apply skills learned in other subjects and pupils' research skills are underdeveloped in history. In French, pupils are competent in the basic construction of simple sentences and in building an everyday vocabulary. In geography, younger pupils understand about weather and rivers, and older primary pupils begin to develop basic skills in

presenting an argument, for example in discussing pros and cons over building a bypass.

In the lessons seen, standards are in line with national expectations for children in nursery classes and through to the end of the Foundation Stage.

Pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily when working with the co-ordinator out of the classroom, but their progress is slower when in mainstream classes.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

A particular strength of the school is its successful integration of pupils who have not thrived elsewhere, such as those who may have experienced bullying in a previous school. Pupils exhibit a good level of confidence and socialisation, with some reported as having improved greatly since admission. Many state that they enjoy coming to school.

At Key Stage 1 and below behaviour in all lessons was good or satisfactory. There was very good or excellent behaviour in Key Stage 2 English and drama lessons, where objectives were shared and pupil participation was planned. It also occurred in GCSE lessons, particularly the well planned and challenging small group tutorials in modern languages. There was some unsatisfactory behaviour at Key Stages 2 and 3, mainly by a few boys, some new to the school, who were not sufficiently stretched by undemanding or inappropriate work.

Pupils' behaviour around the school is generally good. Pupils show consideration for each other, for staff and for property. Generally, they are supportive of those pupils with special educational needs.

Senior staff follow up incidents of poor behaviour and ask culprits to explain the reasons why their actions were inconsiderate. Some pupils with behavioural difficulties re-offend and sanctions do not always enable pupils to reflect upon the full impact of their behaviour on others. For example, for some minor misdemeanours pupils receive punishments such as writing lines.

Some pupils, through taking a full part in extra-curricular clubs, visits out of school, speaking and listening activities, such as during assemblies, or through the use of ICT, learn to work independently. However, the teaching that is planned in lessons offers little encouragement for pupils to show initiative or to take responsibility for their own learning. The library is an underused resource to support independent learning, being regularly used for tuition and teaching or locked at times. However, pupils respond well to the provision made for them to complete homework and coursework in supervised sessions during the school day and after school.

Attendance

The overall annual attendance figure of 94 per cent is satisfactory. However, in the two weeks prior to inspection, the overall attendance rate was lower at 90 per cent, with the lowest figure of 75 per cent recorded in the Year 11 class. A very few

secondary age pupils who have a history of low or non-attendance at other schools are supported by a local education authority (LEA) or a charity. They have recorded extremely poor attendance this year, being absent for more days than they have been present. Parents of these pupils remain in contact with the school and have requested texts and exercise books from the school to enable them to study at home.

The practice of allowing parents to arrive and depart outside of set starting and finishing times with their children during the nursery sessions is disruptive to learning, lesson planning and to the evaluation of these children's progress.

Punctuality at the start of lessons is good. Some lateness is caused by the unpredictability of heavy traffic in the vicinity of the school at the start of the day.

One pupil was permanently excluded during the past year.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

The quality of teaching is too variable. Teaching is mostly good in the secondary phase and mostly satisfactory in the primary and early years but, at all ages, there is a significant minority of unsatisfactory lessons.

The wide range of quality in lessons seen at each age group in the school is a weakness and overall, while 25 lessons seen were good and 26 were satisfactory, 14 of the 65 lessons seen were unsatisfactory. In the main these poorer lessons were characterised by: teachers working at the edge of their expertise; insufficient planning for the individual needs of pupils or the wide range of abilities present; lessons which were too short; and often where books showed poor marking.

In the early years, most teaching is satisfactory with good sessions seen in craft, dancing and some activity sessions where explanations are clear and help children to learn

In the infant and lower junior classes, teachers help pupils to frame questions, give clear explanations, use well targeted questioning and give opportunities for pupils to apply their skills. Teachers record attainment effectively on individual record sheets. In the top juniors, however, the shortage of time in the 30 or 35-minute lessons makes it more difficult for teachers to develop pupils' learning beyond initial responses. This problem is compounded by the withdrawal from classes of pupils for reading, which frequently disrupts the flow of lessons. It was not often evident in the lessons observed that teachers were planning and adapting their teaching well enough to meet the needs of individual pupils.

In the senior school up to the age of 16, good lessons were seen in English, where teaching is well planned so that individual pupils can meet their learning objectives. This was also the case in modern foreign languages, especially where classes are small and work is individually targeted. Some very good teaching and learning were seen in ICT, with pupils showing high levels of skill and increasing self-confidence.

