

INSPECTION REPORT

Saint Mary's Catholic Primary School
Maidenhead

LEA area : Windsor and Maidenhead

Unique Reference Number : 110028

Inspection Number : 182386

Headteacher : Mrs P Prescott

Reporting Inspector: Mrs V A Mason
10598

Dates of inspection: 6 – 9 December 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 706998

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school :	Infant and Junior
Type of control :	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils :	4 - 11
Gender of pupils :	Mixed
School address :	Cookham Road Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 7EG
Telephone number :	01628 622570
Fax number :	01628 680017
Appropriate authority :	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors :	Mr Howard McBrien
Date of previous inspection :	May 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mrs V Mason, RgI	Mathematics Information technology Geography History	Attainment and progress Teaching Leadership and management Efficiency
Mrs J Baxter, Lay Inspector	Equality of opportunity	Attitudes, behaviour and personal development Attendance Support, guidance and pupils' welfare Partnership with parents and the community Accommodation
Mrs V Emmett	Science Design and technology Art Physical education	Curriculum and assessment Staffing and learning resources
Ms G Wiles	English Music Under fives Provision for pupils with English as an additional language Special educational needs	Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Note: Religious education was subject to a separate inspection under Section 23 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and is not reported on here.

The inspection contractor was:

Emmett Education Enterprises
Drumlins
Newtonmore Road
Kingussie
Invernesshire
PH21 1HD

Tel: 01540 661962

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33 Kingsway
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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

- The headteacher provides an excellent lead in moving the school forward and has established amongst staff, governors and parents a strong sense of teamwork and a shared vision of what sort of a school they want St Mary's to be and how they are going to achieve this.
- The high quality of financial planning and management enables the school to sustain good staffing levels and still find money for the school's other priorities for improvement.
- The high quality of teaching in Years 5 and 6 results in pupils achieving good standards.
- The staff provide pupils with high quality pastoral care and support.
- The provision made for pupils with special educational needs is very good; it is well organised and managed and is effective in helping these pupils make good progress.
- The school has established a very effective partnership with parents and the local community

Where the school has weaknesses

- Some teachers' expectations of what pupils in Key Stage 1 can achieve, particularly in writing, mathematics and science and for their behaviour are not always high enough.
- The curriculum for the under fives does not meet their learning needs well enough.

The school has many strengths which outweigh its weaknesses. The governors will consider these weaknesses as a basis for an action plan. A copy of this action plan will be sent to all parents or guardians of pupils at the school.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

After the last inspection pupils' performance in the Key Stage 2 statutory tests fell to below the national average in 1996. The school tackled this issue well and has focused on improving both teaching and learning. Results have steadily risen and in 1999 pupils' performance was above the national average. The results in the Key Stage 1 tests have also risen year on year and in 1999 were much better than in most schools. The school has made much headway in addressing the shortcomings found in its curricular provision and its assessment arrangements in the last inspection, in addition to implementing successfully the national strategies for literacy and numeracy. The most significant improvements have been made since the appointment of the present headteacher, just under a year ago. New approaches to managing pupils' behaviour have been successful, both in lessons and in the playground. Pupils and parents appreciate the new facilities and range of activities now available for lunchtime play. Strategic management and planning are now very strong: priorities for development and improvement have been identified after a thorough appraisal of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and planning to bring the required improvement and meet the targets set is of a very high quality. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality of education provided are now a major strength of the school. The governors are playing an increasingly important part in the school's development. Careful financial planning and management of the school's budget has enabled them to increase the level of support for pupils with special educational needs and these pupils are now very well supported and making good progress. A major building project has resulted in good accommodation for all classes, and current building works will provide better offices and staff facilities. The library facilities are much improved and the new computer suite will very soon be operational. The school staff work very effectively in their teams and, under the excellent leadership of the headteacher, are striving to improve the educational provision and raise standards further. They have made considerable progress in a short period of time and are very well placed to continue to do so.

Standards in subjects

The table shows the standards achieved by 11 year olds in 1999 based on the National Curriculum tests:

Performance in	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools <i>i.e schools with between 8% and 20% pupils eligible for free school meals</i>	Key
English	B	B	<i>well above average</i> A <i>above average</i> B <i>average</i> C <i>below average</i> D <i>well below average</i> E
Mathematics	B	B	
Science	B	B	

The pupils' performance in the 1999 tests for eleven-year-olds in English, mathematics and science was above the average for all schools nationally. The pupils' results also compare well with those of pupils in schools that have similar characteristics. Standards of work amongst the current Year 6 pupils in all three subjects reflect the above average standards in the 1999 tests.

In the 1999 tests for seven-year-olds, pupils' performance was well above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics, notably so in mathematics, where all pupils reached the benchmark level for their age, and over half exceeded this. The pupils' performance in reading, writing and mathematics was much better than that of pupils in similar schools. The standard of work amongst the current Year 2 pupils is above average in reading, but standards in writing and mathematics are not as high. The inspection evidence suggests that fewer pupils than last year are likely to exceed the benchmark level. This in part reflects the higher number of pupils with special educational needs, but also some low expectations on the part of some teachers.

Standards in information and communication technology are average overall, although pupils in the upper part of Key Stage 2 do well in aspects relating to communication and handling information.

Children in the reception year attain the standards expected for their age in language and literacy and mathematics.

Quality of teaching

Teaching in:	Under 5	5 - 7 years	7 - 11 years
English	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Good
Mathematics	Good	Satisfactory	Good
Science	Good	Satisfactory	Good
Information technology		Satisfactory	Very good
Religious education*		N/A	N/A
Other subjects	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Good

* Religious education was subject to a separate inspection

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

Teaching was very good or better in 25 per cent of the lessons seen and good in a further 39 per cent. In the remainder it was satisfactory, apart from one lesson in Key Stage 1 where it was unsatisfactory because activities were not well organised and pupils' inattentive behaviour was not managed well enough. The most effective teaching occurred in Years 5 and 6.

Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Behaviour is good in lessons and in the playground. The oldest pupils have mature attitudes and display high standards of self-discipline. The younger pupils are sometimes restless in lessons.
Attendance	Good. Attendance is above the national average and there is no unauthorised absence.
Ethos*	The strong Christian ethos is reflected in all the school does. Relationships at all levels are very good and the whole school community works with a sense of purpose and a commitment to raise standards.
Leadership and management	The headteacher provides an excellent lead, and staff and governors fulfil their responsibilities well to bring improvement. The school's strong programme of monitoring and evaluation is very effective in identifying where and how the school can do better, and ensures that spending is directed to where it is most needed to bring improvement.
Curriculum	The curriculum for pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 is good and provides pupils with a broad and balanced education. The curriculum for the children under five is unsatisfactory: too little attention is given to the national recommendations for this age group and the children have too few opportunities to learn through well-planned play.
Pupils with special educational needs	The high level and good quality of support is very well organised and managed and ensures that pupils receive the help they need to make good progress.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	The school fulfils its aim to educate children according to Gospel values. Provision for their spiritual development is good and pupils' moral and social responsibilities are developed very effectively through all that the school does. Pupils are helped to understand and appreciate cultural diversity through an appropriate range of activities.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	The school has good levels of well-qualified and experienced teaching, support and other staff and provides good opportunities for staff to up-date their knowledge and skills. Classrooms are attractive and well equipped and books and materials are in good supply, to support both teaching and learning.
Value for money	The school manages its finances very well so that improvements in the educational provision can be made. During their time in the school pupils make good progress and they leave at the age of eleven with above average standards. Taking these factors into account, the school provides very good value for money.

* *Ethos is the climate for learning: attitudes to work, relationships and the commitment to high standards.*

The parents' views of the school

What most parents like about the school	What some parents are not happy about
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They are made to feel welcome in the school and are kept well informed about what their children are learning and of their progress.• The improved behaviour in the school and the values that the school promotes.• The way the new headteacher is leading the school forward.• The help and care the staff give to their children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some parents were concerned about the effect of...• Some parents thought there was too much...

The inspectors endorse the parents' positive views. They also considered the concerns, and find that staff turnover has been high and this has been unsettling for the pupils. However, the staffing is now more stable and the inspection evidence indicates that, overall, pupils are making good progress. The inspectors do not share the concerns about homework; the amount set follows the national guidelines. For the youngest pupils, homework focuses on reading, and this provides parents with the opportunity to help their children develop good reading skills and share their enjoyment of the stories they read at school.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

The headteacher, staff and governors should:

- **Seek to sustain the high standards achieved in 1999 in the Key Stage 1 statutory tests and assessments by:**

Ensuring that all teachers in the key stage have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve and for their behaviour and work rate;

Providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills in English and other subjects of the curriculum.

(references in paragraphs 9, 11, 17, 19, 28, 39, 110, 113, 117, 119, 122, 125, 131)

- **Improve the curriculum for the children under five by:**

Giving more attention to the nationally recommended programme for pupils of this age;

Including opportunities for well-planned play, both indoors and outside;

Providing an outdoor play area and large toys and equipment.

(references in paragraphs 6, 37, 80, 91, 92, 101, 102)

In addition to the key issues above, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

Improve monitoring of attendance registers; (reference paragraph 57)

Develop the art provision so that it makes a better contribution to pupils' personal development. (reference paragraphs 54, 145)

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

Saint Mary's RC Primary School was founded in 1871 and moved to its present site in 1974. The children who attend come from a wide area serving the Catholic community of Maidenhead and Cookham. Priority for admission is given to children from Catholic families; the governors' admission policy permits a maximum of 15 per cent of non-Catholic pupils to attend the school. The school admits children in the term after their fifth birthday, but where funds and space permit, Catholic children are admitted in the term before their fifth birthday. At the time of the inspection there were five children under the age of five on roll. The school is similar in size to most primary schools, with 207 boys and girls aged between 4 and 11 on roll. Overall, there is a reasonable balance of boys and girls, but in Year 6 there are twice as many boys as girls.

Pupils come from a variety of backgrounds, but their social circumstances are typical of those found in most homes nationally. In the current term, only six per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is much lower than the national average. In past years, however, around 18 per cent have been eligible, about the national average. Almost all pupils are of indigenous ethnic origin; nine per cent are from other ethnic groups. Twenty-five pupils come from homes where English is not the first spoken language. Almost all the pupils have some pre-school experience and they enter the school with pre-reading and numeracy skills that are average for their age. The school has identified 58 pupils as requiring additional support for their learning. Their needs are varied, but include requiring support for dyslexia, moderate learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties and speech and communication disabilities. There are 21 pupils at Stage 3 and above of the Code of Practice¹ and four pupils have statements of special educational need.

The school's aims are encompassed with one statement:

"Saint Mary's School exists to educate children according to the Gospel values that are central to our teaching. We aim to provide the best education possible in order for each child to fulfil their potential within a Christian environment"

4 The school's major priorities for the current year are concerned with:

Implementing the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson; improving ICT, science and RE programmes; initiating more rigorous internal annual testing, using data to inform teaching and aid the target setting process;
Improving the ethos of the school by reviewing policies on behaviour and bullying, reintroducing class masses and writing a cultural policy;
Increasing partnership with the local community, parents, St Joseph's parish and St Edmund Campion School;
Improving the environment of the playground and the school for pupils and staff;
Increasing monitoring by governors of literacy, numeracy and science in the school and increasing their knowledge of the curriculum;
Providing time for staff to develop their curriculum monitoring roles, developing the lunchtime controllers' role and introducing the assessment of staff performance.

In line with statutory requirements, the school has set targets for the pupils' performance in the Key Stage 2 statutory tests in English and mathematics:

Percentage of pupils to achieve Level 4 or above in the statutory tests for eleven-year-olds in English and mathematics – Year 2000 : 75 per cent in both English and mathematics; Year 2001 : 89 per cent in English and 85 per cent in mathematics.

Key Indicators

¹ Code of Practice – this gives practical advice to schools and local education authorities about their responsibilities and tasks to ensure that pupils who have special educational needs receive the appropriate help to further their learning and personal development. This is a statutory duty under the 1993 Education Act. Stages of special educational need range from Stage 1, when limited additional support is provided for pupils entirely from within the school, to Stage 5, which ensures that a pupil has a statement outlining his or her needs and shows what additional and specific support that pupil will receive. Stages 3, 4 and 5 involve external specialists as well as staff within the school.

