

# INSPECTION REPORT

**Mersham Primary School**  
Ashford

LEA area : Kent

Unique Reference Number :118377

Headteacher : Mr M Brooks

Reporting inspector :Mr M Milton  
OIN: 1723

Dates of inspection : 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 707473

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

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school : Infant and junior

Type of control : County

Age range of pupils : 4 to 11

Gender of pupils : Mixed

School address : Church Road  
Mersham  
Ashford  
Kent  
TN25 6NU

Telephone number : 01233 720449

Appropriate authority : Governing body

Name of chair of governors : Miss M Young

Date of previous inspection : March 1996

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
M Milton, Registered Inspector	Science; information technology; history; geography	Equality of opportunity; Attainment and progress; Attitudes, behaviour and personal development; Curriculum and assessment; Teaching; Efficiency
S Cash, Lay Inspector		Attendance; Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; Support, guidance and pupils' welfare; Partnership with parents and the community; Accommodation
S Morgan	Design and technology	
D Hunter	English; art; music; under-fives	Leadership and management
R Scahill	Mathematics; physical education; religious education; special educational needs	Staffing and learning resources

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33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

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## MAIN FINDINGS

### What the school does well

- ! Standards are high in English, mathematics and science.
- ! The quality of teaching is good and enables pupils to make good progress.
- ! Pupils behave very well indeed and are very keen to do their best work.
- ! Teachers' marking and the target setting for individual pupils helps them understand exactly what they need to do to improve their work.
- ! Assessment information is used effectively to keep a check on the progress made by individual pupils.
- ! It provides pupils with very good opportunities for social and moral development.
- ! The headteacher and other managers have successfully improved the quality of education and raised pupils' standards of attainment.
- ! Provision is good for pupils with special educational needs.

### Where the school has a weakness

- ! Pupils do not reach the expected standards in information technology.

**The weakness is greatly outweighed by the strengths, but it will form the basis of the governors' action plan.**

### How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has made very good progress since the previous inspection. All of the key issues have been addressed. The quality of teaching has been significantly improved, as have pupils' attitudes to work and their behaviour. Pupils' attainment has risen from average to well above average. The school has a good capacity to maintain the high standards and secure further improvement because there is a strong wish to provide the best possible education for the pupils. The staff work well as a team and are strongly supported by the parents. The headteacher provides very effective leadership and school development planning is very good.

### 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
English	A*	A
Mathematics	A	A
Science	A	A

<b>Key</b>	
<i>in top 5% of schools</i>	A*
<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

Standards are well above average for English, mathematics and science. Work in religious education is satisfactory but standards in information technology are below those expected. By five years of age, almost all children do well across the full range of their work. Their personal and social development is particularly good.

## Quality of teaching

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

*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 sound or better in all of the lessons seen. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. Teaching was good or better in 53% of the lessons seen. The overall quality of teaching is good, and this helps the pupils to make good progress. Specialist teaching of information technology has been started this term and pupils are now making good progress in lessons from a low starting point. However, pupils' progress in information technology during both key stages has been unsatisfactory.

## Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Very good in lessons and around the school.
Attendance	Levels of attendance are above the national average. Pupils arrive punctually.
Ethos*	Very good attitudes to learning. Pupils take responsibility for their own learning and want to do their best. Relationships are very good, and pupils work well in pairs and groups. There is a strong emphasis on high standards throughout the school.
Leadership and management	The headteacher has been very effective in leading and managing the school since the previous inspection. Other staff carry out their management responsibilities effectively. The monitoring of teaching and the curriculum is very good. The governing body actively supports the improvement of the school.
Curriculum	Is broad and balanced, and well planned to help pupils learn. The Literacy and Numeracy Hours are being well taught. Good range of extracurricular clubs, including sports. Good systems for assessing pupils' attainment, and this information is being used to improve the curriculum.
Pupils with special educational needs	Make good progress, especially when receiving specialist support, including extra help during Literacy Hour lessons. Learning support assistants are well qualified and effective.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Good overall. Links with the church have been strengthened. The school's assembly guidelines do not give staff enough guidance for acts of collective worship. Any concerns or problems that pupils might have are discussed weekly in each class. All who work in the school are considerate towards each other. Visits and the curriculum provide opportunities for cultural development, but pupils have few opportunities to learn about the richness and diversity of other cultures.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	The school actively promotes the professional development of staff, and this increases their effectiveness. The staff are committed and hard working. There are sufficient, well-organised learning resources. Many improvements have been made to the building and site since the previous inspection.
Value for money	Good. Pupils' attainment on entry is above average. They make good progress and at eleven their attainment is well above average. The pupils' personal development is very good.