Most mathematics teaching is at least satisfactory, but at Key Stage 2 teachers spend too much time on one-to-one help to support pupils who are working on individual

programmes. In Key Stage 4, unsatisfactory lessons were characterised by too narrow a range of teaching styles and lack of challenge for pupils of different abilities.

In science, teaching is mostly satisfactory. At times, however, although classes are small, the teachers do not target the work carefully enough at individual pupils and exposition and whole class activities predominate. Work in exercise books is too frequently copied from the blackboard. Thus, marking is often therefore restricted to comment on spelling, presentation and neatness, with limited comment on pupils' real level of skill, knowledge or understanding in the work.

At the foundation stage, pupils' learning is generally good. They are keen to explore new experiences and participate in practical activities. Good learning was exemplified in one class, where the teacher planned for pupils to develop independence by organising data on a tally chart. Effective learning was seen in discussions in class and when pupils were allowed to apply skills, for example in design and technology and ICT, but this was not so evident in history or geography lessons. There was some good use of parents in lessons, as when a nurse came in to talk about her job to contribute to a class topic on Florence Nightingale; this stimulated pupils and again enhanced their learning.

The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. The programme of support matches the broad needs of the individual pupils, and there is detailed planning. This, however, lacks specific short-term objectives and sufficient information about progress being made. There is regular, informal liaison between the SEN co-ordinator, the head of the lower school, the class teachers and with the part-time support teacher for mathematics. However, class teachers do not have a good working knowledge of the pupils' individual education plans nor of work covered in support sessions; consequently the potential for supporting or extending their work in lessons is not fully exploited.

Apart from the good practice seen in GCSE English, there is little sign of marking which helps pupils to improve their work or of setting of clear targets for future learning. Teachers often merely tick work, with a word or two of encouragement or give it a numerical mark. A significant amount of work was unmarked in any way. The current marking policy does not address these weaknesses adequately.

Staff development and in service training provision over the past two years or so have been limited. The school has concentrated on staff attendance at examination board courses and at the local independent schools' training group, along with National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) early years and education training in the workplace at nursery level. Some teachers have attended specialist training such as first aid, lifesaving, public service vehicle licence courses and ICT work. Apart from a literacy day and training by the local group, there has been little development of teaching, assessment or curriculum planning skills.

In the senior school there is a good common approach to teachers' assessment in the core subjects including science, which covers the main National Curriculum strands and records evidence. It appears that the staff do not have the time or the opportunity to use this information to track the pupils' progress, so that teachers can plan their lessons accordingly and improve pupils' learning.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?

Curriculum

The curriculum is broad at all key stages, and balanced at Key Stages 1 to 3. The curriculum is flexible in Key Stage 4, including a good range of GCSE subjects and a GNVQ, and it allows well for early entry to public examinations, late entrants to the school and the running of small classes, sometimes outside timetabled lesson time.

Much of the timetable for Key Stages 2 and 3 is in 30 or 35-minute lessons. This adversely affects the teaching and in particular it limits the opportunities pupils have to reflect on their learning, work in an extended way and write at length under the guidance of their teachers.

Subject schemes of work take various forms. They are, in general, unhelpful to teachers' planning as they focus mainly on the content to be taught rather than the learning that is intended. The school recognises the need to improve long and medium term planning and this is identified as a priority in its development plan. Some teachers are attempting to include learning objectives in their daily lesson plans, but this is not consistent across the school. With the exception of English and some lessons in modern foreign languages, planning does not generally take account of the wide age and ability ranges in classes.

The provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory, as is the provision for those who are gifted and talented and for pupils with English as an additional language, through withdrawal for individual tuition. While the pupils benefit from the individual support, this is not sufficiently underpinned by the work in mainstream classes. Classroom teachers do not have sufficient insight and understanding of the content of the withdrawal work as well as the overall objectives for each pupil who has special educational needs or is learning English as an additional language.

There is no coherent provision for personal, social and health education, including sex education. It is provided in timetabled lessons for some classes and for others within subjects such as biology and GNVQ health and social care. Careers guidance and work-experience are provided on the basis of needs expressed by individual pupils; again, neither is provided in a fully co-ordinated way.

The provision of lunchtime clubs is a feature of the school. Since these are timetabled, participation rates are high. The range of clubs is wide. Pupils' choice of clubs is not monitored to check balance over time and access in terms of gender. There is insufficient focus on what pupils learn through these activities. Current provision of extra-curricular activities at other times, except for music, is limited but over a longer period riding, ballet, badminton, Ten Tors Exmoor Challenge, enrichment maths and dry ski slope practice are provided. Visits out and visitors to the school are almost always curriculum-related. For example, during the inspection week, a parent talked to the reception pupils about Africa as part of their class topic.