Attainment at Key Stage 1²

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1
for latest reporting year:

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	16	15	31

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Number of pupils at NC Level 2 or above	Boys	16	15	16
	Girls	15	14	15
	Total	31	29	31
Percentage at NC Level 2 or above	School	100 (81)	94 (84)	100 (84)
	National	82 (80)	83 (81)	87 (84)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 2 or above	Boys	15	16	16
	Girls	14	14	13
	Total	29	30	29
Percentage at NC Level 2 or above	School	94 (78)	97 (84)	94 (63)
	National	82 (81)	86 (85)	87 (86)

Attainment at Key Stage 2³

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2
for latest reporting year:

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	21	20	41

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 4 or above	Boys	18	18	21
	Girls	18	13	18
	Total	36	31	39
Percentage at NC Level 4 or above	School	88 (76)	76 (67)	95 (62)
	National	70 (65)	69 (59)	78 (69)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 4 or above	Boys	17	18	16
	Girls	18	12	13
	Total	35	30	29
Percentage at NC Level 4 or above	School	85 (79)	73 (71)	71 (55)
	National	68 (65)	69 (65)	75 (72)

Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions)
missed through absence for the
latest complete reporting year

		%
Authorised Absence	School	5.0
	National comparative data	5.7
Unauthorised Absence	School	0.0
	National comparative data	0.5

Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school
age) during the previous year:

	Number
Fixed period	0
Permanent	0

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is :

	%
Very good or better	25
Satisfactory or better	98
Less than satisfactory	2

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

Under fives

6 In accordance with the governors' admission policy, Catholic children are admitted in the term before their fifth birthday, where space and funds permit. Five children under the age of five were admitted at the start of the current term and work in a class with Year 1 pupils. Their literacy and numeracy skills were broadly average when they entered the school. The children follow the reception year programmes of the national literacy and numeracy strategies. In reading they make good progress, whilst their progress in writing and mathematics is satisfactory. In these areas of learning they attain the standards expected by the time they are of compulsory school age. The planning for the other areas of learning is based on the subjects of the Key Stage 1 National Curriculum, rather than the nationally recommended programmes for children under five. Whilst the children make broadly satisfactory progress in the National Curriculum subjects, too little attention is given to including well-planned play to support their learning. Some aspects of their personal and social development, such as learning to work together harmoniously, and developing and initiating ideas, are not as advanced as might be expected, because they have too few opportunities to learn these through play. Similarly, their physical and creative development would be increased through planned play activities, both indoors and outside.

Key Stages 1 and 2

7 Pupils' performance in the statutory tests in reading at the end of Key Stage 1 has fluctuated between 1996 and 1999, but over this period it has been above average overall. In 1999 the school's results showed improvement over 1998, and pupils' performance in the reading tests was well above the national average, and very high when compared with schools with a similar intake. Pupils' performance in the writing tests at the end of Key Stage 1 has shown a rising trend over the last four years and in 1999 it was well above the average of all schools and also that of similar schools. In mathematics, the results have shown some fluctuation year on year, but, overall, the trend is a rising one, and in 1999 pupils' performance was very high when compared with all schools nationally and with schools whose intakes are similar to that at St Mary's. In the reading, writing and mathematics tests the boys' performance has been consistently better than that of the girls. The school comments that the most likely explanation is that in recent years there have been a number of very able boys in the Year 2 classes.

8 There are no statutory tests in science at the end of Key Stage 1; assessment is carried out by the teachers. The teachers' assessments show that the standards achieved in 1999 were much better than in 1998, and were well above the standards achieved in most schools. When compared with schools with similar characteristics to St Mary's, the standards were very high.

9 Standards in reading amongst the current Year 2 pupils reflect the tests results of last year: pupils' attainment is above average. In writing, mathematics and science, however, standards are lower than those in last year's tests and teacher assessments. Many of the pupils are on course to reach the benchmark Level 2, but the inspection evidence suggests that few are likely to exceed this in these subjects. This is, in part, attributable to a higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs in this cohort, but some of the teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too modest and the work is not always demanding enough for the older and higher attaining pupils in the mixed Year1/Year 2 classes. There was no significant difference between the achievements of boys and girls.

10 Since 1996 the pupils' performance in the statutory tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 2 has steadily improved. In 1999 in all three subjects the results at St Mary's were above the national average, and pupils' performance was also better than that in schools with a similar intake. The comparative performance of boys and girls has varied year on year, showing no clear trend, but in 1999 boys did better than girls in mathematics and science. The standard of work of the current Year 6 pupils in English, mathematics and science is above the level expected for their age, and they are well on course to repeat the good results of last year in the

national tests and also to meet the challenging targets in English and mathematics that have been agreed with the LEA. This is a considerable achievement, since almost one-quarter of these pupils have special educational needs, and reflects the high quality of teaching in the upper part of the school. In the work seen during the inspection there were no evident differences in the performance of boys and girls.

11 Throughout the school pupils make good progress in reading. By the time they leave school pupils read with good fluency and expression and they are skilled in reading for information from a variety of books. The school's policy of early intervention to address pupils' learning needs means that pupils with special educational needs and those who find difficulty in reading receive intensive help early on. This is proving effective, and most pupils are able to read sufficiently well to participate fully in lessons in all areas of the curriculum. Progress in writing is satisfactory overall, but in Key Stage 1 not enough writing occurs and pupils have few opportunities to develop their writing skills in subjects other than English. By Year 6 pupils' writing is more extensive. They write well-structured and correctly punctuated sentences, and some show flair, producing some imaginative work with good descriptive vocabulary. In this key stage pupils use their writing skills in other subjects, for example to write accounts of their investigations in science, but more could be done in other subjects, such as history, to develop pupils' range and styles of writing.

12 Pupils have frequent opportunities to contribute to discussions in their lessons. They are confident, articulate speakers and the older pupils express their views clearly, using technical vocabulary, when appropriate to do so. For example, in science pupils were observed using the correct terminology when they made predictions about the outcomes of an investigation on the separation of particles in a mixture of dry solids. The majority of pupils listen carefully so that they can follow the discussion and join in, but some of the younger pupils do not always listen carefully enough, especially when the lesson moves along rather slowly and their interest is not sustained.

13 In Key Stage 1 and in the lower juniors, pupils have a secure understanding of the number system and are developing their numeracy skills steadily and extending their strategies for mental calculation. Their speed of calculation, however, is sometimes slowed because they do not have a rapid recall of multiplication facts. In Years 5 and 6, pupils' numeracy skills are well developed and they are adept at mental arithmetic. Pupils use their mathematical skills, especially data handling skills, well in other subjects, but particularly in science and geography, where they use graphs and charts effectively to show the results of experiments and surveys.

14 Progress in science is satisfactory in Key Stage 1, but increases markedly in Key Stage 2, especially in Years 5 and 6 due to the high quality of teaching in these classes. By Year 6 pupils are skilled in investigative and experimental work and have a good knowledge and understanding across all the areas of science they have studied.

15 In information technology, pupils' attainment, overall, at the ends of Key Stages 1 and 2, is as expected at the ages of seven and eleven. This represents an improvement since the last inspection, although attainment in different aspects of the work still varies somewhat because pupils have more experience in some areas of the curriculum than in others. Pupils generally do well in aspects relating to communication and handling information. They use these skills well in English, where they use word processing programs - for example, to draft and edit their writing - and in mathematics, where spreadsheets and databases are used - for example, to analyse and explore data. Their skills in other aspects of the subject should increase now that new facilities and equipment are in place and the school can implement fully its plans to develop the curricular provision.

16 In other subjects pupils make at least satisfactory progress, and in the upper part of the school their progress is often good. In most subjects the standard of work seen during the inspection was as expected for pupils' ages, although in some areas pupils did particularly well. In history, pupils in Key Stage 2 have above-average skills of enquiry and are adept at extracting and interpreting information from a variety of sources to find out about the past. Standards in singing are good, notably so in Key Stage 2, where pupils give skilled performances, interpreting the mood of the song or carol well. Pupils' standards of construction in design and technology are good and their completed models and artefacts are finished to a good standard.

17 The high quality of lesson planning, in which teachers give attention to ensuring that tasks are modified to suit the different capabilities of pupils in the class, is particularly effective in ensuring that pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make good progress. This planning is also

effective in Key Stage 2 in ensuring that the brightest pupils are able to achieve to their potential. In Key Stage 1, the teachers plan work at different levels to take account of pupils' capabilities, but sometimes their expectations of what pupils can achieve are too modest and in these instances the progress of some of the older and higher attaining pupils is restricted by the nature of the tasks.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

18 Improving behaviour, particularly at lunchtime in the playgrounds, has been one of the school's major priorities since the current headteacher took up her post. A revised approach to managing behaviour, implemented consistently by all staff, has resulted in generally good standards of behaviour throughout the school day. At lunchtimes pupils play well together and they are enthusiastic about the playground equipment. They understand the need for classes to take turns in using the equipment and playing football, and consider this to be fair. During wet playtimes they organise themselves well and occupy themselves sensibly with games, books and other activities. The older pupils show maturity when they help in the classrooms during wet lunch breaks, organising and playing games with the younger pupils. Staff, governors and a large number of parents comment that behaviour has improved significantly. Pupils themselves comment that behaviour is much better, and that unkindness or bullying occur infrequently. They have confidence in the staff to deal with such behaviour. Their confidence is well founded: although the school has not found it necessary to exclude any pupil from lessons, one pupil was excluded recently, for a short period, during the lunch break, until his behaviour towards other pupils was modified.

19 In lessons pupils usually behave well, particularly in the upper part of the school where they display high standards of self-discipline and respond well to the consistently high expectations of their teachers. They concentrate for long periods of time and persevere when solutions are not found immediately. They particularly enjoy investigative work, and undertake research, for example for history, with good levels of independence. These positive attitudes are a contributory factor leading to their good progress. Younger pupils in Key Stage 1 generally exhibit good behaviour in lessons, but some are not yet self-disciplined enough to remain attentive when lesson introductions are long or when the lessons move along slowly. On such occasions their restlessness can disturb those pupils who are paying attention and want to learn.

20 The very young pupils in the mixed reception and Year 1 class settle well into school and are becoming independent as they get used to class routines and procedures. They participate well in class activities, but some have yet to learn to share resources and take turns. This sometimes results in childish squabbling, particularly towards the end of the longer sessions, such as literacy and numeracy, when their concentration and interest have waned.

21 The school is successful in fostering in its pupils a sense of respect and love for others: relationships throughout the school are very good and are built on a strong basis of mutual trust and respect between adults and children. Pupils respect the values and beliefs of others; this was illustrated clearly in an assembly when they celebrated Ramadan on the same day as one of their own Catholic religious festivals. Pupils are courteous and friendly towards visitors and talk with pride about their school, their work and their interests.

22 Overall, pupils' attitudes are good. They are keen to do well and value the system that rewards them for good work and effort. Merit assemblies, where they receive their rewards, are much enjoyed by the pupils and most are motivated by them to persevere and try hard. Some of the younger pupils, however, do not always take enough pride in their written work and, where their teachers are not rigorous in insisting on high standards, they are sometimes content with less than their best.

23 Pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities in the classroom and around the school. Older pupils readily carry out their assigned tasks, such as getting the hall ready for assembly, garden duties and library duties, and they often volunteer to do other jobs when something needs to be done. For example, pupils anticipated what needed to be done at the end of a wet lunch break and tidied classrooms without being asked to do so. Although younger pupils are not allocated specific tasks they take responsibility for themselves and others and are generally helpful throughout the school day. The personal development of pupils is good overall, although inclusion of some well-planned play activities during the school day would help the youngest pupils' social development.

24 Pupils have a well developed sense of citizenship, demonstrated when they talk about the way they are able

to help the less fortunate through collecting for charities. Pupils appreciate the strong links between the parish church and the school and enjoy opportunities to contribute to the community through activities organised through the church.

Attendance

25 The good attendance rate reported at the last inspection, which is above the national average for primary schools, has been maintained since then. Parents appreciate that regular attendance is important for their children's progress, and most absence is for reasons of illness, although some authorised absence is for family holidays.

26 Nearly all pupils arrive on time each morning but a very small number, usually the same children, arrive late on occasions. Their lateness means that they miss part of the class or whole-school worship, which is an important and significant part of the school's provision for pupils' personal development.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

27 The overall quality of teaching is good. Of the lessons seen, 25 per cent were of a very high quality, a further 39 per cent were good, and the remainder were satisfactory, with the exception of one lesson where activities were not well organised and pupils' inattentive behaviour was not managed well enough. This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection, where there were very few lessons judged to be of a high quality and fifteen per cent were judged to be unsatisfactory. The improvements, however, are not uniformly spread across the key stages. Teaching of the under fives and of Key Stage 1 pupils was mostly satisfactory, although there were some examples of good teaching amongst these classes, whereas in Key Stage 2 the teaching was mostly good and of a very high standard in almost one-third of the lessons seen. This high quality teaching occurred in Years 5 and 6. The success of the teaching in these classes is due to the high expectations that these teachers have of their pupils, in respect of standards of work, behaviour and work rate.

28 All teachers plan their lessons well, basing the content and level of work on what pupils have already achieved. Lessons are well structured, and most begin with a whole-class introduction, where the objectives are made clear to pupils, so that they know what they have to achieve by the end of the lesson. A strength of the planning is the way that the individual or group tasks that follow the introduction are modified to suit the differing capabilities in the class. In the most effective lessons the work is set so that pupils are stretched to the limits of their capabilities. In a mathematics lesson, for example, an investigative task was planned to have several levels of challenge, so that pupils could move on to the more complex stages when they had completed the first. All pupils achieved the first objective, most the next and the brightest pupils tested predictions about triangle numbers until they worked out a general rule for the number sequence. In Key Stage 1 the teachers make more modest demands in some lessons and this restricts the progress that some of the older and brightest pupils in the mixed-age classes can achieve. For example, in a history lesson the tasks required both Year 1 and Year 2 pupils to record their work pictorially; the Year 2 pupils were capable of doing more and could, for example, have been required to produce their evidence in writing. In some lessons, even where the teaching is satisfactory overall, the lessons tend to move along at a rather leisurely pace, and the pupils have no sense of urgency to complete their work.