\* *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"> <li>! There are high expectations of behaviour.</li> <li>! There is a caring attitude amongst the pupils and a family feel to the school.</li> <li>! Behaviour is good.</li> <li>! Their children like school.</li> <li>! The school teaches pupils positive values and attitudes.</li> <li>! Homework projects are well marked.</li> <li>! The setting of homework is improving and parents are clearer about the system for setting it.</li> <li>! Pupils are polite and respectful of other children and adults.</li> <li>! The school is very good at communicating with parents.</li> <li>! Reports are very full and clear about targets for improvement.</li> <li>! The school encourages the involvement of parents.</li> <li>! The school is very approachable if their children have problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>! Particular criticisms were only raised by</li> </ul>

The parents are very supportive of the school. Inspection evidence supports parents' positive views of the school.

### KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

The governing body, headteacher and staff should raise pupils' attainment in information technology by:

fully implementing the recently adopted scheme of work;  
ensuring that the use of information technology is included in the schemes of work for all subjects;  
teaching information technology skills to pupils efficiently so that more than two pupils can learn at any one time;  
providing pupils with more opportunities to work with computers each week;  
continuing with the training of staff to improve their expertise;  
compiling a portfolio of pupils' work to show the expected standards of attainment in each year.  
[7, 14, 97-100]

*[Numbers refer to the relevant paragraphs in the body of the report.]*

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

ensure that all written tasks in religious education are challenging; [26, 104]  
ensure that the improvements to homework are fully completed; [30]  
ensure that teachers have enough guidance for acts of collective worship; [39]  
provide more opportunities for pupils to experience the diversity and richness of other cultures; [42]  
ensure that the policy for special educational needs includes all of the necessary information; [54]  
continue to improve the stock of books in the school library; [60, 78]  
improve the opportunities for outdoor play by the under-fives; [66]  
provide Year 2 pupils with opportunities for measurement in science. [91]





## INTRODUCTION

### Characteristics of the school

Mersham has 167 pupils in six classes. This is below average in size for a primary school. There are similar numbers of boys and girls. About a quarter of the pupils come from the village itself, with most of the others from the nearby town of Ashford. Pupils come from a variety of backgrounds, with most from areas of private housing and advantaged backgrounds. About 7% of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is below the national average. Very few pupils are from ethnic minority groups. About 10% of pupils are on the school's special educational needs register, which is below average. One pupil has a statement of special educational need. Children enter the Reception class in the September after their fourth birthday. They attend full time at the beginning of the term in which they are five. At the time of the inspection, there were 20 children under five. Pupils' attainment on entry to Reception is above average.

The aim of the school is to establish a happy, supportive, working environment in which children are encouraged to:

- produce work of the highest quality;
- reach their full potential in all aspects of the curriculum and, in particular, acquire knowledge, effective communication skills, and understanding in literacy and numeracy;
- help and support each other socially and academically, and show a sensitive awareness of individual differences;
- develop a sense of moral responsibility and of self discipline, and adopt acceptable standards of behaviour;
- take full advantage of the opportunities provided to investigate their immediate environment;
- realise their place as members of a school, a local community, and, beyond that, of society;
- take responsibility for their own learning at the earliest opportunity and develop a desire to expand their knowledge and skills throughout their lives.

The school's current priorities for improvement are to:

- continue improving curriculum planning;
- use assessment to raise levels of achievement in literacy, numeracy and other subjects;
- improve the efficiency of recording and communicating assessment information;
- provide opportunities for staff development in key areas such as special educational needs, and information and communication technology;
- continue improving the quality of teaching and learning;
- develop and implement the new home-school agreement;
- improve learning resources for numeracy, and information and communication technology.

The targets agreed with the local education authority for the percentage of pupils reaching Level 4 or above in 2000 are 85% in English and 90% in mathematics. The targets for 1999 were achieved.

## Key Indicators

### Attainment at Key Stage 1

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	17	13	30

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Number of pupils at NC Level 2 or above	Boys	14	15	17
	Girls	12	12	12
	Total	26	27	29
Percentage at NC Level 2 or above	School	87 (94)	91 (94)	97 (94)
	National	82 (80)	83 (81)	87 (84)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 2 or above	Boys	14	16	16
	Girls	12	12	12
	Total	26	28	28
Percentage at NC Level 2 or above	School	87 (94)	93 (94)	93 (100)
	National	82 (81)	86 (85)	86 (86)

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Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

## Attainment at Key Stage 2

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	8	11	19

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 4 or above	Boys	8	7	8
	Girls	10	8	10
	Total	18	15	18
Percentage at NC Level 4 or above	School	95 (50)	79 (30)	95 (40)
	National	70 (65)	69 (59)	78 (69)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 4 or above	Boys	7	7	8
	Girls	10	10	10
	Total	17	17	18
Percentage at NC Level 4 or above	School	89 (60)	84 (50)	94 (60)
	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	5.3
	National comparative data	5.6
Unauthorised Absence	School	0.3
	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

Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year, when only 10 pupils took the tests

Percentage of teaching observed which is :