Planned provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is satisfactory but limited. Themes give coherence to school assemblies but these could be better planned to offer time for reflection. All pupils study religious education and this promotes an understanding of spiritual issues from the perspective of Christianity and other religions. Pupils understand the difference between right and wrong but moral development is not included in the school aims in the prospectus. Pupils' social conscience is well developed. They have, for example, raised money for a variety of good causes, local and international. Apart from isolated instances there is little explicit development of pupils' awareness of lives and cultures other than their own.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

The head of lower school, who is in charge of pastoral care, has overall responsibility for promoting the welfare, health and safety of pupils at the school. The support and welfare of pupils are clearly evident throughout the school day and the school takes a pride in knowing all the pupils well and gaining their trust. The school environment is one in which pupils feel secure and valued as individuals. Parents and carers who returned questionnaires endorsed this. The school has had good success with pupils who have been unhappy at previous schools.

Class teachers take responsibility for the pastoral welfare of pupils in their care. In addition, senior male pupils have ready access to the head of the main school, senior girls to a designated female member of staff.

The school has a brief, but appropriate child protection policy. The head teacher is the named point of contact but staff need formal training to update the informal advice they receive.

The school has effective procedures to deal with bullying. Individual cases are handled well by individual staff when they occur. The school has proven success with pupils who have moved to the school because of previous concerns about bullying.

Staff are checked against records of suitability held by the DfES and the police, but the school has not always been precise and timely in its response when DfES has requested additional information.

Fire drills are conducted regularly, at various times of day and evaluated. Full records are kept, including date, time of drill and evacuation time. Fire appliances are regularly checked.

Supervision during playtimes for younger pupils is good. An accident book is kept up to date. There are normally sufficient designated first-aiders on site.

Procedures to identify and control health and safety risks have been identified. This risk assessment focused on buildings, grounds, adventure play areas, sports hall and pedestrian and vehicular access. Curriculum areas that involve high-risk activities, for example science, riding, skiing and school excursions, have been included.

The school generally provides satisfactory individual support and advice for its pupils, reporting to parents in writing three times each year and holding an annual parents'

consultation evening. There is also an 'open door' office policy for children and parents; individual appointments are readily made and there is an evening and holiday telephone line permanently available. The school has recently developed an assessment policy document. Teachers test pupils regularly. In Key Stages 1 to 3, pupils are assessed, using standard National Curriculum test papers, which are marked internally but not moderated. In the senior school there is a new common approach to assessment in the core subjects, which covers the main National Curriculum strands and records evidence. However, the information gained has not yet been adequately collated to show how progress is being made across the key stages and there is insufficient analysis of data in comparison to national standards to allow the school to chart pupils' academic progress. Targets have not been set in terms of progress through national curriculum levels.

Assessment procedures in the early years are inadequate and there is little evidence to show that the information is used to guide future planning and teaching. It is not clear that the staff have the time or the opportunity to track the pupils' progress or to plan and adapt pupils' learning accordingly.

The admissions register does not comply with statutory requirements. During this school year no pupil was allocated an admission number immediately on admission. The precise date of admission and departure is not entered for all pupils. The school is in the process of updating the admissions register by including admission numbers, but here there are incomplete details for contacting parents in emergency or previous schools to obtain records. An ordinary ledger is used in place of a published admissions register, which would provide the correct framework for the information required. The attendance registers do not comply with statutory requirements although their completion has improved since the previous inspection. Codes are not used consistently to distinguish between authorised and unauthorised absence. Many parents inform the school of absence by telephone or in person, and there is insufficient recording and filing of letters and other communication from parents. More effective measures to promote good attendance and to follow up absences are required.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

The returns from the parents' questionnaires provide a mostly positive view of the school. Parents express high levels of satisfaction, over 90 per cent, with the attitudes of their children to school and the progress they are making. The overwhelming majority of parents think that the teaching is good. A small number of parents, about 10 per cent, do not feel that the right amount of homework is set. Much smaller proportions think the school is not well led and managed and that they do not get enough information about how well their children are getting on in school.

The school maintains a good range of communications with parents; these contacts, both formal and informal, include an annual consultation meeting, homework diaries, newsletters and an evening/holiday telephone line. A particular strength of the school's approach is the ready access parents have during the school day particularly through the head of lower school whose office is located near to the main entrance.

Parents of pupils in early years' classes welcome the very flexible arrangements whereby they bring and collect their children at times other than the normal start and end of sessions. However, pupils joining and leaving the groups at varying times of day can be disruptive to learning.