29 The teachers' knowledge and understanding across the range of subjects they teach are generally good, demonstrated by their clear explanations and the way they are able to answer the pupils' questions and build on pupils' discussions. The weaknesses in art, design and technology, information technology and science, reported in the last inspection, are no longer present. The school, has however, identified the need for further training to familiarise teachers with the new equipment and facilities in information and communications technology, and to continue to develop teachers' expertise in teaching aspects of scientific investigations. Recent in-service training in science has enhanced teachers' knowledge and understanding in this area of the work and this is proving effective in helping to raise standards. In Key Stage 1, however, teachers need to consider further how they tackle this area of work, since some of the tasks are too open-ended for the younger pupils to undertake independently.

30 Teachers in all classes take great care in choosing resources and methods to bring variety to the teaching. Good use is made of video recordings; for example in the mixed reception and Year 1 class the children enjoyed the animated movements on screen of two-dimensional shapes and were motivated by this. In the practical activities that followed, where they had to sort and name some two-dimensional shapes, their progress was good.

31 The National Literacy Strategy is well in place and teachers have a secure understanding of its key elements. In all classes teachers give due attention to teaching phonics, although the work in the mixed reception and Year 1 class is not always taught in a context that the youngest pupils can understand. The teaching of literacy in Key Stage 1 is mostly satisfactory, but pupils are not always given the sustained guidance they need to make good progress in the guided reading and writing sessions. In Key Stage 2 literacy is taught well. A strong feature is the way in which questioning is used to help pupils think more deeply about the text. For example, skilful questioning led pupils in Year 5 to identify the key features in different pieces of writing about the Titanic. They made good progress in distinguishing between, for example, reports by the ship makers and newspaper accounts of the sinking.

32 The National Numeracy Strategy has been introduced effectively. Lessons start with mental or oral work, and this is helping to develop pupils' recall of number facts and developing their skills in mental calculation. Pupils' progress in developing these skills is better in the upper part of the school where the teachers question pupils about their methods and make them explain how they got their answers. This results in pupils learning from each other and widening their own range of methods of calculation.

33 The specialist teaching of pupils with special educational needs, individually and in small groups, is good. Much care has been taken to provide a support programme to suit the needs of the individual pupils and the teaching in the phonological awareness and literacy support groups in Years 1 and 2 is effective in moving pupils forward. The Additional Literacy Support programme for pupils in Years 3 and 4 has been introduced this year. It is taught effectively, although the learning support assistants who teach this programme would welcome training about the specific features of the programme so as to maximise their input.

34 Good liaison between the class teachers and the part time teacher who provides specialist support for pupils who speak English as an additional language ensures that the intensive teaching relates to what the pupils are doing in the class. In the session observed, the teaching was good and effective in developing the pupil's proficiency in English.

35 Homework tasks are chosen to reinforce and extend what pupils have learned in school. Some parents commented that there was too much homework for the younger pupils. The inspectors found that teachers adhere to the school's homework policy and the amount given is appropriate for all age groups, and in line with national guidance.

The curriculum and assessment

36 The school has successfully maintained a broad curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2, which is well balanced overall. It has remedied the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection in design and technology, art, science and physical education. Subject policies and schemes of work were reviewed and learning resources improved. These measures, together with provision of in-service training to enhance teachers' knowledge and understanding of how to teach these subjects, now enable the school to meet National Curriculum requirements in full. Governors are becoming increasingly involved in curriculum review and development. Special attention has been given to improving the provision of information and communication technology, and a well-planned programme, designed to give full cover of all the areas of the programmes of study, is being implemented at both key stages. The total teaching time at Key Stage 1 is now in line with the recommended minimum for this key stage, but it is still slightly below the minimum at Key Stage 2.

37 The school is less successful in its curricular provision for the children under five, and this is currently unsatisfactory. The children are taught in a class with Year 1 pupils and for the most part their curriculum follows

the early stages of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 1. Planning for the under-fives takes too little account of the nationally recommended areas of learning for children of this age, and the children's learning is not supported well enough through well-planned play.

38 Teachers are making effective use of the guidance provided by the recent publication of national schemes of work for Key Stages 1 and 2, and a commercially published scheme for physical education is being followed. The national programmes of literacy and numeracy have been implemented well. The recent introduction, in Key Stage 2, of teaching groups based on pupils' stages of development in numeracy is working effectively; it enables teachers to match the tasks more closely to the narrower range of attainment in the groups. These arrangements serve the brightest pupils well; they are achieving to their potential.

39 The attention given to medium and short term planning is a notable strength of the curriculum and this results in continuity and progression within and across the key stages. Teachers plan work thoroughly in their key stage teams, and regular monitoring of teachers' planning by the headteacher, the senior management team and subject co-ordinators helps to ensure the curriculum is coherent across the school. Apart from English and mathematics where the nationally recommended annual programmes for literacy and numeracy are followed closely, in most other subjects work is planned on a two year cycle. This works well and enables teachers to take account of the mixed-age classes and to make efficient use of a wide range of learning resources. Teachers use the guidance from schemes of work to ensure the learning objectives for each lesson are clearly defined. Excellent attention is given to planning work at different levels to take full account of the range of abilities in each class, although on occasions the work in Key Stage 1 could make more demands on the pupils. In general, however, the planning ensures that higher attaining pupils are fully stretched and well challenged, and that pupils with special educational needs have modified tasks that enable them to make good progress. The additional help arranged for pupils with special educational needs, either individually or in small groups, is well planned in liaison with the class teacher so that the support is maximised. The sessions are well organised, so that pupils do not miss important parts of the whole-class lessons. Teachers are alert to the needs of pupils who do not speak English as their first language and take care to ensure that the reading content of tasks is suited to their level of proficiency in English.

40 The statutory curriculum for all pupils is extended by a programme of personal, social and moral education at both key stages. The scheme of work is wide ranging and the programme is largely implemented in religious education and science. Sex education is not taught in isolation, but is well linked to topics in health education and to religious education, using a programme specially designed for Catholic schools. Some teachers include circle time during the week, where they discuss with their pupils matters concerning behaviour and self-esteem. The school has given much thought to its policy on the management of pupils' behaviour and involved parents and governors in this matter. The intention to introduce circle time, as part of the curricular provision, should contribute well to this aspect of pupils' personal development.

41 The school makes effective use of the expertise provided by visiting speakers to extend pupils' experience. A local organisation known as "Learning through Action", whose tutors use role play extensively, has contributed well to some of the topic work in history, for example when pupils were studying the Ancient Egyptian period. The use of role play by the visiting tutors has also allowed pupils to explore feelings and to develop personal skills in the context of sensitive issues that could confront them both within and outside school. The local police liaison officer visits the school regularly and contributes to the school's programme on drugs education and personal safety. The organisation of a "Book Week", with visits by authors and other adults, contributes to the school's target of stimulating pupils' interest in reading.

42 The curriculum is enriched by visits to museums and other places of interest. Studies, by older pupils, of Maidenhead town centre and of the village of Cookham and the local area contribute well to the curriculum in art, science, geography and history. Use is made of the school grounds as part of environmental education in geography and science. A period of residential experience for Year 6 pupils contributes both to their personal development and to the outdoor and adventurous activities aspect of physical education.

43 Regular after-school sporting activities in football, netball, skipping and general games skills training are run by teachers and visiting specialists, including members of a local professional football team, and involve between 10 and 35 pupils on each occasion. All these activities are open to both boys and girls, although current participation

largely follows traditional gender patterns. The school takes part in the local netball and football leagues against other schools and teams have met with some success. The chess club, which currently involves 10 pupils, was successful in a competition against other schools shortly before the inspection. About 20 pupils are receiving instrumental tuition during the school day in violin and guitar provided by specialist staff from the Berkshire Music Trust.

44 In addressing the key issues for action in the previous inspection report, the school has given good attention to the further development of assessment and recording. Teachers are following the recent national guidance on the management of assessment issued by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

45 As part of their weekly planning teachers review the outcomes of the teaching and learning, identifying points that need further development, or where pupils have achieved well or need further support. This is good practice. The introduction of the “page per pupil” system for recording pupils’ progress is being implemented well, and as a result class teachers maintain a very thorough overview of each pupil’s progress and attainment. Records are well maintained and are passed from one class teacher to the next as pupils move up through the school.

46 A highlighting system for recording the work covered in literacy and numeracy is working well; it is proving manageable and teachers keep up-to-date records of pupils’ progress. Twice-termly formal assessments of pupils’ investigations are undertaken in science. Samples of pupils’ work in science are retained in a portfolio, which is used to provide illustrative examples of the range of investigations that pupils undertake at each key stage and for meetings at which teachers review and moderate the grades awarded by each class teacher. Similar portfolios are to be developed in English and mathematics, with the intention that all teachers should gain a better understanding of the levels that pupils reach and to identify those who are potential under-achievers. A portfolio illustrating the range of work that pupils undertake is being developed by the art co-ordinator as a means of improving standards and enhancing teachers’ knowledge and confidence in teaching the subject.

47 Baseline assessments of pupils’ skills are made when they enter the school as under-fives or at the start of Key Stage 1. The results are used well to identify those pupils who would benefit from additional support, which is provided either in class or in the special withdrawal groups. Standardised reading and verbal reasoning tests, as well as the non-statutory assessment tests issued by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, are used in other year groups to monitor pupils’ progress, and to target further learning support for those who are not making the expected progress. The school is taking good steps to identify pupils who may be under-achieving and is considering the provision of “booster classes”, through a national initiative, for those who might just fail to achieve the benchmark grades in the end-of-key-stage tests and assessments.

48 The school’s arrangements for regular assessment of the progress made by pupils with special educational needs are very effective in ensuring that the targets set for these pupils are relevant and achievable. The involvement of the class teacher, the special needs co-ordinator, the learning support assistants, parents and, where appropriate, external agencies, ensures that all parties are aware of the pupils’ progress and what needs to be done to ensure that they continue to move forward in their learning.

49 Assessment is a developing strength of the school; the outcomes are used effectively by teachers in their curricular planning and by the headteacher and governors to review standards and to target resources. The school is beginning to use the data it is building up on individual and groups of pupils to evaluate the educational gains they make over time, as well as to measure the school’s performance and to decide if standards are high enough.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

50 The strong Christian ethos, reported at the last inspection, is still evident in all that the school does. The school fulfils well its aim to educate children according to the Gospel values.

51 The school makes good provision for pupils’ spiritual development, mainly through religious education and class and whole-school assemblies. Teachers aim to develop in assemblies a quiet sense of occasion, where the emphasis is directly placed on making a connection with God. The statutory requirements for collective worship are

fully met through a range of prayers and opportunities for quiet, personal reflection. Children are encouraged to “talk to Jesus in our minds”. Class assemblies are uniformly quiet, thoughtful settings to the day and they successfully create an atmosphere in which all pupils have an equal place in the school family and belong together. Pupils enjoy assemblies and they appreciate the time for reflection. As one pupil explained, “we are always busy in the lessons and the playground, but in assembly we have time to be quiet and think”. The school makes a conscious effort to create a link between personal and spiritual development through a reminder of the words of Jesus within a variety of contexts. The good links with the church reinforce the values the school promotes. A special mass is undertaken at regular intervals in each junior class and younger pupils experience the liturgy. The parish priest visits regularly and pupils visit the church where they celebrate important festivals, such as Christmas. In lessons pupils are helped to develop a sense of curiosity and consider values, through, for example, reflecting on the beauty of music and their feelings when they hear moving music, but more could be made of such opportunities when pupils study, for example, poetry, literature and the work of different artists.

52 The school has maintained its very strong provision for pupils’ moral development that was reported in the last inspection. Assemblies are an important part of the provision: religious readings are selected to reinforce such values as trying hard, behaving responsibly and caring about others. The notion of a “fresh start” is emphasised. In the day-to-day work of the school, the staff constantly, but unobtrusively, reinforce school values and social and moral responsibility and encourage, for example, kindness and caring and respect for other pupils’ views and beliefs. In some classes these aspects of personal development are promoted through circle time. The school’s intention to include planned circle time in its curriculum for all classes should strengthen this provision, especially for the younger pupils, who are still learning how to work together and share and respect the views and feelings of others. The staff know the pupils very well and do their utmost to help them to develop good self-esteem through praise when it is deserved, the use of a merit system and by ensuring that all pupils are included in class discussions. There is a high expectation for pupils to develop self-discipline, both in the class and around the school. Pupils are expected to respond politely to visitors and to each other. In their own demeanour, all adults in the school present a very good example of how to behave to others. Older pupils are placed in positions of trust, when for example, they take responsibility for the money when they sell crisps at break times, or when they run their own stalls on fund-raising occasions.