	%
Very good or better	19
Satisfactory or better	100
Less than satisfactory	0

## **PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL**

### **EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL**

#### **Attainment and progress**

The attainment of the under-fives is above average when they enter the school and they make satisfactory progress during their time in Reception. By the time they are of statutory school age, their attainment is above national expectations across all of the areas of learning. For language and literacy, the majority of pupils are beginning to recognise initial sounds and some can write simple words unaided. They are learning to make use of first dictionaries to find out the initial letter of familiar objects. Children have a good knowledge of the conventions of books and stories, and some are beginning to read. For mathematics, children know a number of counting rhymes and sing counting songs enthusiastically. They are familiar with mathematical language, such as *behind* and *in front*, and can use a number line to check the answers to simple questions. Pupils make good progress in their personal and social development.

Since 1996, the Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 national test results have improved at a faster rate than the national improvement. There was a fall in results in 1998 when there were a small number of pupils in Year 6 and several had special educational needs. The results for eleven-year-olds in 1999 were well above average for all schools and well above average for similar schools. More than half of the pupils achieved the higher Level 5 in English, mathematics and science, and Level 6 was achieved by a pupil in English and mathematics.

At the time of the previous inspection, pupils' standards at Key Stages 1 and 2 were similar to the national average. Since then, standards have improved a great deal and are now well above national averages in English, mathematics and science. The only subject in which standards are below national expectations is information technology. Overall, pupils make good progress during their time at the school. In the lessons seen during the inspection, pupils made good progress. Higher-attaining pupils make good progress as shown by the high proportion of eleven-year-olds who achieved high levels in the national tests. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress especially when receiving specialist support in their class through, for example, additional literacy support, and when receiving intensive teaching when withdrawn from classes for short periods of time. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress over time as during the last year about a quarter of the pupils on the special educational needs register have moved to a lower level or been removed from the register altogether.

There are some differences in the results of boys and girls at Key Stage 1. The school identified that the main difference was that girls' reading results were better than boys', and it has taken action to seek to secure an improvement in boys' reading. By eleven, the results of girls and boys are similar.

Pupils make good progress in English and their attainment at seven and eleven is well above national averages. Key Stage 1 pupils are confident in speaking to small groups and to the whole class. They discuss their work thoughtfully. They listen to complex instructions from adults and follow them correctly. Key Stage 2 pupils are fluent and confident speakers and they have a good vocabulary. They listen to the opinions of their peers and respond accordingly. Pupils of all ages show a great interest in books. They read with understanding, confidence and fluency. They have various strategies to help them when unfamiliar words present problems. Older pupils read with increasing understanding of setting, character and plot. Most Year 6 pupils can evaluate the text they read and refer to relevant pages to support their opinions. Pupils' handwriting is fluent, joined and legible. There are good examples of writing for different purposes and audiences, from note taking at the lower end of Key Stage 2, to different styles of diary writing at the top end of the key stage. Presentation of work is good from pupils of all abilities.

There are good opportunities in Key Stage 1 to develop pupils' literacy skills through other subjects. For example, during a science lesson, the names of some plants and animals were used to reinforce phonic work. In history, pupils learned about Pepys' diary and wrote their own diary for a day during the Great Fire of London. In Key Stage 2, there was good development of literacy during a mathematics lesson on interrogating graphs. Many questions were formulated and appropriate vocabulary was promoted, for example, *identical*, *popular*, and *interrogated*. In music, extracts from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" were used as a stimulus for a musical accompaniment.

Pupils make good progress at both key stages in all aspects of mathematics and their attainment at seven and eleven is well above national averages. They have good numeracy skills. In one Key Stage 2 class, pupils made good progress as they consolidated their knowledge of the properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes by devising puzzles for others to solve. In another class, pupils made good progress in their understanding of the relationship between decimals, fractions and percentages.

Pupils' numeracy skills are well used in other subjects. For example, in science, Key Stage 2 pupils are often involved in measuring as part of their investigative work and present data as bar and line graphs, which they then interpret. In geography, as part of some fieldwork on the River Stour, older Key Stage 2 pupils calculated the water's surface speed and drew cross sections of the channel, while younger pupils drew and interpreted climate graphs.

Key Stage 1 pupils make sound progress in science and their attainment is above average at seven. For example, pupils sort objects by the type of material from which they are made, and by the extent to which their shape can be changed by different forces, such as twisting. They test materials to find which are waterproof, and investigate the conditions needed for seeds to germinate. Key Stage 2 pupils make good progress and their attainment is well above national averages. For example, Year 6 pupils understand terms such as dissolve, filter, sieve, condense and saturate, and are able to apply their knowledge by devising ways of separating different mixtures. They complete plenty of investigative work which is very well structured and includes prediction, the formulation of hypotheses, measurement and drawing conclusions from findings. A particular strength of the investigative work is that pupils are starting to use their knowledge to explain their findings.