The end-of-term reports provide some useful information for parents about pupils' progress, particularly in subject areas. Not all the comments provide sufficient information on pupils' levels of achievement or targets for improvement. This limits the picture for the parents.

Parents are invited to a range of school events throughout the year including productions, assemblies, end-of-term services and social events. A small number of parents make valuable contributions to work in the classroom by talking about their occupations and hearing children read. There is also an active Friends of Magdalen Court School group which raises funds; most recently their efforts have helped in the purchase of portable stage equipment and improving the acoustics in the hall.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Good leadership is provided both by the former overall head of the school, who recently became the non-teaching head of the lower school, and by the head of the main school. The latter has recently taken full charge of the curriculum, examination courses and the conduct of staff and pupils. As the school has grown rapidly, they have worked closely together and well on everyday issues of care and provision for pupils.

Overall the management of the school is unsatisfactory, although it has recently begun to tackle the management problems that were reported during the last visit by HMI. These problems were in establishing a suitable curriculum, staff development and assessment systems, which are now referred to in the school's development plan. Day-to-day management by the head of the main school is severely hindered by the fact that he has very little non-teaching time in the school day. There is no systematic observation of lessons and improvements in teaching and curriculum development have been slow, in comparison with site and ICT developments, which have been good.

The school's aims and values are explicit but policies have not yet been fully executed. As the school continues to grow, the present entirely informal approach to management is inappropriate. Some of the heads' available time is devoted to overseeing children's behaviour towards staff and each other. However, little time is made available for observation of lessons and the performance management of teachers. Little assessment data is collated or evaluated effectively. Consequently, the school has been slow to set priorities for developing teaching and learning. Achievement targets have yet to be introduced for the whole school. There are no clear criteria established, against which the school can assess its long-term progress. At present, no minutes of meetings are taken and there is no delegation of funds to heads of subjects. Methods of professional training and development, induction of new teachers and consultation with staff are presently informal and inadequate.

The heads have a clear commitment and a wish to improve, and plan to institute a school council and to develop better assessment, consultation and evaluation. None of these is yet satisfactory. The deputy head and senior mistress, who also teach full-time, have not been able to take a proper share of delegated responsibility for other staff and whole-school planning, due to a lack of non-contact time

The SEN co-ordinator mainly supports individual pupils and informally liaises with class teachers. She exercises an informal co-ordinating role in conjunction with the head of lower school, who deals with admissions and is involved in the setting up of Individual Education Plans. This, in turn, leads to informal staff training. The SEN policy is no more than a brief page at present and does not define roles and responsibilities for support staff and class teachers. In-service development does not match the significant rise in the SEN population of the school. There is some good use of the school's ICT resources to enhance the programme of support for individual pupils. The range and quality of resources for SEN overall are adequate.

More formal management systems, measurable and fully evaluated targets and success criteria are required urgently, with time to manage and lead the school being paramount, in order to achieve higher standards and consistency in teaching and learning.

Staffing and resources

Generally the number, qualifications and experience of teachers and support staff match the current demands of the curriculum although they will need adjustment as the school grows. The ratio of teachers to pupils is good. The staff includes a good mix of longer serving teachers and newer colleagues. Some permanent staff and supply teachers are occasionally placed in classes and teach subjects that do not match their particular expertise or experience.

The school's learning resources are adequate for the curriculum and the age range of pupils; most subjects have sets of appropriate textbooks, and pupils are only asked to buy their own textbooks if they wish to annotate on course books in any way. The library provision requires resourcing and updating. The stock of library books needs radical culling. Signs and labelling in the library are generally poor. The library would be more useful to pupils if it were more accessible; it is currently often locked or used for tuition or lessons and needs to be rearranged for modern library use. There are also weaknesses in the provision of class libraries.

Effective use is made of new technology, including ICT in teaching and the prospectus is available on the Internet. There is scope for further ICT applications to co-ordinate assessment data, admissions and attendance registers, for example, or to catalogue resources, including the library.

The premises are suitable and there is adequate play space. The staggering of breaks is a good arrangement and recent improvements to the nursery area garden have provided a good and stimulating environment for these children. Although the accommodation mostly allows the curriculum to be taught effectively, there are still pupils sitting on chairs and at desks of inappropriate size. The school has had attention drawn to this problem in previous inspections.

Furniture in general gives an impression of long usage and some desks are covered with graffiti.

A useful risk assessment and health and safety audit were conducted in the previous year for the premises and accommodation. They covered specialist accommodation for science where recommendations have been followed. The suggestions for the school entrance improvements have featured in the school's development plan. Those for the design and technology room, although apposite, have yet to be acted on. The pillar drill, band saw and the grinding wheel should all have emergency stop installed. The storage of wood next to the door prevents rapid evacuation of the room at any time of emergency. The sink cleansing powder contains bleach and should be locked away when not in use.