53 The provision for pupils’ social development is also very good. Pupils are helped to develop a strong sense of personal responsibility and independence by providing a range of opportunities to take responsibilities appropriate to their age. In Key Stage 1, pupils undertake jobs within the classroom, designed to develop positive attitudes, co-operation with others, independence and responsible behaviour. In the upper part of the school, responsibilities are widened and pupils enjoy the chance to undertake tasks around the school. All Year 6 pupils carry responsibilities that span a number of activities, including helping teachers, looking after younger pupils and helping during wet play. Social responsibility is further promoted when they are encouraged to take care of the library and the school gardens. Independence is fostered through opportunities for pupils to undertake their own research - for example, in history and geography. A sense of initiative is encouraged through homework where pupils are expected to find out information for given topics. High expectations are held at Key Stage 2 for sensible and constructive collaboration in groups and pairs and ground rules are clearly established to enable this to happen. There is no formal avenue for pupils to put forward their ideas, for example through a school council, but the pupils know they are listened to and find it easy to approach staff with their ideas. For example, pupils’ request to use cricket equipment at lunchtime was agreed, providing pupils accepted responsibility for its sensible use. Teamwork is encouraged through games in physical education and through extra-curricular sporting activities and the pupils are helped to understand that in competitive sports they have to accept defeat as well as success. Social and moral responsibility are also developed through the programme of charitable giving and, through the church, helping within the community.

54 The school took appropriate action to address the shortcomings in its provision for pupils’ cultural development reported in the last inspection. Books that reflect the cultural and religious heritage of ethnic and other groups have been purchased and visits and visitors to the school are chosen carefully to illustrate different cultures and cultural traditions. Provision for this aspect of pupils’ development is now satisfactory. Within lessons, teachers make efforts to develop pupils’ awareness and understanding of different cultures. For example, texts for literacy include stories from other cultures and the personal experiences of children of different ethnic groups. Religious education explores the main religions through its multi-faith programme, and pupils are helped to understand the importance of festivals within each of the main religions. Art has been used to illustrate, for example, various

patterns within the Hindu festival of Diwali. Visits are a strong feature of the provision for history and geography and they promote an understanding of pupils' own cultural heritage as well as of different cultures. The school celebrates individual achievements of pupils, such as their musical achievements outside school. Changes of staff have resulted in a reduced extra-curricular provision for music and art, and currently these subjects do not make a strong contribution to pupils' cultural development, although visiting musicians are invited to the school to perform to the pupils.

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

55 On her appointment the headteacher gave priority to addressing the issue, raised in the last inspection, relating to providing more constructive supervision at lunchtime. The improvements represent a real success story. Close working between the headteacher, lunchtime controllers and parents has resulted in much better supervision, more activities for pupils' play at lunchtime and much improved behaviour. The introduction of the 'blue book', for use of lunchtime controllers, has been a particularly effective innovation to monitor pupils' behaviour and personal development. The books are scrutinised weekly by the headteacher and, as well as recording incidents of inappropriate behaviour, they contain observations of positive features, for example, when pupils are particularly caring or helpful towards others. The blue books are also used positively to select pupils for merit awards. Clear rules and expectations for acceptable behaviour, detailed in the new behaviour policy, are known by all staff, and rewards and sanctions are used consistently. These measures are proving effective in promoting discipline and good behaviour.

56 The thoroughness with which pupils' work is monitored is a contributory factor to their continuing progress. Pupils are well known to all members of staff and the 'page per pupil' records, in which teachers note where pupils have achieved well, or where they need more help, ensure the picture is up to date, so that guidance and support may be given when needed. In addition, the headteacher monitors a sample of pupils' exercise books regularly and discusses her findings with the class teacher.

57 The responsibility for monitoring attendance lies with class teachers, with termly checks by the education welfare officer. At present, no one on the staff has responsibility for overseeing and checking all registers on a regular basis. As a consequence, uniformity of completion of registers is not assured and there are sometimes delays in getting explanations for absence from parents.

58 The school's current provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is mainly through science and religious education lessons. The school intends to develop its provision through the introduction of planned circle time in each class. Implementation of an enhanced programme of this nature should benefit all pupils, but in particular, it would help the youngest and newest children in the school whose social skills are still fragile and need development.

59 The high quality of pastoral care ensures a secure and safe environment for all pupils. Child protection procedures are appropriate and clearly understood by all staff. The staff and governors take matters of health and safety very seriously and regularly conduct thorough checks for potential risks and hazards. Termly fire drills ensure that pupils and staff are familiar with the procedures. First aid arrangements are well considered and appropriate procedures are in place to deal with accidents and illness.

60 The level of support for pupils with special educational needs is much better than at the time of the last inspection. The learning support assistants' work with individuals and in the classrooms is effective in providing both pastoral care and support for the pupils' academic progress, alongside the class teacher. When the need arises, a range of professionals from outside the school provides extra help. In lessons, teachers take care to ensure that work is modified for those pupils who speak English as an additional language, so that they are included in all activities. The additional support, from a part-time specialist teacher, is effective in helping these pupils to become proficient in English. The school is equally alert to the needs of the brightest pupils, and the setting arrangements for mathematics in Key Stage 2 are very effective in ensuring that they work to their potential. In Key Stage 1 teachers plan for extension work for the brightest pupils, but sometimes the extension activities are not demanding enough.

61 The school recognises the importance of good induction procedures for new pupils and works closely with the on-site pre-school group. The children from the pre-school visit regularly to have lunch, enjoy physical education lessons in the hall and attend assemblies. This enables them to feel quickly at home when they start school. Pupils who come from other pre-school provision make visits to the school with their parents before they start, so they too can familiarise themselves with their new surroundings. All new pupils and their parents receive helpful and well-written booklets to help ensure a happy and quick start to school life.

62 The school is equally aware of the need to provide guidance and support to the Year 6 pupils as they prepare to transfer to secondary school. Even though pupils transfer to a large number of secondary schools, the staff at St Mary's help with the transfer arrangements, for example by visits to the secondary schools and transfer of records. Parents are particularly appreciative of the support the school gives to those children who sit the entrance examinations for local grammar schools.

63 Overall, the school provides a high quality of support, advice and guidance, which parents and their children appreciate.

Partnership with parents and the community

64 Since the last inspection the school has continued to work closely with parents and the partnership with them is very strong. Parents give overwhelming support for the school and have great confidence in the headteacher's leadership in moving the school forward.

65 Communication with parents is excellent. Parents particularly appreciate the weekly newsletter; some parents commented that they positively look forward to receiving them. The school also goes to great lengths to keep parents informed about what their children are being taught and how well they are doing. For example, workshops to explain the national literacy and numeracy strategies have been held, and each term class teachers write to parents to inform them about the topics to be studied. Parents comment favourably that this enables them to support their children's learning at home. They confirm that homework is set regularly and, for the older pupils, they are positive about the way this is helping to prepare their children for secondary school. A few parents commented that there was too much homework for the youngest children, but the inspection evidence confirms that the amount and content are in line with national guidance and totally appropriate for pupils in the reception and Year 1 classes. Parents are kept very well informed about their children's progress. The timing of consultation and open evenings is planned carefully so that parents have opportunities throughout the year to meet with the teachers. Written reports, at the end of the school year, are well written and give clear information on what their children have achieved and the effort they have made. A few parents expressed their concern about the effect on their children's progress of the high turnover of staff in the last year. This has been unsettling for pupils, but the staffing is now more stable and pupils' progress, overall, is good.

66 The school works closely with parents whose children have special educational needs. They are invited to the meetings where their children's progress is reviewed and they receive copies of the individual educational plans and the targets set for their children. In addition, the school has produced a helpful booklet for parents about the special needs provision in the school. Parents speak highly of the way the school involves them in their children's education.

67 Parents are much involved in the life of the school. A significant number help in the classroom and with events in school, and there is tremendous support for the Friends of St. Mary's, which is an integral part of the school. It is a well-run association, committed to arranging social and fund-raising events to benefit the school. Members are enthusiastic and its officers appreciate the support of the headteacher and staff at all functions. Its efforts have made a considerable contribution recently to the adventure playgrounds, new classrooms and the computer suite. The school also maintains strong links with past members of staff, who continue to support the school in a variety of ways. For example, a retired member of the staff is organising the development of an area of the garden, with a statue of Our Lady, where the pupils can go for quiet prayer and thought.

68 The school is much involved in the local community. Pupils play an active part in all parish functions; for example, they organise and run their own stalls to raise money for charities of their choosing. They take part in the

annual Maidenhead carnival and they use the local area for history and geography projects. Local residents attend some school functions, and during the year visitors, such as the fire brigade and the police liaison officer, make valuable contributions to the curricular provision. A local football team undertakes football training for pupils to develop their skills in this sport. The school enjoys the support of local organisations: the infant adventure playground, which has played an important part in improving lunchtime behaviour, was sponsored by a locally based company. Links with the parish church are strong. The parish priest visits regularly to celebrate class and whole school masses, and many of the pupils are involved in activities organised by the church. Membership of two cluster groups of schools ensures that St. Mary's maintains good relations with many schools in the area. There is a strong link with the on-site pre-school group.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

69 The school has been through an unsettled period since the last inspection, with staff changes due to retirement, promotion and family circumstances. Despite this, good headway has been made and the key issues raised in the last report have all been tackled well. Parents, staff and governors acknowledge that the most significant improvements have been made since the appointment of the headteacher, just under a year ago. She provides an excellent lead and has very quickly established a strong sense of teamwork amongst staff, governors and parents. Their involvement in evaluating the school's strengths and weaknesses and identifying and agreeing priorities for improvement has resulted in a great clarity of vision for the future development of the school and a shared commitment to raising standards. A very positive ethos has been created: the increased attention given to improving pupils' behaviour has resulted in a positive climate for learning, relationships throughout the school are very good, there is a strong commitment to equality of opportunity for all pupils and the whole school community strives to meet the school's aim to educate children according to Gospel values.

70 The school's priorities for development are well documented in its improvement and management plan. The quality of the planning is much better than reported in the last inspection and is now a major strength: targets are realistic and manageable in number, and the means of measuring progress towards them are made clear.

71 The headteacher has brought with her a tremendous understanding of the value of monitoring and evaluating teaching, learning and the curricular provision, and these are now very strong features of the school's drive to raise standards. The school's commitment to this constant self-review is evident from the financial planning which provides additional teaching staff to allow senior staff and subject co-ordinators to be released, on a regular basis, from their class teaching in order to carry out their monitoring role. This is proving effective: support has been provided where a need has been identified to improve both teaching and curricular planning.

72 The school's plans for developing literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology are being well led by the subject co-ordinators and much has been achieved already. In other areas of the curriculum, the more recently appointed subject co-ordinators are developing well into their role and are clear about what needs to be done to bring improvement. The governors too have increased their involvement in monitoring the educational provision, and through regular planned visits, in which the focus has been agreed with the headteacher, they are now in a much stronger position to be able to evaluate the school's performance and contribute to its development. They fulfil all their statutory obligations, having taken appropriate action after the last inspection to ensure that both the prospectus and their annual report contained all the required information. They keep themselves well informed by attending appropriate training courses and are currently awaiting training for their role in performance management.

73 Since the last inspection the school has increased its support for pupils with special educational needs. The provision is very well managed and the allocation of responsibilities between the special needs co-ordinator and the class teachers is effective in ensuring pupils have the support they need to enable them to make progress. The support is well organised and regular reviews ensure that the targets set for individual pupils are based on a thorough assessment of their progress and learning needs.

74 The school has made considerable progress in moving forward in the last year and is in a strong position to

continue to improve.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

75 The school has seen many changes in staff since the previous inspection. It has sufficient appropriately qualified teachers, who between them offer a suitable range of experience and expertise to teach young children under five and all the subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. One class at Key Stage 1 is shared by two part-time teachers, who collaborate well to ensure that curricular continuity and progression are maintained. The small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language benefit from specialist teaching provided by another part-time teacher.

76 The teaching staff are supported very effectively by the very good number of learning support assistants, who are well briefed about the learning objectives of lessons and teaching methods. Many have received specific training for the various programmes to support the teaching of literacy and the provision has a markedly positive effect upon the learning of pupils with special educational needs. There are sufficient administrative and other support staff, who each carry out their duties very efficiently and contribute significantly to the smooth running of the school.

77 Induction of teachers new to the school is good; the induction booklet for staff is informative and clearly sets out the procedures teachers are expected to follow. Weekly staff meetings ensure good communication. Opportunities for teachers to plan in their key stage teams help to ensure new teachers are well informed, and continuity and progression between year groups is assured. Staff development is well managed and is well linked to the priorities in the school's improvement plan, for instance on the management of pupils' behaviour. The need for staff training to teach information and communication technology was addressed after the previous inspection; an audit of current teachers' skills by the coordinator has resulted in some further training and more is planned to ensure staff are familiar and confident with new equipment. As in many schools, formal appraisal has been suspended pending national changes, but the headteacher has observed all class teachers teach and held annual interviews with all the teaching and non-teaching staff. The outcomes have been used well to identify priorities for their professional development and several have attended appropriate in-service training courses. The headteacher and governors are supportive of all staff's career aspirations and provide good opportunities for their personal professional development.

78 The school's buildings are much better than at the time of the last inspection. Major building works have resulted in well-appointed classrooms for all classes. These are bright, clean and well furnished and of a size that allows different styles of teaching and a range of activities to be undertaken to ensure that pupils have opportunities to learn in different ways. There is now a designated area for computers which will allow the school's plans for improvements in this area of the curriculum to be implemented. Library facilities are also much better. The book stock has been increased and the range and quantity of books are comprehensive and support pupils' research well. In addition, each classroom has good collections of fiction, well chosen to interest pupils, and of reference books to support current topics. The school's plans for improvements to the buildings are almost complete: works in progress during the inspection will provide better office facilities and an enlarged staff room. Improvement to the pupils' lavatories, which are in need of refurbishment, is included in the school's longer-term plans for the premises.