The school has recently upgraded its computers and also adopted the Qualification and Curriculum Authority's scheme of work, which are both improvements since the previous inspection. However, these changes have not been in place long enough to make a significant improvement to pupils' attainment in information technology. Consequently, pupils have not had the opportunity to make enough progress and their attainment is below national expectations at the end of both key stages. However, their progress over time is improving. At the end of Key Stage 2, the keyboard skills and knowledge of saving and loading files are relatively weak for a significant number of pupils. Pupils in various Key Stage 2 classes have used information technology for a number of different uses but eleven-year-olds have not had the systematic teaching of the full range of skills during the key stage.

In religious education, pupils make sound progress during both key stages and their attainment at seven and eleven matches the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. Key Stage 1 pupils know why Harvest Festival is held and write prayers thanking God for His gifts. They learn about Hindu festivals and recall the story of Rama and Sita. Key Stage 2 pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of Christianity and of some features of other major world religions. They made good progress in a lesson when comparing the different accounts of the 'Feeding of the Five

Thousand'.

In geography and history, most of the pupils' work is appropriate for their ages with some work that is above the expected standard. For example in geography, Year 2 pupils complete sound maps of the school's site and of their routes to school, and Year 5 and 6 pupils calculate water speed and the channel shape following fieldwork on the nearby River Stour. In history, Year 2 pupils had a sound knowledge of Florence Nightingale's work in the Crimea and made very good progress as they identified many similarities and differences between clothes, lights and nurses' uniforms now and in her times. Older pupils used portraits as evidence about Henry VIII, from which they drew conclusions about his character.

Pupils make sound progress in art, design and technology, music and physical education, and their work is appropriate for their ages. Art work is sound for painting and drawing but there is little three-dimensional work. In design and technology, Year 6 pupils are able to develop a number of design ideas, for example, when designing toys using mechanisms such as cams, and Year 2 pupils undertake simple research, for example, looking at the materials used to make puppets. In music, older pupils sing with accurate pitch and good volume. As part of physical education, nearly all pupils meet the expected standard in swimming and many earn a range of distance and skills awards.

### **Attitudes, behaviour and personal development**

The under-fives in Reception make very good progress with their social development. They respond politely to adults and to each other. They can follow instructions and comply with requests. They work well in groups and, when they have completed the set task, they check the activity board and move on sensibly to the area that has been designated for their group. They are well behaved in the classroom and show thorough understanding of the class and school routines.

At the parents' meeting before the inspection, the parents agreed that the school has high expectations of behaviour, deals with problems effectively, and that pupils are polite and respectful. A high proportion of those parents returning the questionnaire judged the pupils' behaviour to be good. The findings of the inspection support parents' views. Pupils' behaviour is very good overall in lessons and around the school. The only unsatisfactory behaviour seen was by a very small number of pupils and occurred occasionally in the Year 2 class. No pupils have been excluded in the last year.

The parents at the meeting agreed that they liked the caring attitude amongst pupils, and the family feel to the school. The inspection findings support this view. Older pupils help younger ones and teach them games in the playground. The older pupils had to apply for this responsibility and received training. In lessons, pupils naturally help each other, and couch criticisms in a kindly way. Relationships are very good amongst the pupils and between pupils and adults. Pupils work well in pairs and groups. They willingly take responsibility by helping their teachers with different tasks. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into the life of the school and work well.

Pupils have very good attitudes to learning, which is a great improvement since the previous inspection. They concentrate well and are keen to take part in lessons by, for example, answering questions and contributing to class discussions. They work with some independence from Year 1 and take responsibility for their own learning from an early stage. They take a pride in their work and present it carefully. The pupils want to work hard and they apply themselves diligently to the tasks they are set. This makes a significant contribution to pupils' good rates of progress.



Occasionally, a few younger pupils lack the normal self-discipline and motivation to work.

A key issue from the previous inspection was to teach the pupils the skills they need for learning. The school has made very good progress in resolving this issue.

### **Attendance**

Levels of attendance continue to be above the national average, with unauthorised absence below that found in many schools. The required statistics are now properly published. Most pupils arrive punctually, an improvement since the last inspection, and time keeping during the day is now satisfactory. Registers continue to be efficiently marked and annotated. Pupils are very keen to come to school. Their good attendance and punctuality are making a useful contribution to the progress pupils make in lessons.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED**

### **Teaching**

The overall quality of teaching is good. Teaching was sound or better in all lessons seen, and good or better in more than half of the lessons seen. Teaching has improved a great deal since the previous inspection when teaching was only sound or better in 60% of the lessons seen. The causes of the improvement are that almost all of the teachers have changed since the previous inspection, and a very effective programme for the monitoring and support of teaching has been introduced. The improvement to teaching has resulted in pupils making much better progress. The weaknesses identified in teaching by the previous inspection have been remedied.