There is no science technician. This places a great burden, especially on those who have other senior responsibilities. It also makes it difficult to ensure that all resources are well stored and serviced, and available for use when needed. There is no system of stock control for science books, materials or equipment. A health and safety audit has been made in science rooms. The school should obtain a set of the relevant regulations to ensure that chemicals are always properly stored and handled in line with proper procedures. It would also provide effective risk assessment data for practical laboratory activities.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to bring about further improvement, the school should:

- improve teaching and learning in the unsatisfactory lessons;
- review the usefulness of the very short lessons;
- establish a more formal management structure and give the time for senior staff to carry out their responsibilities and monitoring roles;
- make better use of assessment data to set pupils targets and track their progress;
- specify standard arrival and departure times for nursery sessions;
- improve the quality of teachers' marking and thereby improve pupils' learning;
- improve the support in classes for pupils with special educational needs;
- establish a suitable training and staff development programme;
- address urgently the items criticised in the previous report by
 - keeping fully up to date the school admissions and attendance registers;
 - improving the use of the library as resource for all pupils; and
- take action on health and safety measures identified by HMI, especially the unsuitable furniture for some younger children.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of inspection evidence

The team of six inspectors spent 16 inspector days overall gathering first-hand evidence; observing part or all of 65 lessons, discussing with parents, staff and pupils,

hearing pupils read and evaluating their work. Further evidence was collected from the materials the school provided and from parents' questionnaires.

Information about the school's pupils

	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of full-time pupils	49	58	107
Number of part-time pupils	23	28	51
Total number of pupils	72	86	158

	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of pupils of compulsory school age	46	49	95

Number of pupils with English as an additional language	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on the SEN register
4	9	18

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	1

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	5	4	9

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	4	4	8

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	3	6	9

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15-year-olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	1	3	4

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	5.8	School data	0

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Public funding of pupils

	Number of pupils	Average funding per pupil	Total funding
Five Charities	4	£3,188	£12,750
Nursery scheme	35	£398	£13,938
Placements by LEAs	6	£3,071	£18,423
Placements by social service departments	1		£1,450 for one term only
Total	46	£1,012	£46,561

Teachers and classes

For children under five

Teachers and other practitioners

Number of teachers with Qualified Teacher Status*	1
Number of practitioners with at least NVQ level 3 or equivalent*	5
Number of other practitioners	3
Child to adult ratios for under two-year-olds	NA
Child to adult ration for two to three-year-olds	4:1
Child to adult ration for three to five-year-olds	8:1

**full-time equivalent*

For children aged five and over

Teachers

Number of teachers with Qualified Teacher Status*	7.3
Number of teachers with Qualified Teacher Status*	2.3
Number of pupils per teacher	9.9

**full-time equivalent*

Education support staff

Total number of education support staff	1
Total aggregate hours worked per week	22.5

Deployment of teachers

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	86
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Average class size

Key Stage 1	16
Key Stage 2	15

Average teaching group size

Key Stage 3	19
Key Stage 4	12

Financial data

Annual fees	Day pupils
Five to six years of age	£2,850
Seven to ten years of age	£3,150
Eleven to 13 years of age	£3,750
Fourteen to 16 years of age	£4,350

Nursery: £7.50 per session, £15 per school day

Average expenditure per pupil: £1,630

SURVEY OF PARENTS AND CARERS

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	158
Number of questionnaires returned	80

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
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My child likes school.	75	21	3	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	73	25	1	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	61	37	1	0	1
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	45	42	11	0	2
The teaching is good.	61	35	1	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	53	41	5	1	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	76	22	1	1	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	78	21	0	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	56	37	5	1	1
The school is well led and managed.	49	41	5	0	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	70	30	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	61	31	3	0	5

Summary of responses

There were 14 written comments from parents, of which nine were particularly positive, five made some criticisms.

Issues that concerned parents

Positive comments focused on the positive ethos of the school, the caring attitude of staff and the progress made by pupils. The amount of homework set was the concern of about one in ten of parents and to a much lesser extent the leadership and management, together with information about how pupils were getting on. Some of the responses from parents of the youngest children made it clear that they were not able to comment on some of the questions.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE (NURSERY AND RECEPTION CLASSES)

Standards achieved are generally sound and good in some areas. Overall the quality of teaching is satisfactory. Staff have some understanding of how pupils learn but have limited information and training on the foundation stage. They plan a programme of activities, which is generally appropriate, although the learning objectives are not always evident and clear.