79 The school, with the support of the Friends of St Mary's, has worked hard to improve the outdoor areas. Playgrounds are well equipped with climbing and other apparatus for adventurous play and these facilities have made a significant contribution to improving behaviour at lunchtimes. The grounds also provide good facilities for physical education and the school is able to teach the full range of games and sports, including swimming. The swimming pool, which is managed by a committee of parents, also provides an excellent facility for the families of pupils at the school, who use it out of school hours.

80 The absence of a separate outdoor play area and large toys and play equipment limits the school's provision for the children under five. The children are given too few opportunities to develop their motor skills through using equipment such as bicycles or scooters, or to take part in imaginative play using, for example, construction toys and other equipment.

81 Resources to support all areas of the curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2 are generally good and they are readily accessible. The good range of apparatus in science enables the school to adopt a practical problem-solving approach to the subject. The stock of computers and other equipment for teaching information and communication technology has recently been enhanced. The purchase of additional software and further training for staff are planned to ensure the new equipment can be used effectively to increase pupils' skills. Good use is made of loans of books, photographs and artefacts from the library and museum services to supplement the school's own stocks, for example, for the teaching of history and geography. Visits to museums and places of educational interest contribute to pupils' wider experience, for example, when Year 6 pupils took on the roles of Victorian school children during a visit to a local museum. The experience increased their understanding of what it was like to be a pupil in the last century and they appreciated how times have changed for children. Effective use of the school grounds and of the local area enhances still further the range of teaching and learning in subjects such as science, geography and history.

The efficiency of the school

82 The school's financial planning and management are of outstanding quality and lead to a highly efficient use of all of its resources. The governors work closely with the headteacher to determine budget allocations. Decisions about how the school's budget is to be spent are made only after a thorough analysis of the needs of the school and the priorities for improvement. Such careful management has enabled the school to accumulate a surplus, which it is now using to maintain good staffing levels, so that mixed-age classes are avoided in Key Stage 2, and pupils with special educational needs are given the extra help they need. Governors have also managed to find the money to allow for subject co-ordinators and senior staff to undertake their monitoring roles, something which is central to the school's drive to raise standards.

83 All staff are effectively deployed to make best use of their experience and expertise. All are eager to up-date and enhance their knowledge, and the funds the school receives for staff development are used well to support the staff's continued professional development. Training focuses on the priorities, identified by the school, that will help to raise standards. The benefits of recent training to increase the teachers' expertise in science are already evident in the classroom, and the training for implementing the numeracy strategy is helping teachers to plan and structure their mathematics lessons effectively.

84 The administrative and caretaking staff provide highly efficient and unobtrusive support for the headteacher and staff that ensures that their time is used to best effect to carry out their respective roles in the school.

85 Prudent financial management allows the school to supplement the money it receives to provide support for pupils with special educational need. Rigorous monitoring of the provision and regular reviews of pupils' progress ensure that the pupils who are most in need of support receive it. Much of the support is placed in the lower part of the school, in line with the school's policy of early intervention that seeks to address the pupils' learning needs before they enter the junior classes. The learning support assistants carry out the school's varied programmes of support, both in class and in small groups, all designed to improve pupils' literacy skills, very effectively. The pupils' good progress is testament to the efficiency and effectiveness of this support. The small amount of part-time specialist teaching for pupils who speak English as an additional language, which is paid for from a central government grant, is also used to good effect. Pupils receiving this extra help are steadily developing the language skills that enable them to participate fully in class lessons.

86 Capital grants to improve the accommodation have been used wisely and the school now has good accommodation. The overall environment is enhanced by well-mounted displays of pupils' work. All space is used effectively: small rooms and library areas are used very well to enable specialist teaching of individual and small groups of pupils to take place. These sessions are well organised so that the teaching that takes place in these areas is not interrupted and the pupils concerned are supported in an environment conducive to learning. Careful timetabling of the hall ensures that all classes undertake the full range of indoor physical education activities.

87 Just as much consideration has been given to the use of the money provided for the school to be part of the National Grid for Learning. The grant has enabled the school to move ahead with its plans to develop both equipment

and facilities for information and communications technology, and it is now well placed to develop the curriculum further and raise standards in this area of its work.

88 The governing body takes a more active role in monitoring the school's performance than at the time of the last inspection. Under the guidance of the headteacher, governors are beginning to use the information from assessments and comparative data provided by the DfEE and the LEA to evaluate the school's performance and to set targets for improvement. Their visits and regular reviews of the progress the school is making in implementing its plans for improvement help them to evaluate whether their spending is leading to the intended outcomes.

89 The school manages its finances very well to ensure good staffing levels and to provide money for the planned improvements in its educational provision. During their time in the school pupils make good progress and they achieve above average standards by the time they leave at the age of eleven. Taking these factors into account, the school provides very good value for money. This represents an improvement from the time of the last inspection.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN UNDER FIVE

90 In line with the governors' admission policy, Catholic children join the school in the term of their fifth birthday, if space and funds permit. In the current term five children under the age of five were admitted and they joined a class with Year 1 pupils. More four-year-olds will be admitted in the next two terms.

91 The majority of children enter school with literacy and numeracy skills that are broadly average for their age. The children in the reception class follow a curriculum that is based on the Key Stage 1 National Curriculum, alongside the Year 1 pupils in the same class. Planning and organisation do not have sufficient regard for the recommended areas of learning for young children. The children are introduced too quickly to formal methods of learning and not enough is planned to enable them to learn through appropriately structured play, both indoors and out. Aspects of their personal development, such as learning how to control impulses and understanding the need for rules, would be enhanced if there were more opportunities for well-planned play. Such provision would also increase opportunities for their creative and physical development. Further resources, especially large toys, more construction equipment and ready access to a secure outdoor play area, are needed to improve the play provision. Classroom accommodation is spacious and displays are colourful with due emphasis on children's own work.

Personal and social development

92 The children's personal development is, overall, as expected for this age group. Most have positive attitudes to school, know the difference between right and wrong and learn class routines quickly. Aspects of social development, such as working together harmoniously, and developing and initiating ideas, are less well sustained because the children have too few opportunities to learn these through play. They are, at times, restless and bicker when they need to share equipment. They do not yet have a sufficient concentration span, nor the perseverance required, to cope with some of the longer sessions. This tends to make them too reliant on adult help and tentative in using their own initiative. Where the work matches their interest and level of development, and where they have the support of an adult, they work hard and enjoy the focused attention they receive.

Language and literacy

93 Children make good progress in reading. They enjoy looking at books and can follow the story by looking at pictures and they enjoy listening to stories. Some have reached the stage of reading simple words and phrases. For example, in a literacy lesson they could identify a few simple words from the class text. All knew about the title of the book and could pick out individual letters in the words. In a "letter bingo" session, with the teacher, they could identify several letters of the alphabet. They make satisfactory progress in writing. They write their own names and can copy some letters and simple letter clusters. They can dictate sentences to the teacher and copy under an adult's writing with reasonable accuracy and with developing control. They still find it hard to work effectively without the teacher's help during individual group tasks, particularly when there are too many things to remember or where the task is not pitched precisely to their level.

94 The teaching of literacy is satisfactory. The teacher's exploration of the class text with the children effectively establishes a good reading ethos. Questions are used to initiate discussion and to help the children explore the text and express what is happening and what is likely to happen. Children are offered many opportunities to articulate a point of view and are invited to point out what they know about letters and words. The teacher effectively directs the work on initial letters and explanations are clear. The teacher is secure in her teaching of phonics, but phonic work is not always taught in a context that the children can understand; this leads to restlessness and a slow work rate. Story telling is good. Stories are well told, with good dramatic emphasis, and pupils are given soft toys to hug during the process. The literacy hour is not as well balanced as it might be to include a range of activities that would encourage the development of better writing skills.

Mathematics

95 Pupils make steady progress and attain the standards expected for their age. They are developing their knowledge of shapes and readily identify circles, squares and triangles and sort them according to their basic properties, explaining their reasoning. They are increasing their mathematical vocabulary.

96 The teaching of mathematics is good. Planning is very good and learning objectives are clear. Effective use is made of resources, such as a video, to illustrate the vocabulary and properties of two-dimensional shapes, for example. Reception and some Year 1 pupils are taught together, but the teacher's questions are well focussed to ensure that all children's understanding is enhanced and to make sure all pupils are involved. The practical activities are well targeted at the pupils' level of understanding and the plenary session is used well to reinforce learning. Expectations for appropriate behaviour are high.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

97 Pupils' progress in science is good overall and they reach the standard expected for their age. They receive a range of opportunities to develop their skills of observation and scientific vocabulary in, for example, their experiments of making assorted slopes by using bricks and boards to see what difference each makes to how far a moving vehicle can go. They also have opportunities to build moving models with big Lego pieces. In a lesson about floating and sinking objects, they could explain the difference, and illustrate this by references to bath toys at home. Some could predict which articles were likely to sink or swim and after they had observed the behaviour of these in the water, more were able to predict the likely behaviour of another set of objects. The highest attainers could explain why, for example, a ball with holes would sink.

98 The children follow the early Key Stage 1 curriculum in history and geography and this provides opportunities for them to develop their understanding of the world about them. They have opportunities to find out about the past and about the place where they live and its environment. No teaching of history or geography was seen during the inspection.

99 In the science lesson seen, the teaching was good. The lesson was carefully planned with a strong emphasis on practical activities. Good provision was made for the youngest pupils, who worked effectively with support. Questions and explanations matched the children's level of competence and understanding, and they were taught good habits of scientific enquiry, such as the need for careful observation and accurately expressed descriptions of what was happening.

Physical development

100 Children's attainment is average for their age. They are developing co-ordination, for example as they jump with a bean bag, and as they skip, although in skipping they are not yet able to sustain a technique for more than a few steps. Good use is made of body movements and facial expression to portray, for example, emotion.

101 In the physical education lesson seen, the teaching was good. Objectives were clearly explained and instructions were succinct. The children were well managed and a lively pace was maintained. Good demonstrations were provided to enable children to master a given skill, such as skipping. All children were expected to participate and all were engaged in sustained physical activity. Outside of the formal physical education lessons the children have few opportunities for physical development. The absence of planned outdoor play activities and appropriate equipment for this limits aspects of physical development through, for example, spontaneous play.

Creative development

102 Specific lessons in music were not timetabled to occur during the time of the inspection, but children were observed participating, with Year 1 and Year 2 pupils, in singing. In this they joined in well. During the day there are occasions when pupils sing rhymes and songs, for example, as they get ready for lunch. They have quickly learned the words and are keen to take part. In art lessons they have opportunities to be imaginative. In one lesson pupils created their own designs for Christmas wrapping paper. In this lesson the teacher explained the tasks well, preparation was thorough and pupils were well managed so that all worked purposefully to complete the task. There

are, however, few opportunities for the development of pupils' imagination through, for example, role-play in a wide variety of situations. The home corner has been converted into a "post office", but it is not resourced well enough to encourage rich play.

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

103 Between 1996 and 1999, pupils' performance in the statutory tasks and tests in reading and writing at the end of Key Stage 1 have been consistently above the average for most schools. The school's results also compare very favourably against those in schools whose pupils have a similar background, particularly in reading where the pupils' performance at St Mary's was very high. In writing, test results have shown a rising trend, greater than that seen nationally and overall, over the last four years, have been well above the national average. In 1999 the proportion of pupils reaching a level above that expected for their age was very high compared with all schools nationally. Nationally, girls outperform the boys, but this is not the case at St Mary's. Compared with the national picture, the boys' performance in recent years has been above average, whilst the girls' performance has been similar to that of girls in most schools. In 1999, the boys did particularly well in writing. The school comments that this is most probably explained by the particular cohorts of pupils, which have contained some very able boys.

104 At Key Stage 2, from 1996 to 1999 results have risen year on year, although the proportion reaching Level 5 in 1999 was lower than in 1998. Nevertheless, the pupils' performance was above the national average and above the average of pupils in similar schools. The comparative performance of boys and girls has varied year on year, with no clear trend, and no significant difference in 1999.

105 The high standards in reading, seen in the national test results, are evident amongst the current Year 2 pupils; many are already attaining above the standard expected for their age. Standards in writing are not as high. The inspection evidence indicates that whilst many should reach the benchmark Level 2, fewer pupils than last year are likely to exceed this. This is, in part, due to the higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs in the current Year 2, but a contributory factor is that not all of the teachers have high enough expectations for writing. There are no significant differences in the standards achieved by boys and girls.

106 At Key Stage 2, the inspection findings confirm the high standards seen in the tests. There is also a higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs in the current Year 6, but the strong teaching in the upper part of the key stage results in good progress and the pupils are well on course to meet the benchmark Level 4 and many should exceed this.

107 Pupils make good progress in English during their time in the school. Pupils have mainly average literacy skills when they join the school and by the time they leave at the age of eleven they have attained high standards. Well-planned work and good teaching enable pupils with special educational needs to make good progress in reading and writing and give pupils confidence to speak out.