The quality of the teaching of the under-fives is sound and this enables children to make satisfactory progress in all areas of learning except for their personal and social development where progress is good. The teacher and the classroom assistant work very well together and the classroom assistant plays a valuable teaching role in the small groups she helps. The class teacher introduces the lesson and the expectations in a friendly manner and the children are encouraged to accept responsibility for themselves and their learning from the very beginning. Daily structured play sessions provide a broad, interesting range of tasks and the class is managed to ensure that each child has a broad experience of activities. Occasionally, the pace of work in whole-class teaching is a little slow. In a lesson where the children made good progress, there was a brisk pace to the sequence of stimulating activities and very little slack time. The teacher and learning support assistant were actively involved throughout in encouraging talk and extending the children's understanding.

Teaching is good at Key Stages 1 and 2, and enables pupils to make good progress. Teachers' subject knowledge is good, for example, of the requirements of the Literacy and Numeracy Hours and how to teach investigative science. This good subject knowledge results from the school's active policy for promoting the professional development of its staff. There is some specialist teaching of music, science, physical education and geography and this helps improve pupils' progress. Teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to work are high but realistic. Pupils are helped to take responsibility for their own learning and develop good study skills. They are able to concentrate on the task in hand and work without direct supervision. This is an important factor in their good progress. Teachers always use the appropriate vocabulary for each subject. Work is challenging for the higher-attainers as well as being well matched to the needs of lower-attainers. There are occasional instances in religious education when written work is insufficiently challenging. Lesson plans are good and include clear learning intentions,

which are often shared with pupils at the start of the lesson. Then, during a plenary session at the end of the lesson, the class reviews its progress towards achieving the intentions.

A strength of teachers' methods is that they often use time-limited tasks which ensures that there is a brisk pace of learning. Numeracy lessons all start with a session of mental mathematics although occasionally pupils are not given enough opportunities to practice their skills quickly. Teachers' explanations are usually clear, and they motivate and encourage the pupils, for example, during the Literacy Hour, and make the work relevant to the pupils' lives. They often group pupils by attainment in their classes and this helps match work to the needs of the pupils. The school's good learning resources are well used. For example, in a Key Stage 1 lesson on the classification of materials, pupils had a wide variety of materials to work with and, in a Key Stage 2 history lesson, pupils used many different Victorian artefacts as evidence.

Teachers' marking is particularly good. Work is marked regularly. Marking identifies errors in, for example, pupils' knowledge and understanding of science. Comments are specific to each pupil and include clear guidance on how to improve attainment and progress. Linked to this is the good target setting for each pupil in English, mathematics and science.

The specialist teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very good and pupils make good progress. The specialist teaching includes support in class and a few short sessions when individual pupils are withdrawn from their classes. Relationships are very good in the one-to-one teaching sessions. There is a brisk pace of work and much is achieved that is directly related to the targets in the pupils' individual education plans. The teaching helps pupils to work out answers for themselves. In-class support includes effective additional literacy support. Learning support assistants liaise closely with class teachers and keep detailed records of pupils' response and progress. The targets in individual education plans are taken into account as teachers plan their lessons.

Some parents completing the questionnaire were dissatisfied with the homework their children were set. However, at the meeting before the inspection, parents agreed that homework projects are well marked and that the setting of homework is improving and arrangements have now been formalised. The inspection evidence is that the current arrangements for the setting of homework are good.

### **The curriculum and assessment**

The curriculum for the under-fives is appropriate and includes all the necessary areas of learning. There is a satisfactory transition to the National Curriculum, and there is close liaison with the Year 1 class to ensure continuity in pupils' learning. There is a good system for assessing pupils' progress and good records are kept for each area of learning.

The school provides a curriculum for Key Stages 1 and 2 that is broad, balanced and relevant. As at the time of the previous inspection, breadth is provided by drama and French together with worthwhile study of all of the National Curriculum subjects. The Literacy and Numeracy strategies are being effectively implemented. Each class has a Literacy Hour for four days each week with a lesson for extended writing on the fifth day. This arrangement is effective. All statutory requirements are met except for the special educational needs policy which does not include all of the necessary information; the school is aware of this and is in the process of revising and improving the policy. Personal and social education is timetabled for each class each week.

The school provides good equality of access and opportunity for all pupils. For example, the school identified a difference between boys and girls in reading and has responded to boys' lower achievement by improving the supplies of books for that will be of interest to boys. Pupils with special educational needs are effectively supported and higher-attainers are successfully challenged. Some pupils with special educational needs are withdrawn from their classes, and receive well-planned effective teaching. Where pupils are supported in classes, the learning support assistants establish good relationships with pupils and liaise effectively with the teachers. Individual education plans are clear and provide appropriate targets for improvement for individual pupils.