Pupils' learning is generally good. They are keen to explore new experiences. They engage in practical activities and build on their existing knowledge and skills. There is a warm and caring atmosphere in the early-years classrooms. Staff are kind and caring with pupils in their care and relationships are good. Pupils are encouraged to share and take turns during activities. Staff generally set high standards for behaviour to which pupils respond positively.

Assessment procedures in the early years are inadequate and there is little evidence to show that the information is used to guide future planning and teaching. It is not clear that the staff have the time or the opportunity to track the pupils' progress or to plan and adapt pupils' learning accordingly.

Personal and social development

Pupils' personal, social and emotional development is good. They are keen to learn and try new experiences and are becoming confident in choosing their own resources. They generally work well in groups, share, take turns and are beginning to use their initiative. Pupils' generally behave well and understand explanations from staff on the consequences of unacceptable behaviour. Pupils concentrate and persevere at tasks such as completing jigsaws or taking turns in a game. Relationships are good at all levels and pupils express themselves and show their feelings clearly. There was laughter during activities such as dancing when they listened to music and pretended to be 'monsters' or 'butterflies'. Pupils have growing awareness of other cultures and beliefs, reinforced by craft activities. Knowledge of their own culture is soundly reinforced through a variety of activities, including the celebration of Christian festivals.

Language and literacy

Pupils' achievements in this area are satisfactory. They are able to listen and talk, showing awareness of others and responding to their ideas. They enjoy stories and rhymes, which are told regularly and take part in role-play, making up and acting out their own stories, using a satisfactory range of vocabulary. Pupils' conversations with staff are lively and informative and they compare their own ideas and experiences well. Staff are beginning to teach the sounds of the letters of the alphabet and to link these sounds with letters. However, this work is not introduced practically enough, through play activities, and is followed up by the use of inappropriate worksheets. Younger pupils are beginning to recognise their name and simple words around the room, although the examples of script displayed around the rooms are not always clear and consistent. Older pupils write their names using upper and lower case letters and can write simple sentences. Pupils are being taught to read using recognised

reading schemes but some younger pupils are being introduced to formal reading schemes too early, when they are not at an appropriate age or stage of development.

Mathematics

Pupils' attainment in mathematics is satisfactory. They can solve simple, practical problems such as matching and sorting groups of elephants into colours. Pupils use number rhymes, games and mathematical vocabulary, for example knowing the names of two and some three dimensional shapes. Some younger pupils can count and recognise numbers up to ten using everyday objects, but this is sometimes introduced in too formal a way when pupils are too young, using inappropriate worksheets. Older pupils are beginning to solve simple problems, often using Montessori equipment. Pupils recreate patterns for themselves, for example using coloured pegs and boards. They can sort, compare and match objects during activities, for example by building using coloured shapes and large building equipment. However, opportunities are too limited for independent, practical learning or mathematical discovery through play and role-play.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

Children's knowledge and understanding of the world is generally good. They use topic work well to investigate their local and wider environment, for example when studying the animals that live in Africa, their habitats and food. This good work is now being extended, with the help of parents, to include similarities, patterns and changes, with older pupils painting camouflage patterns and younger pupils appreciating fabrics and textures. Pupils can build and construct well, using good commercial and discarded resources, for example making giraffes from egg boxes and drums from food containers. They observe seasonal changes and can identify features in their new garden and outdoor play area, which greatly stimulates their learning. Older pupils use computers to assist their learning in a weekly computer club.

Physical development

Pupils' physical development is good. They are beginning to move with confidence, control and co-ordination. They climb and balance well, using the new equipment in the well designed and equipped outdoor play area. Pupils' show good awareness of space and of each other during dance lessons, responding well to different types of music, creating characters using their imagination. Older pupils use the sports hall for physical development activities and have opportunities for swimming. Pupils have studied topics on food and how to eat healthily. They bring their own snacks for break time and often a packed lunch as well and therefore opportunities for the school to promote healthy eating are limited. There is a choice of food at lunchtime, which includes salad and fruit, but pupils generally seem to prefer less healthy alternatives. The introduction of fruit, plain biscuits and milk at break times should be considered

Creative development

Pupils' creative development is satisfactory. They have regular activities but too many of these are too directed and have limited creative value. Pupils use their senses to explore colour, shape, form and space in two and three dimensions, for example

making textured collage. Some examples of pupils' work are displayed, which gives them a sense of achievement. However, their creative work is not sufficiently carefully mounted or labelled and display techniques are unimaginative. Pupils sing satisfactorily during informal sessions and a planned singing lesson for older pupils; otherwise opportunities for pupils to make music and express themselves are too limited. Younger pupils use their imagination well through role-play; they dress-up and act out their own stories. However, older pupils have very limited role-play and chance for self-expression, because of the restrictions of space and layout in the classrooms.