108 At both key stages, attainment in speaking and listening is good. Pupils are confident, articulate speakers and most are careful listeners by the time they are seven. They are ready to engage in conversation and well able to discuss and explain their work, not only in English, but across the range of subjects. Pupils in one class, for example, gave very good responses in a shared reading session when asked what the fox might say in a given situation illustrated in 'Rosie's Walk' and in history, where pupils explained how toys had changed over the years. By the end of Year 6 they have effective communication and listening skills. They can develop ideas and discuss and describe events and are able to engage in constructive dialogue with their teachers. In a literacy lesson, for example, pupils in Year 6 discussed the differences between biography and autobiography and considered what constituted both fact and opinion, and some thoughtful ideas emerged.

109 In reading, pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1. By the age of seven, most are fluent, accurate and expressive readers with a confident ability to tackle unknown words and reading material. They have a well-developed ability to locate information easily using a book's contents and index pages. The lower attaining readers enjoy reading and know how to use simple skills, such as their knowledge of letters, to work out an unfamiliar word.

They understand terms such as title and author, and can use a book's index to find out information. Pupils' reading has some very good elements at Key Stage 2, such as the use of library and research skills. Fluency, accuracy and understanding of a text are good. Pupils are quick to identify the key features and themes of the books they read. They give lively character descriptions and discuss the possible motivation within the plot well.

110 In writing, pupils' progress at Key Stage 1 is satisfactory overall. They are able to spell the words they use most often, but some careless spelling continues to occur. Handwriting is legible and occasionally neat, but some untidy and careless formation of letters with a smattering of capitals amidst lower case letters is evident. Basic punctuation is usually correct, with most pupils aware of the need for a full stop at the end of a sentence and capitals at the beginning, but the higher order punctuation that is expected from the brightest pupils when they write their stories is not often found. Sentences are appropriately structured and ideas are developed mostly in a sequence, but apt and interesting vocabulary for their stage of development is used infrequently. In one class some lively, expressive stories have been written, and in one lesson, with the same teacher, pupils produced some good instructional writing. Some pupils could have achieved a higher standard in other lessons had the teachers raised their expectations and provided more demanding tasks for them to do. By the time pupils are in Year 6 their written work is thorough, accurate and neat and pupils have a good understanding and use a range of writing skills. Some lively and interesting extended work, with some imaginative, and occasionally funny, aspects occurs. For example, on the theme of 'Alice Through the Looking Glass', pupils wrote their own variations such as 'Alice Through the Computer Screen' and constructed some imaginative sentences using good descriptive vocabulary. Spelling is accurate and punctuation is used effectively to enhance ideas. Sentences are usually well organised and grammatically correct. Handwriting is generally fluent, joined up and in ink. Independent activities in Key Stage 2 are used effectively to develop writing skills.

111 Literacy is used appropriately across the curriculum, particularly by teachers of Key Stage 2 classes. Good use is made of technical terms and vocabulary, for example in mathematics, science and geography. Older, higher attaining pupils write well-written and mostly accurate accounts of mathematical and scientific investigations. In history pupils are adept at reading and extracting information about the period they are studying and they produce well written factual accounts. Other styles of historical writing are not extensive and this is an area that could be developed to extend pupils' writing. A good use is made of informational technology for word processing pupils' work and for drafting written work. At Key Stage 1 not enough writing occurs. There is some factual writing by Year 2 pupils, but tasks do not always provide opportunities for extending their writing skills.

112 Most pupils across Key Stage 1 listen and respond well during whole-class sessions and the majority persevere well during their individual tasks, effectively organising their own work, although there are times when some pupils refer too frequently for help from the teacher or other adults. Behaviour is generally good. In the best lessons, pupils are very attentive and absorbed. They are very well behaved, know what the teacher wants and strive to do their best, with well-sustained concentration. At Key Stage 2 pupils respond very positively to the literacy hour and readily participate in discussions. They complete their individual tasks quietly and effectively. They work constructively in groups and pairs and sustain a high rate of work.

113 Teaching is mainly satisfactory at Key Stage 1. In these instances the teaching has more strengths than weaknesses, and the pupils make steady progress. Their progress could be enhanced, however, if teachers raised their expectations of what pupils could achieve. Too few writing demands are made and pupils are not given sustained guidance in the group sessions for guided reading and writing. More could be made of the plenary sessions to reinforce learning. There are, however, examples of good practice in Key Stage 1, where the combination of a better pace and more demanding work results in good progress.

114 In Key Stage 2, the teaching is mostly good and sometimes very good. All teachers plan well: learning objectives are precise and good attention is given to meeting the needs of individuals. Whole-class work with texts is mostly well conducted, and skilful use of questioning encourages discussion and comprehension. Resources, such as the overhead projector, are used effectively. Stories are read well and discussed in a lively, stimulating way. Probing and challenging questioning is a strength in the best lessons, where it is used well to highlight key features and layout and structure of the text studied. The focus of discussion enables pupils to think more deeply and respond accordingly. High expectations of pupils are held both for work and behaviour in the most successful lessons. Time limits for certain tasks help to sustain the momentum and ensure the lesson objectives are met. Plenary sessions are

used well to monitor progress and understanding, and are well organised.

115 The school has responded effectively to the demands of the National Literacy Strategy. The literacy hour is well in place. The management and planning for the literacy requirements of pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language are very good. Provision is based on thorough assessments of pupils' needs and is proving effective in helping pupils develop the literacy skills they need to participate fully in all their lessons.

116 Leadership in English is good; there is a high emphasis on the monitoring and evaluation of current practice and procedures. Procedures for assessment are well considered and the recording systems ensure that pupils' progress may be easily checked. Assessment data from a wide range of tests, including national tests at both key stages, are analysed well to pick up trends, inform planning and predict targets. Since the last inspection library facilities and stock are much improved. There is now a comprehensive range of fiction and reference books, including large books for whole-class use, and good quality literature.

Mathematics

117 Between 1996 and 1999 pupils' performance in the statutory tests at the end of Key Stage 1 has shown some fluctuation, but the trend is a rising one, the rate of increase being similar to that seen nationally. In 1999 pupils did particularly well: they all reached the national benchmark for their age, Level 2, and over half achieved Level 3. Their performance placed them in the top 5 per cent of all schools nationally, and it was very high when compared with that of pupils in similar schools. In each year, boys have out-performed girls in the tests. The school's analysis of results suggests that the differences were attributable to the generally higher abilities of the boys in these particular year groups, but it is carefully monitoring standards to ensure that both boys and girls achieve to their potential. The very high standards seen in the 1999 tests are not evident amongst the current Year 2 pupils; their attainment is average overall. This is, in part, due to the higher proportion of pupils in this year group with special educational needs, but also reflects some insufficiently high expectations of some of the teachers in this key stage.

118 In the Key Stage 2 tests in 1999, pupils also did well, and their performance was above the average of all schools nationally and also better than that of most schools with a similar intake. Since 1996, when results were below the national average, there has been a steady trend of improvement. In 1999 the boys did better in the tests than the girls, but in past years there has been no consistent pattern to the comparative performance of boys and girls. The current Year 6 pupils are doing well, and by the end of the year their performance in the statutory tests should match that of last year. This represents a significant achievement, since almost one-quarter of the pupils in this year group have special educational needs. These good standards are the result of the high quality of the teaching in the upper juniors. The inspection evidence suggests that the school should meet the targets that have been set for pupils' performance in the Key Stage 2 tests at the end of this academic year.

119 In Key Stage 1 pupils of all abilities, including those with special education needs and whose first language is not English, make satisfactory progress overall. In their planning, teachers take account of the different stages of pupils' development and plan work at suitable levels to build on what they have already achieved. Whilst this planning promotes sound progress, progress could be more rapid, especially amongst the older and higher attaining pupils in the mixed-age classes, if the teachers' expectations were raised. In both Year 1 and Year 2 pupils are developing their number skills steadily. They have a secure understanding of the number system and by Year 2 are able to identify patterns in a variety of sequences of numbers. For example, when exploring numbers to 100, pupils recognised that when counting in fives, the last digit was either a zero or five. They are beginning to use their knowledge to help them calculate, both in writing and mentally. Pupils are also steadily increasing their mathematical knowledge about shapes and measures. The youngest pupils in this key stage can correctly identify common two-dimensional shapes and describe some of their properties. By Year 2, pupils are more confident when describing the properties of, for example, triangles, rectangles and pentagons, but in a lesson seen, the teacher's imprecise use of the associated mathematical vocabulary left pupils confused about the words which correctly described the properties.

120 In Key Stage 2, the setting arrangements are effective in enabling the teachers to plan for a narrower range

of ability in each group, and this contributes to the pupils' good progress. In Years 5 and 6, where teaching is of a consistently high quality, progress is particularly good. Progress in mental calculation is good in the upper juniors, but slower in Years 3 and 4. In these years, pupils are developing strategies to help them calculate mentally, but they are not very quick at recalling multiplication facts and this slows down the calculations they carry out in their heads. By Year 6, however, pupils have developed good skills and they enjoy the mental "starters" of lessons, particularly when they are challenged to beat the clock in a "countdown" activity. Pupils are developing good investigative skills, where they draw on their learning and apply it to find solutions to a variety of problems. By Year 6, pupils tackle the problems in a logical manner, organising and checking their work as they seek solutions. For example, when they were investigating triangle numbers, their organised approach helped them to identify the pattern of numbers and to predict further numbers in the sequence. Some of the brightest pupils went on to work out a general statement for the pattern, based on their own predictions and trials. Standards in data handling are also good. Pupils understand how to collect data, organise it in tables and charts and present it graphically in a variety of forms. Pupils use their knowledge and skills well in other subjects, such as science and geography, where they construct and interpret bar charts and line graphs from information from experiments and surveys.

121 Pupils enjoy mathematics, especially in the upper part of the school where the teachers' high expectations for work rate and behaviour are met well. Pupils are keen to do well and try hard; in many lessons there is a buzz of enthusiasm and a purposeful atmosphere, which is sustained throughout. In Key Stage 1 and sometimes in the lower juniors, pupils start the lesson enthusiastically, but teaching is sometimes slow, with teachers taking too long to explain the work, or not giving tight enough deadlines for its completion, with the result that some pupils lose interest and become inattentive. In these instances their work rate decreases and they chatter about unrelated matters.

122 The overall quality of teaching is good. In the lessons seen it was never less than satisfactory and there were examples of teaching that was outstanding. There are, however, marked differences between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. In Key Stage 1 the teaching is satisfactory overall, whilst in Key Stage 2 it is good, and of a very high standard in the upper juniors. At both key stages a strength of the teaching is the joint planning in year group teams, which ensures a consistency of approach. The lessons are well planned, and teachers take care to ensure that the activities take account of what pupils have already learned. In Key Stage 2, especially in Years 5 and 6, the level of work set provides challenge for pupils of all abilities and promotes good progress. In Key Stage 1 the work the teachers set allows for steady progress, but in general, expectations of what pupils can achieve are too modest, especially for the older and higher attaining pupils in the classes. The current level of work is unlikely to result in the same standard seen in recent years in the tests at the end of Key Stage 1. In Key Stage 2 the teachers make high demands on their pupils, but based on a thorough assessment of what they know pupils can achieve. This ensures that they get the best out of them. The teachers use their good subject knowledge well when they explain new ideas and concepts to their pupils. The clarity of such explanations, together with skilful questioning which helps pupils to develop their own thinking, are very effective in moving the pupils on. Skilful use of questions is also a feature of the most successful oral work that starts most lessons. Teachers use the pupils' responses to questions about how they got their answers to measure the depth of understanding as well as to rectify any misconceptions before these become embedded.

123 Teachers make effective use of the learning support assistants to work with pupils with special educational needs and other pupils who need support. The assistants are given clear guidance about their role in lessons and they play an important part in promoting pupils' progress.

124 Considerable headway has been made since the last inspection in developing the role of the subject co-ordinator, and leadership and management of the subject are now good. The co-ordinator has been instrumental in ensuring that the National Numeracy Strategy is implemented and in providing training and support for the staff to ensure that their planning and teaching take account of the recommended structure for lessons. Resources have been increased and are good in range and quality, so that teachers are able to provide varied activities in their teaching. The co-ordinator has, with the headteacher and senior management team, undertaken monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in a sensitive and supportive way which is appreciated by her colleagues. The outcomes of this monitoring are used to good effect to plan for the future development of the subject. As part of this development, the co-ordinator is working with staff to ensure that effective and manageable procedures are in place to assess and record pupils' achievements. The present arrangements are very good and the information from the assessments is used constructively to plan subsequent work, as well as allowing pupils' progress to be checked with relative ease.

With changes of staff and the introduction of the numeracy strategy, staff have not recently met to moderate and agree standards of samples of pupils' work for inclusion in a school portfolio. Plans to start this again are in hand, and should provide opportunities for staff to maintain consistency and accuracy in their assessments.

Science

125 Pupils' attainment in the national assessments in science at the end of Key Stage 1 has improved significantly since 1998, at which time it was low. In 1999 attainment was well above the national average, especially in the number of pupils gaining higher levels. Boys did much better than girls. Pupils in the current Key Stage 1 are attaining broadly average standards and there is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. At present very few pupils in Year 2 are achieving high standards, however, largely because teachers' expectations are not high enough, especially in terms of the demands they make on pupils' writing in science.