A key issue from the previous inspection was to continue to improve planning for continuity and progression in pupils' learning. Sufficient improvement has been made as the school has adopted schemes of work for most subjects, but the school will need to continue to fully implement the improvements that have been started. An aim of the governing body is to establish single-age classes to simplify curriculum planning, and it has been successful; there are only two mixed-age classes at present and the school hopes to create a new class next September so that all classes will have a single age group. There is a clear, well-structured system of curriculum planning. There are long-term plans for all subjects and the school has started to use the schemes of work published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. Teachers' medium-term plans give the learning objectives for each week together with the teaching activities; this remedies a weakness identified at the previous inspection. The school has begun using well-structured short-term lesson planning since the start of term. This short-term planning for pupils includes provision for pupils of differing levels of attainment, and it is good that teachers' planning efforts are now focused on planning at this level. At the end of Year 6, pupils transfer to seven or eight secondary schools but there is no effective curriculum liaison with them.

For pupils with special educational needs, the special educational needs co-ordinator and the learning support assistants liaise well with the class teachers. The curriculum arrangements help the pupils make progress in literacy, especially with the special literacy support provided this year as part of the Literacy Hour. Pupils' targets in their individual educational plans are appropriate. A variety of specific assessments are used to identify pupils with special needs, in addition to the school's comprehensive programme of assessment.

The good range of extracurricular activities include netball, dance, football, rugby, short tennis, choir, orchestra, calligraphy, chess and library. Two teachers run a sports club during the summer term. Year 6 pupils have a day of sailing and watersports each year. There are regular sports fixtures with local schools. The school teams have been successful in recent years in kwik cricket, athletics, football, and new-image rugby. All Key Stage 2 pupils receive swimming coaching during the spring term. Professional coaches are employed to support cricket, football and swimming.

There are good systems for assessing pupils' attainment. At the time of the previous inspection, there was a good portfolio for English. Now there are also portfolios for mathematics and science, and the English portfolio has been revised. A wide range of assessment tests are used and the results are thoroughly analysed to identify pupils who are underachieving and to improve the curriculum. For example, a weakness in pupils' spelling was identified and this aspect of the curriculum was developed which led to improved spelling by pupils. This assessment information is also used in the setting of year group and individual targets. Pupils agree personal targets for improvement with the class teachers for English, mathematics and science as well as selecting one target of their own for each subject. There is good assessment of reading and mathematics, and one piece

of writing work for each pupil is matched to National Curriculum levels each term. Other subjects are assessed at least twice each term against learning objectives.

The previous inspection identified the need to make greater use of assessment to diagnose problems before the end of key stages. This has been improved. There is a very good analysis of national tests at seven and eleven as well as the non-statutory national tests to identify weaknesses in the knowledge and understanding of individual pupils as well as more general weaknesses. It will be important to continue with this, as the schemes of work are relatively new and there has been little time available to improve them on the basis of assessment information.

### **Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

As at the time of the last inspection, provision for pupils' spiritual development is sound. Pupils are helped to develop a strong sense of self-worth and to understand how they relate to others. Links with the church have strengthened over the past three years. Older pupils spoke of finding the silence observed on Remembrance Day, and on other occasions of sadness within the school community, very moving. However, not all pupils have an opportunity to reflect on what has been said in assembly nor to take part in a daily act of collective worship. The acts of worship seen during the inspection were of a sound quality but some assemblies do not include worship. There are brief assembly guidelines but these do not give teachers enough advice as they provide class assemblies.

Provision for pupils' moral development has improved and is now good. It is specifically addressed in the aims of the school and the headteacher considers this aspect of the school's work to be very important. There is a clear emphasis, for example, in the behaviour and anti-bullying policies, on knowing right from wrong and on understanding the consequences of one's actions on other people. Pupils are encouraged to consider those less fortunate than themselves through the support of various charities. They are also helped to develop a growing awareness of environmental issues. At the end of each week, time is set aside within classes to consider any concerns or problems which may have arisen during the week. These are discussed and solutions sought. Such opportunities support both the moral and social development of pupils.

The very good social development of pupils is valued by parents, almost all of whom feel that the school promotes positive values and attitudes. They appreciate the family feel of the school, the caring attitude among pupils and the help which the older ones give in looking after the younger ones. There are good opportunities for increasing responsibility as pupils move through the school, from performing helpful tasks in the Reception class, to explaining the literacy group task in Year 1, and finally taking on a wide range of responsibilities in Year 6. Adults provide very good role models in the way they treat pupils and in the support they offer, for example, in resolving friendship problems and ensuring that new pupils quickly feel at home. Clear expectations about behaviour and personal relationships, which are consistently reinforced throughout the school right from the very beginning of the Reception class, lead to the high standards of behaviour and consideration for others observed during the inspection. This is an improvement on the findings of the previous inspection.