ENGLISH

Overall, standards are average for the ages and abilities of the pupils concerned. Some pupils in Key Stage 4 are achieving above what is expected whilst a significant minority in Key Stages 1-3 are not achieving as well as they might.

All the pupils in the current Year 11 took GCSE English language early and obtained grade C or above. Pupils do well in English Speaking Board, Guildhall School of Music and Drama and Poetry Society examinations.

Standards of speaking are very good throughout. Listening is good. Reading is sound in the foundation stage and in Key Stage 1. Thereafter, the poor library provision and the lack of class libraries do not promote pupils' interest in books. Handwriting is weak in Key Stages 1 and 2 and presentation is poor in Key Stages 3 and 4. Poetry writing is good, particularly in regularly held whole-school competitions. Otherwise, the standard of writing is satisfactory, overall. Technical inaccuracy detracts from pupils' very good ideas, particularly in Key Stages 2 and 3. Literacy across the curriculum is poorly developed.

Overall, teaching is good in Key Stages 2 to 4. Otherwise, it is satisfactory. The best teaching has a number of common features. It is lively. The pace of the lessons is good with well focused questioning. Teachers use personal examples, so making difficult concepts accessible to pupils. Teachers set different tasks at the right level for different pupils and expect different outcomes, giving pupils a clear rationale for their work. Most importantly, teachers plan and teach to well thought out objectives encapsulating what needs to be learned.

Various aspects of teaching are not strong enough. Teachers do not make clear to pupils what learning is intended, at the beginning of the lessons. Teachers do not always find the time, especially in 30-minute lessons, to return to the learning outcomes at the end of lessons. Teachers move round classrooms, helping pupils, but not always in a focused way. GCSE work is commented on constructively. Otherwise, marking is minimal and commentary offers insufficient guidance to pupils on how their work could be improved. A recently introduced system involves teachers recording pupils' progress in National Curriculum levels, together with appropriate evidence. There is no consistent target setting that is personal to individuals or involving groups of pupils, to help them raise their levels of achievement.

The head of department has a very heavy teaching commitment. Given the constraint of very limited time, management and leadership in English are good. The head of

department regularly meets the other members of staff who teach English and supports her non-specialist colleagues. In addition to teaching every class for English in Key Stages 2 to 4, she teaches the class at the end of Key Stage 1, each week, for part of a lesson and routinely makes classroom visits.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, standards in mathematics are average, with high attaining pupils enabled, with individual support, to study for and pass GCSE mathematics early.

In Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils make unsatisfactory progress in their knowledge, understanding or skills, focusing on quantity of work rather than quality. Pupils with higher attainment are expected to do more work in their exercise books, rather than to think of more efficient methods, alternative approaches or links within mathematics. Work in pupils' books generally indicates insufficient development of a concept before moving onto another one. Work consists mainly of answers, rather than demonstration of understanding of method. Where marked, it is almost all ticked as correct, which demonstrates pupils' understanding of that topic but also a lack of challenge.

By the time that pupils reach the oldest primary class they are attaining standards which are broadly average for their age. Numerical skills are satisfactory and pupils can solve simple problems. Individual pupils show a sound knowledge of mathematical processes but many have yet to fully develop their understanding and do not yet systematically check their work. Pupils in Key Stage 1 can use appropriate mathematical language, for example naming two-dimensional shapes, but are often not fluent enough in expressing their mathematical ideas in discussion.

Most teaching was at least satisfactory. Some good whole class teaching was seen, for example where 6 to 7 year-old pupils made effective use of practical experiences. Pupils had chosen their favourites, either a TV programme or food which they then recorded pictorially. They learned how to handle the data and draw a simple block graph. The teacher planned the lesson well, with clear expectations for learning, including frequent short discussions to ensure that pupils had a very clear idea of what they were doing and why. However, in other primary classes pupils generally worked individually from workbooks or textbooks, so that a wide variety of topics were being covered in the class at the same time. Teachers spent much of their time moving from pupil to pupil to help them understand the work they were doing. This was inefficient, even in relatively small classes and did not make effective use of teachers' expertise.

In some Key Stage 3 lessons, teaching ensures good behaviour through sound knowledge of all pupils and their general mathematical attainment. Care is taken to raise the confidence of pupils with low attainment. In Key Stage 4, pupils are well motivated by early entry for the GCSE examination and are given individual support for this in a weekly after-school session. Most of the unsatisfactory lessons were characterised by lack of challenge for pupils of differing attainment and unclear progression through a concept. The teaching approach offered too narrow a range of learning, particularly for the pupils in the class who would have benefited from different styles. In the some cases there was lack of clarity about mathematical concepts so that pupils were confused.