126 Attainment in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 has fluctuated year on year between 1996 and 1999. Between 1996 and 1998 the overall picture is of below average performance. In 1999 there was a significant improvement and boys' performance improved more significantly than girls'. Attainment overall was well above both the national average and the average achieved by pupils in similar schools, although the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels was only average. Pupils in the current Year 6 are achieving above average standards in the work they have completed so far.

127 Over the course of Key Stage 1 pupils make satisfactory progress. Pupils' progress increases markedly during Key Stage 2, especially in Years 5 and 6, due to the high quality of the teaching in these year groups. At both key stages pupils with special educational needs make good progress as a result of the carefully differentiated work their class teachers plan for them and the good quality support they receive from the learning support assistants who work with them in the classroom.

128 Pupils of all abilities steadily build up a sound knowledge of the properties of many familiar and unfamiliar materials. By the end of Key Stage 1, as a result of their practical investigations, pupils are able to classify objects simply on the basis of their physical properties, such as attraction by a magnet and whether they float or sink in water. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils understand the factors that result in changes of state and they can devise ways to separate solids on the basis of both particle size and solubility in water. In work on forces younger pupils can identify the pushes and pulls needed to make objects move and they know that the distance a toy car will run down a ramp is dependent on the height of the ramp. Older pupils learn to measure forces and begin to understand the factors that affect friction when a vehicle moves over different surfaces. By the time they leave the school pupils show good observational skills and they make detailed written records of their investigations. They learn how to record their results systematically, for example the temperature change over time when investigating the insulating properties of different materials. They apply their knowledge of mathematics well in displaying their results using histograms and line graphs.

129 Pupils enjoy their science. In all classes they take an interest in their work and persevere to solve problems. They work responsibly on individual tasks and they collaborate with others when working in small groups. In whole-class discussion sessions many contribute their ideas willingly and they are keen to show what they know. Older pupils, especially, listen to each other well when working in groups and talking about strategies for tackling a practical problem, and they each take responsibility fairly for different aspects of the task. When the teacher's control is less strong or an activity is allowed to go on for too long, some younger pupils find it more difficult to sustain their motivation and their progress is slower.

130 Almost all the teaching seen was at least satisfactory and in well over half of the lessons the teaching was good or very good, the best teaching occurring in the upper part of the school. In all classes a major strength of the teaching is the very good attention given to detailed lesson planning. All teachers take good care to devise activities that challenge pupils to think for themselves, and different tasks are planned for the different ability groups in each class. Very good emphasis is given to the development of pupils' practical problem-solving skills and in most lessons teachers devise tasks that successfully capture pupils' interest. The best teaching was characterised by a lively and enthusiastic approach to the subject, where teachers presented the tasks as demanding challenges; as a result, the

pupils worked very hard to solve the problems. In these lessons, teachers' expectations of all pupils were very high and they were encouraged to do their best. The use of well-focused questions in discussion sessions, especially at the beginning of lessons, serves pupils well in helping them to recall prior learning and begin to apply it to a new problem, for example in work at Key Stage 2 on separating mixtures.

131 On occasions, especially where activities went on for too long, teachers gave less attention to the review of pupils' progress towards the end of the lesson, losing the opportunity to give both the teacher and the pupils the assurance of knowing what had been learned. In only one lesson was the teaching unsatisfactory overall, although some weaknesses in teachers' management of pupils and resources in other lessons should be addressed. At Key Stage 1, pupils would have benefited from more help from the teacher in deciding how to organise the sequence of activities in testing materials with a magnet and how to record their observations. In another Key Stage 1 class, the provision of too many resources served to confuse the pupils, so that they were unsure about what they were intended to find out and were unable to organise themselves easily. Where the teacher's management of the situation was insufficiently strong to ensure that all pupils persevered with their task, the noise level rose and behaviour deteriorated. As a consequence the pace of the lessons fell and pupils were not able to make satisfactory progress.

132 At present the work in science is organised as a series of short units on a two-year cycle at both key stages. In the work seen there was too much overlap and insufficient progression between the work at Key Stage 1 and at the beginning of Key Stage 2. A new scheme of work is being implemented based on new national guidance; this should help to overcome some of these problems, but teachers will need to give careful attention to the progression when topics which are begun in Key Stage 1 are revisited in Key Stage 2. Short booklets on each topic provide guidance on how to teach different aspects of the subject. The weaknesses in assessment, which were identified in the previous inspection, have been addressed well. In each class pupils now do two assessed investigations each term and this enables teachers to monitor their progress and understanding. A portfolio of assessed work, which can be used by teachers to provide illustrative examples of the work pupils undertake, is well developed.

133 The school has taken very good care to try to overcome another of the major weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. Staff have given considerable attention to extending opportunities for pupils to plan investigations, learn how to predict and make their tests fair. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of how to teach this effectively have been considerably enhanced as a result of some well focused in-service training. The use of structured planning sheets in all classes clearly helps pupils to order their thinking, and by the end of Key Stage 2 most pupils know what they need to do to make their tests fair if their results are to be reliable. On occasions at both key stages too much time and attention are given, however, to planning an investigation and making predictions, and as a result pupils have too little time to actually carry out the practical investigation or to test whether their predictions were correct. For younger pupils especially, their ability to make predictions about the likely outcomes of testing unfamiliar materials, or using new methods, is obviously limited by their experience of the world; consequently they were seen to be confused about what they should expect or do. Teachers in Key Stage 1 especially, should reconsider the open-ended nature of the work they set the pupils, and provide more guidance and direction, so that pupils are clear about what they are to do, enabling them to make better progress.

134 The responsibility for co-ordination of the subject is now shared by two part-time teachers; the headteacher and governors will need to monitor the effectiveness of these arrangements, to ensure that all teachers receive sufficient guidance and support and that continuity between and within the key stages is assured.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

a) Core subjects

Information technology

135 The school took appropriate steps following the last inspection to increase the staff's expertise and to improve the computer equipment in the school. The school's development, however, did not keep pace with the rapidity of change nationally, and on her appointment, the headteacher identified information and communications technology as a priority for further improvement. Much has happened in the last year and the school now has a new

computer suite and a network of computers. At the time of the inspection the final stages to bring the new equipment into use were being completed.

136 Standards have improved since the last inspection, and, overall, pupils attain the standards expected of seven and eleven-year olds at the ends of Key Stages 1 and 2. Attainment in different aspects of the work, however, varies somewhat because pupils have more limited experience in some areas of the National Curriculum, for example, that related to controlling devices and, in Key Stage 2, multimedia presentations. The school has, however, made effective use of existing equipment in the classrooms to develop pupils' skills in communicating and handling information. By Year 6, pupils achieve good standards in these aspects of the curriculum.

137 In Key Stage 1 pupils are making steady progress in the basic skills. They are becoming familiar with the layout of the keyboard and with the functions of particular keys, such as delete, shift and space bar. In a lesson observed in a mixed Year 1/ 2 class the pupils quickly located these keys on freestanding keyboards on their desks, and listened carefully as their teacher explained the purpose of these keys when entering text. Their interest and understanding would, however, have been greater if they had been able to see on a screen the effects of pressing the keys. By the end of Year 2 most pupils have the skills expected for their age: they use the keyboard and mouse competently to activate options on the computer screen and they use word processing and drawing programs to generate text and pictures.

138 In Key Stage 2 progress is good. Teachers build well on the skills pupils have acquired, both at school and at home. Pupils make good use of word processing programs, particularly for their work in English, and show a good understanding of how different layouts and size of fonts can be used to produce different effects and enhance their writing. Pupils are also beginning to appreciate the advantages of using the computer for drafting and editing their work. The older pupils in the key stage also make good progress in their use of spreadsheets and in their understanding of how these can be used for calculations. For example, pupils in Year 6 quickly grasped the concept of entering formulae into a spreadsheet to find the area of a rectangle. They made good gains in their understanding of how computer technology can be used to explore a mathematical model as they predicted what would happen if they changed the data and then tested their predictions using a spreadsheet.

139 Teachers and pupils alike are looking forward eagerly to using the new computer suite. The teachers are confident in their use of information technology, but the school has a well-planned programme to develop the staff's skills further to ensure that they have the expertise to use the new network and make effective use of the multi-media equipment and internet facilities. At present, the school's arrangements for information technology include a specific time each week for whole-class teaching. These arrangements are effective in ensuring that key skills are taught and demonstrated to all pupils before they work individually or in small groups to practise these skills. During the inspection, three lessons were observed. In Key Stage 2 the teaching was very good and promoted good progress amongst pupils. In these lessons the clarity of the teachers' explanations and effective demonstration ensured that pupils had a secure foundation to develop their work using spreadsheets. The success of the teaching was also attributable to the high quality of planning, which took account of the pupils' range of prior attainment, so as to provide worthwhile tasks that were sufficiently challenging for all. This detailed planning ensured that pupils with special educational needs and those whose first language is not English were also provided with materials and tasks that enabled them to make good progress. At the start of the lesson the pupils are told what they are expected to achieve and they are motivated to do so. They work with purpose and interest. Teachers are skilled in listening to the pupils' discussions to judge when they need help to move on. When this is the case, they pose questions in such a way that the pupils are encouraged to work things out for themselves and this helps to deepen their understanding of the key concepts.

140 In Key Stage 1 the teaching seen was satisfactory. The objective of increasing pupils' familiarity with the keyboard was met and most pupils made appropriate progress. The planning, however, did not take enough account of the different previous experiences of pupils; some of the older pupils in the mixed Year 1/Year 2 class and those with computers at home already knew some of what was taught, so their progress was more limited. The absence of new and challenging work led to some restless behaviour and the teaching was interrupted whilst the teacher dealt with this.

141 Increasing use is made of information technology to support pupils' learning in other subjects. For example,

pupils were observed using CD-ROM information resources in history. They were confident and skilled in locating and retrieving information about longships as part of their project on Vikings. They got much enjoyment out of this and they collaborated well, taking turns to use the keyboard and mouse as they browsed the information on the screen.

142 The co-ordinator provides very good leadership, and planning for the development of information and communication technology is of a high quality. Priorities for staff development and for increasing the range of software have been identified after a thorough audit. Much headway has been made in improving the curriculum and in developing assessment procedures. National guidance is used effectively as a framework for curricular planning so that the pupils' understanding and skills are developed systematically and there is progression from year to year. At the ends of units of work teachers assess and record pupils' achievements. These arrangements are new and not yet fully in place, but seem likely to provide a manageable system of keeping checks on pupils' attainment and progress.

b) Non-core subjects

Art

143 There were few opportunities to inspect art lessons during the inspection. Over time pupils gain experience in working in both two and three dimensions with a good range of media, although there is little evidence of opportunities for younger pupils, especially, to work co-operatively on large-scale paintings and collages. Evidence from three lessons and from previously completed work shows that pupils achieve broadly average standards in individual painting and drawing. Younger pupils understand how to create effects with colour, demonstrated in their pictures of firework displays, where they have used overlapping strokes with coloured crayons to create colourful effects. In an exercise on proportion, older pupils showed good control using a pencil to make sketches of human faces, but these had not been developed further to give pupils an opportunity to learn how to show expression or emotion in their drawings. Standards of observational drawing vary widely: pastel drawings of an arrangement of coloured glass bottles by older pupils showed good control in the mark making, but few had successfully mastered the technique of representing the reflections in the glass. From an early stage pupils learn how to mix paints to create new colours successfully, for example when working in the style of artists of the Impressionist period. Some pupils in Year 4 showed good control in reproducing the tones and colours to give an accurate match to the painting they were copying, but others found it much more difficult to mix primary colours to achieve the desired effect. Some of the work that pupils undertake is linked well to topics in other subjects, such as history. In their study of the Victorian period, Year 5 pupils had drawn designs and then made clay tiles following the style of William Morris. Year 6 pupils looked carefully at the designs and embroidery stitches used in Victorian samplers and then carefully drew designs for modern samplers of their own.

144 Pupils show good powers of concentration in their artwork and they persevere well when they encounter difficulties. In discussion sessions they are encouraged to appraise their work and that done by others, and they do so thoughtfully.

145 The school has worked hard to overcome the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. The teaching seen during the inspection ranged from satisfactory to good. The major strength is in the quality of planning, where teachers identify clearly what skills and techniques they intend to teach and the pupils to learn. The lessons were well prepared so that resources and materials were readily available and time was not wasted. None of the teachers is an art specialist, but a new co-ordinator was appointed this year and a new scheme of work, which gives teachers good guidance, is in the process of implementation. The school recognises that although the breadth of the work has been increased and staff are more confident about teaching the subject, there is still scope for further improvement.

Design and technology

146 No lessons in design and technology took place during the inspection. Samples and photographs of previous work, other documentary evidence and discussions with staff indicate that the curriculum is broadly balanced and provides good opportunities for pupils to design and make models and other objects using a wide range of

construction materials. The school has successfully addressed the weaknesses in the subject identified in the previous inspection. The scheme of work has been revised and teachers are using national guidance well to identify the learning objectives and ensure there is good progression of skills over time. The organisation of the subject makes efficient use of the time allocated to it. Procedures for assessment have been reviewed and teachers are beginning to use the criteria in the national guidance to evaluate the standards pupils achieve.