Sound provision is made for pupils' cultural development through music and art, and particularly through history, where the topics are studied in depth. Pupils go on visits each year, linked to areas of the curriculum. For example, they have been to Bodiam Castle and to the British Museum. Pupils listen to music from other cultures and learn about other faiths in religious education. Some have visited a Sikh Temple. Others compare life in an Indian village with life in their own village. During book week, a story teller told the pupils stories from different

cultures. However, pupils generally have little first-hand experience of other cultures and the school offers too few opportunities for them to experience the diversity and richness of other cultures.

### **Support, guidance and pupils' welfare**

The school has recently developed good systems for monitoring pupils' academic progress. Pupils and teachers set individual targets in a number of subjects. Pupils are clear about these and say they find them helpful. Every pupil has a folder of best work so that they and their teachers can look back and see what progress has been made. These systems are making a significant contribution to raising standards. Good progress has been made in this area since the last inspection. Pupils' personal development is not monitored formally but teachers know their pupils well and are able to write perceptive comments about them on their annual reports.

The progress of pupils with special educational needs is carefully monitored. There are effective links with outside specialists and agencies including a special school.

Good progress has also been made in developing and implementing a whole-school behaviour policy and an anti-bullying policy. There is a clear structure of rewards and sanctions which pupils understand. Parents felt that the policies make the school's expectations clear and encourages a partnership between parents and school in maintaining high standards of good behaviour. The behaviour policy is consistently used throughout the school in a positive manner, so that relationships are good and the school is an orderly place. Pupils and their parents expressed confidence that there was little bullying and that incidents, such as name-calling, would be dealt with quickly and effectively. The level and quality of supervision at break times and lunch times has improved since the last inspection and is now good.

There are sound systems for monitoring attendance and punctuality. An effective system for promoting improved punctuality is now in place and so pupils now arrive promptly in the mornings. Effective child protection procedures are in place, though the policy is old and about to be reviewed. The health and safety issues raised in the previous report have largely been addressed. The school deals well with pupils who require first aid or medication and careful records are kept. Good sex and drugs education policies have recently been updated and appropriately include the involvement of outside agencies.

Pupils receive good support when they enter the school, through a sensitive induction process which includes home visits. The arrangements for transfer to secondary school are similar to those found in most schools. Pupils expressed confidence that teachers and other adults would listen to them and give advice if they had any concerns or problems. Parents also cited examples of the support the school had given to their families. Of particular value is the time set aside on Friday afternoons when teachers and pupils can discuss issues which may have arisen during the week. Overall, the school makes good provision for the support, guidance and wellbeing of its pupils. Many aspects of this provision have improved since the last inspection.

### **Partnership with parents and the community**

The school has worked hard to maintain its good relationships with parents and the local community since the last inspection and has made some good improvements. Inspection evidence confirms parents' views that reports about pupils' attainment and progress during the year are now consistently good with clear judgements and useful guidance on how to improve. Parents are pleased that they now receive good information about the topics their children will be studying

so that they are able to support the work at home. Parents have been kept well informed about recent developments in literacy and numeracy. The school made a video of each class having a numeracy lesson and, having used it for staff training, released extracts for parents to view. Other information for parents continues to be of a good standard. Almost all parents responding to the questionnaire said that the school encourages them to get involved and is very approachable if they have any concerns about their child. Good use is made of home-school books for two-way communication between parents and school. Parents of pupils with special educational needs have the opportunity to discuss their children's progress at parents' evenings, and there are good home-school contact books for pupils with individual education plans. The school intends to improve communication with parents about changes made to individual education plans during the year.

Parents continue to be very supportive of the school. Many hear their children read regularly, support homework and provide practical help. An active parent teacher association raises money for school improvements and organises social events for other parents and for the pupils. Pupils appreciate the efforts their parents made to create the recently developed friendship garden, which pupils helped to plan and to which local firms and individuals contributed. A cook book has been compiled with contributions from a large number of people and has been sold to the wider community.

Pupils benefit from the good use made of the local area to enhance the curriculum. They study the nearby river and visit the church. Close links with the church support pupils' personal development as do other good links with the local community. The school is seen as a vital part of village life, contributing to the parish magazine and with plans to take part in Millennium celebrations. Pupils are also encouraged to take part in local and national competitions, which not only bring tangible rewards but also contribute to pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence.

## **THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL**

### **Leadership and management**

The headteacher is very effective in leading and managing the school. He provides clear educational direction for the continuing improvement of the provision for the pupils' education. The key stage co-ordinators work closely with the headteacher, as the senior management team, and are effective in this role. A major strength is the promotion of excellent relationships and teamwork at the key stage meetings which are held regularly, where teachers plan and review the curriculum. The governing body strongly supports the direction set by the headteacher. It meets regularly, has set up various subcommittees and has been active in the agenda for improvement since the last inspection. Each governor is linked with a curriculum area and visits the school periodically. An experienced governor mentors new governors on their first visit. The management of the school has been very effective in raising standards and improving the quality of teaching since the previous inspection.