Teachers regularly test in mathematics during lessons. The head of mathematics keeps a record of each pupil's progress against numeracy criteria, based on termly and other tests, written work and work in class. However, there is insufficient use of the assessment of pupils' knowledge and skills, to ensure that they are always given work at a level that is suitably challenging for their age and ability and that they make consistent progress. At present pupils sometimes are given work that is too easy or work through a textbook, some of which may be at too high a level. The practice of allowing pupils to work through textbooks for homework, without having been introduced to each new aspect, produces more quantity than quality and is ineffective.

Marking by some teachers is regular but confined to ticks, marks and general encouragement. It does not focus enough on specific strengths and weaknesses and only rarely sets targets focused on concepts, which offers pupils greater support in improving. The marking in exercise books is not always up to date.

Schemes of work consist of content without sufficient detail of the key concepts involved or how the content will be taught. They include little opportunity for extended, investigatory or project work focusing on using and applying mathematics. Some enhancement of numeracy was seen in science and geography lessons. However, there is no clear policy for numeracy across the curriculum and the school needs to consider the benefits of using the national numeracy strategy consistently, to improve standards further. While the separation on the timetable of mathematics from data handling is potentially effective, the level of work seen in each was not matched and some data handling is covered within mathematics. The support for individual pupils for some of their mathematics periods does not sufficiently clarify and complement their current classwork but, less helpfully, concentrates on working through the homework textbook, along with work on multiplication tables and some class targets.

The management of mathematics is not well enough focused on the quality of the teaching of mathematics throughout the school, so that teaching is insufficiently well directed and co-ordinated. Better staff development and training, including the review of teaching approaches, is required.

SCIENCE

By the time they start GCSE work, pupils' levels of knowledge are average and sometimes better. In Year 11, at the time of the inspection, pupils' understanding of the solar system was developing along with their knowledge, and most pupils' test results show that they were in line with national norms. In classes at the start of the senior school, the pupils begin to gain sound knowledge of the periodic table and the concepts of metals and non-metals. The pupils have copied notes and so it is often hard to estimate their true understanding of what they have written, but they do provide a good basis for revision later. In the experiments on making and testing limewater, and in other work seen in physics exploring the properties of pendulums, there is a clear use of the investigative skills pupils have gained from earlier work in the junior classes. At the end of lessons pupils could demonstrate through their responses to teachers' questions that they had grasped the principles involved.

By the end of Key Stage 2 standards are above average. Most pupils have good knowledge and understanding of scientific theory together with skills of scientific investigation. In the higher junior-aged classes, pupils have grasped the concepts of mass and weight and can correctly label force diagrams. Other pupils of the same age have an understanding of sound as vibration and some can discuss the principles by which musical instruments work, aided in this by their making such instruments in design and technology. These pupils are in line with and, in many cases, above the national average in this subject by the end of the junior classes. They have used a range of investigative methods and developed an understanding of these that provides a good foundation for investigative work in the senior school.

By the end of the infant class, standards are average, with most pupils understanding the concept of a fair test and the need for it, as exemplified in their experiments with materials that sink and those that float. They have the ability to classify in a number of ways.

In the lower classes in the senior school, teaching is mostly satisfactory. However, at times, although classes are small, the teaching style remains unchanged and does not exploit the potential for more individually targeted learning. At these times, exposition and whole class activity remain the predominant approaches. Work in exercise books is frequently copied from the blackboard; marking is, therefore, restricted to comments on spelling, presentation and neatness, as such notes give little real indication of pupils' real level of skill, knowledge or understanding in the work. Marking is also restricted by the amount of non-contact time available to teachers. Tests on past papers and other paper tests provide most teachers with an understanding of the level of pupils' knowledge and understanding. These are well recorded but insufficient use is made of such knowledge to plan pupils' future work. The current marking policy does not address this aspect of marking. Learning at GCSE benefits from the greater use of coursework, enabling pupils to build on their investigative skills, and of laboratory work, although the school has no science technician.

Teachers of all classes are well aware of pupils' strengths and weaknesses; they try to concentrate mainly on building on strengths to promote pupils' self confidence in science. Schemes of work, at both junior and senior school levels below GCSE, consist of lists of topics in chronological weekly order. In the juniors these are related to National Curriculum programmes of study, and in the seniors to the GCSE syllabuses. They do not identify the means or methods of assessment nor suggest a range of teaching and learning approaches that might help teachers new to the school to plan their teaching.