147 Teachers plan work thoroughly, topics are well chosen to capture pupils' interest and often include opportunities for pupils to evaluate finished products made by others, as a stimulus before developing their own designs. From an early stage pupils use their sketchbooks well in recording their observations, in setting out their ideas for their own designs and in evaluating the quality of the products they make. At Key Stage 1 pupils often use recycled materials to make simple models, such as toys, and decorate them colourfully. In the upper years of Key Stage 2, pupils' drawings and written records are detailed, and clearly show that pupils have a good understanding of the need to plan before they make their models and other artefacts. In a project on making toys, which incorporated a moving part, several designs by older pupils were imaginative and showed that the pupils understood how to use pulleys and gears effectively to make the toys move. Some had successfully applied their knowledge of electrical circuits by using small electric motors to power their toys. Others had successfully employed principles of pneumatics by using syringes and balloons to inflate parts of their models. Standards of construction are good; in making picture frames pupils in Year 4 had taken care to measure, cut and join their chosen materials accurately. Where it is appropriate to do so, projects in technology are linked to other areas of the curriculum, for example with work in history and geography. In designing a tourist complex in Egypt pupils showed good awareness of environmental issues and of the likely impact on the local community of the influx of large numbers of visitors.

Geography

148 Geography and history are taught in alternate terms; no geography was taught during the inspection. Judgements are, therefore, based on a scrutiny of pupils' work from last term, teachers' planning and discussion with staff and pupils.

149 Pupils' past work indicates that they follow an appropriate curriculum that gives due attention to developing their geographical skills and their understanding of geographical processes. The standards of work seen were as expected for pupils' ages. In Key Stage 1 pupils show progress in making plans and maps of their school and the local area, using symbols and keys accurately to locate and identify the key geographical features. As well as developing a detailed knowledge of their own locality, pupils are developing a knowledge of other countries; their studies, for example, include learning about animal life in Australia, and looking at types of homes from across the world.

150 The work in Key Stage 2 shows satisfactory progression in pupils' skills and knowledge. By Years 3 and 4 pupils have more sophisticated skills in map work, using co-ordinates to locate and describe the position of key features on a map. The upper juniors demonstrate good enquiry skills in their study of Cookham. They have researched the area and produced accurate accounts of the geographical changes from Norman times to the present day. They also show an appropriate understanding of how different geographical features influence lifestyles. For example, in their study of India they show an awareness of how the climatic conditions affect, for example, agriculture, comparing the farmer's year in India with that in Britain.

151 Fieldwork features strongly in the school's provision for geography, and staff make good use of the local area and visits further afield. Pupils comment that they enjoy the practical nature of this work and they particularly enjoy topics which consider environmental issues.

History

152 Standards of work seen during the inspection both in lessons and in work completed earlier this term are average for pupils' ages in Key Stage 1. In Key Stage 2 pupils have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the periods they have studied. They know about how people used to live and draw appropriate comparisons between the past and the present day. In this key stage, many pupils demonstrate above-average skills in historical enquiry.

153 In Key Stage 1 pupils make steady progress in their understanding about the passage of time. They enjoyed listening to recently retired staff from the school talking about their childhood toys and could describe differences and similarities between toys from the past and their own toys. In a lesson that followed this visit, class discussions about the toys that were available after the Second World War helped pupils to develop their understanding of changes over time. The written activities that followed this discussion, however, did not build well on this, and were not particularly challenging, especially for the older pupils, who were capable of doing more than drawing toys past and present to demonstrate differences.

154 In Key Stage 2 the pupils have more challenge and they make good progress, especially in developing their skills of historical enquiry. Teachers plan lessons well to include activities that require pupils to extract and interpret information from a variety of sources. For example, in Year 4 pupils were provided with a set of questions before they watched a video extract about Viking longships. Having the questions beforehand was very effective in ensuring that pupils concentrated and observed carefully. They all made gains in their knowledge about the design and construction of longships and were able to follow up with further research from books and pictures, so that they could draw valid conclusions about the Vikings and their invasions. In Year 6 pupils were also seen to use a variety of sources, including photographs, to find out about the effects of the railways on the lives of the Victorians. They are becoming skilled in interpreting the evidence to explain why things happened, although they are less certain about how historical evidence can be interpreted in different ways. In the best lessons teachers give attention to developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by helping them to consider the social, cultural, religious and ethnic differences which existed in past societies.

155 The overall quality of teaching is good, but it is most effective in Key Stage 2, where the teachers' interest, enthusiasm and good subject knowledge lead to clear, engaging and informative introductions to lessons. Throughout the school teachers plan their lessons thoroughly and they use their assessments of pupils' prior learning well to modify work so that it builds on what has already been achieved. Such planning leads, in most lessons, to challenging work that motivates pupils to do well. In a lesson seen in Key Stage 1, however, the teacher was less successful in pitching the work at an appropriate level for the oldest pupils in the class, and the activity did not extend their learning well enough. By contrast, in a lesson in Key Stage 2 the teacher had given careful attention to the reading demands of materials, so that all pupils, including those who are very able and those with special educational needs, were able to work to their potential in the independent work that followed the whole-class introduction. Many pupils comment that history is their favourite subject because the lessons are interesting and they like "finding things out".

156 The curriculum is organised effectively in two-yearly cycles, so as to avoid duplication of historical content for pupils in mixed age classes. Long and medium term planning, based on national guidance, is well considered to ensure that historical ideas and skills are built up in a systematic manner as pupils move through the key stages. This planning could, however, make more of the opportunities to develop pupils' writing skills. In the upper part of the school pupils are skilled in producing factual accounts about famous people and events, but they are rarely required to write from different viewpoints, or in different styles. When they are asked to do so, they are capable of producing work of good quality; for example, pupils used well chosen vocabulary, that captured the mood when they wrote about a day in the life of Oliver Twist.

Music

157 Pupils attain average standards across the key stages and their progress is sound overall in performing, listening to and appraising music. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in singing. The main thrust of the musical curriculum during the time of the inspection, in the first term of the academic year, is towards listening and appraising and as a result, little work on composition was seen.

158 Pupils' singing, observed in assemblies and in key stage groupings, was good in Key Stage 1 and very good in Key Stage 2. They are practised ensemble singers who retain a very good ear for changes in rhythm and pitch and are sensitive and agile in their response to the different tempo and volume of sound required within some quite demanding songs. They have good skills at interpreting the mood of a song or carol and can bring them to life with a lively attention to phrasing and an appropriate sense of reverence and occasion. Such qualities were observed when

Key Stage 1 pupils sang 'Away in a Manger', and when the older pupils used their skills very effectively to interpret their Millennium Hymn.

159 Most pupils have well-developed listening skills when they listen to music, although at times a few have difficulty in concentrating silently as they listen to a musical extract. In Key Stage 1 pupils readily identify the sounds associated with percussion instruments, whilst in Key Stage 2 they successfully identify instruments within a given musical composition and when they consider the make-up of an orchestra. Pupils' skills in appraising music are not as well developed and their progress in understanding how instruments are used to get a desired effect is limited. Younger pupils in Key Stage 2, for example, are able to identify some of the animals in 'Carnival of the Animals' and name some instruments, but have less skill in describing how the composer manages to create the effect of a given animal.

160 Pupils enjoy singing sessions and are able to respond positively to a variety of vocal challenges. Younger pupils in Key Stage 1 work effectively in a directed situation, but have less skill in settling down to work constructively together to compose their own music.

161 The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, and at both key stages there are some good features. Lessons are well planned and resourced, effectively organised and carefully structured to enable pupils to make good progress within the majority of lessons. The balance between listening to and appraising the given musical extract and the written task, was not strong in some classes and resulted in less effective concentration on the music and more on the mechanics of the written task. The majority of teachers in the lessons observed had good basic teaching skills, but some had less musical expertise than others, which led to lower expectations of what pupils were capable of doing within a given age group.

162 The detailed scheme of work, completed since the last inspection, enables teachers to plan appropriately for the complete musical curriculum. They receive positive and useful guidance from the music co-ordinator. The quality of extra-curricular musical provision is less strong than formerly, due mainly to staffing changes. A choir, recorder groups, and attendance at local schools' musical festivals were previously part of the extra musical provision but these initiatives are not occurring at the present time. The school tries to compensate for this by ensuring that pupils have opportunities to belong to a choir and perform on musical instruments in their school productions, such as the forthcoming Christmas production. Peripatetic musical tuition is also arranged and currently about twenty pupils are learning to play either the guitar or the violin.

Physical education

163 During the inspection it was only possible to observe some of the range of physical education activities provided by the school: inclement weather adversely affected most of the scheduled games lessons. In the lessons seen in Key Stage 2 pupils achieved broadly average standards in dance and gymnastics. In games they show a sound knowledge of the games they play, for example netball. Year 6 pupils knew the rules of netball well and could explain a range of strategies that players adopt in playing a successful game. Year 5 pupils showed good levels of skill in passing the ball and using dodging strategies to avoid opponents. An extra-curricular games skills session enabled those who took part to practise and refine their ball skills further.

164 The teaching seen ranged from satisfactory to very good, but was good overall. In the upper part of the school the teaching was of a consistently high quality. Lessons are planned thoroughly and teachers give good attention to activities that enable pupils to engage in sustained physical activity. Most lessons are well managed and teachers exercise good control. Lively and enthusiastic teaching and a good pace characterise the best teaching. Pupils participate willingly and enjoy the opportunities to show what they can do. They collaborate well with others in paired and group work. In some lessons, however, teachers had to work hard to maintain control and on such occasions when pupils were slow to respond the pace fell. Lessons are more successful where teachers give demonstrations of the techniques to be used, because they set the standard for pupils to aspire to.

165 Teachers base dance lessons on themes and stories that are familiar to and of interest to pupils. For example, in the reception and Year 1 class, pupils enjoyed showing how they could display emotions using movements of their

bodies in an interpretation of the familiar story of Red Riding Hood. Other Key Stage 1 pupils successfully learned how to make jerky movements with their limbs in time to music when imitating the motion of a puppet on a string. In Key Stage 2 gymnastics, pupils worked together attempting to use the slow and well controlled movements used by acrobats in time to music, and others worked with a partner to devise a sequence of movements involving synchronised jumps, turns and spins. Pupils took part willingly in these exercises and successfully sustained their levels of physical activity, but few gave sufficient attention to the shape they made with their bodies in carrying out their movements or landings that would result in a good style, poise and control. This is an area for further development if standards are to be raised.

166 The school has successfully retained a broad physical education programme that includes swimming for all classes in the summer term. Opportunities for outdoor and adventurous activities are provided for older pupils during a period of residential experience in Year 6. The provision of several regular extra-curricular sporting activities enables pupils to pursue their interests and develop their skills further. Several of the weekly clubs are run by outside groups and these give pupils opportunities to work with other adults. The school also takes part in inter-school tournaments, for example in netball matches against other schools.

167 Good attention has been given to trying to overcome some of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. A new scheme of work, based on a commercially published scheme, has been adopted, and in-service training in techniques of teaching dance and gymnastics has enhanced teachers' knowledge of these aspects of physical education. The school needs to make sure that the reduced time now available for the subject is used efficiently. On one occasion pupils had to wait too long for the lesson to begin while the apparatus for gymnastics was put out and as a result they had too little time to use the apparatus to develop and practise their skills.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

168 Four inspectors spent a total of 14.5 days inspecting the work of the school. During this time 46.25 hours were spent observing 58 lessons. In addition assemblies, registration sessions, and extra-curricular activities were observed and the work of six pupils from each year group was scrutinised. Inspectors also spent time in planned discussions with six pupils from each of Year 2 and Year 6 and hearing six pupils from Years 2 and 6 read individually. Other pupils from all year groups were heard reading during their literacy lessons. Inspectors spoke to many pupils about their work and their life at the school and observed their behaviour at break and lunchtimes.

169 Discussions were held with members of the teaching staff, members of non-teaching staff and governors. School policies, registers and teachers' plans were examined, as were governing body minutes and reports to parents. A meeting, attended by 20 parents, was held to hear their views about the work of the school. Inspectors also had brief discussions with a number of parents as they brought their children to school or collected them at the end of the day. Sixty-five parents responded to a questionnaire seeking their views on the school.

170 All teachers were observed teaching, most on several occasions. Every teacher was offered confidential oral feedback on the lessons observed and received comments on the strengths of their teaching and where improvements might be made.

DATA AND INDICATORS

Pupil data

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
YR – Y6	207	4	58	14

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers (YR – Y6)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	9.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21.1

Education support staff (YR – Y6)

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked each week	113

Average class size:	26
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Financial data

Financial year:

1998/99

	£
Total Income	406,028
Total Expenditure	405,592
Expenditure per pupil	1,726
Balance brought forward from previous year	32,110
Balance carried forward to next year	32,546

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:

207

Number of questionnaires returned:

65

Responses (percentage of answers in each category):

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school	59	38	3	0	0
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	63	37	0	0	0
The school handles complaints from parents well	33	52	6	8	0
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	43	45	9	3	0
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	41	47	5	8	0
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	42	54	5	0	0
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	38	55	6	0	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	36	50	3	11	0
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	52	45	3	0	0
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	42	47	6	5	0
My child(ren) like(s) school	55	43	0	0	2

Other issues raised by parents

A few parents expressed concern about the effect on their children's progress of the recent high turnover of staff.

A few parents commented that they thought there was too much homework for the younger pupils.

Many parents commented on the excellent leadership of the headteacher and the improvements since her appointment.