The curriculum is effectively supported, monitored and evaluated by subject co-ordinators and key stage co-ordinators. Their work ensures that good attention is given to planning for progression and continuity of learning. Thorough analysis of the assessment results for Key Stage 1 and non-statutory tests informs the strategy for raising standards. Monitoring the curriculum is a strength of the school. The headteacher plays an active part in monitoring and he also releases the key stage co-ordinators for one afternoon a week each so that they can in turn carry out monitoring, or release subject co-ordinators to do the same. The monitoring is very informative and teachers are given valuable feedback.

Development planning is very good. The work of the school is planned in a realistic yet comprehensive school development plan. Subject co-ordinators carry out an annual audit for their subjects. These are detailed and lead to accurate identification of aspects that need improvement and which will be instrumental in raising standards. There are good strategies in place for the staff and governors to be involved in the formulation of the plan.

The provision for pupils with special educational needs is well managed. The co-ordinator has regular meetings with staff. However, as the school is aware, its policy for special educational needs does not include all of the necessary information. Other statutory requirements are met except that assemblies do not always include an act of collective worship.

The whole school community actively pursues the aims of the school which are very well implemented. There is an excellent ethos at Mersham. This is reflected in the way that the pupils are managed, their very good attitude towards their work and their good progress. Everyone is committed to raising standards for all pupils, with excellent relationships between governors, parents and staff, and all working together towards shared aims. There is a sound policy for equality of opportunity. The school identified that girls' reading was better than boys' at Key Stage 1, and has taken steps to seek to improve boys' standards.

The school has made very good improvement since the previous inspection. The key issues have been addressed, pupils' attitudes to work and behaviour are much better, and the teaching is now good when it was poor. Pupils' attainment is now much higher. The school has a good capacity to maintain the high standards and secure further improvement because the headteacher provides very good leadership, there is a strong wish to offer the best possible education for the pupils, the staff work well as a team, and planning for improvement is very good.

### **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

The school is well staffed with qualified teachers whose initial qualifications or subsequent training are well matched to their specific areas of responsibility. There are sufficient learning support assistants, who are deployed well to help younger pupils, those with special educational needs, and all pupils with information technology. Since the last inspection, there has been almost a complete change of teaching staff. All staff have at least one area of responsibility. They work well as a team and share their expertise.

The headteacher has provided good support and induction for newly qualified staff. Three members of staff are trained appraisers and the appraisal process is up to date. All staff have agreed job descriptions. The school strongly promotes teachers' professional development and staff have attended a good range of professional development courses to enhance their teaching skills. All teachers have completed training in the literacy strategy. This year, there has been well-focused training in the numeracy strategy. The mathematics co-ordinator, headteacher and chair of governors have attended initial numeracy training, and the co-ordinator has led in-service training days to inform staff of the new initiative. There has been in-school training for information technology. The special educational needs co-ordinator is completing further training for pupils with special learning difficulties. Learning support assistants are involved in accredited training activities to improve their skills. They make a very significant contribution to the educational provision for pupils and have received additional training in areas such as literacy and numeracy.

The school has worked very hard to secure significant improvements to the accommodation provided.

Close liaison with Channel Tunnel Rail Link and with Kent County Council has resulted in extensive work to reduce the impact of the fast rail track and to the completion of four new classrooms which replace the mobiles, referred to as inadequate in the last inspection report. Good improvements have also been made to the playground. The friendship garden, designed by pupils and built with the support of parents and local businesses, won an award in a national competition. The size of the school hall constrains the teaching of physical education but teachers plan well to reduce the impact as much as possible. The lack of a school field hinders pupils' progress with some sports. The wild area with a pond is used for pupils' work in science. Overall, accommodation is much improved since the last inspection and is now adequate for the effective delivery of the curriculum. Good use is made of displays to create a vibrant learning environment. The school is maintained and cleaned to a high standard and pupils take good care of it.

The range and quantity of resources have improved since the last inspection and are adequate for most subjects. They are now well stored in designated rooms and are easily accessible to the teachers.

In English, there is a good variety of new books for use in the literacy hour. The provision for information technology has improved and further development is planned. The library has been reorganised and a start has been made to improving its stock of books. It is staffed by parents.

### **The efficiency of the school**

The quality of financial planning is very good. At the time of the previous inspection, there was a need to link the budget more closely to the priorities for improvement in the school development plan, and this has now been done. Bench-marking information from a variety of sources is used to check budget allocations against, for example, allocations in similar schools. Budget information is clearly presented and readily to hand, and spreadsheets are used effectively to consider various options before decisions are made. The school has budgeted effectively for the introduction of new classes as it has expanded. The governing body agrees and monitors the budget.

Staff, accommodation and resources are effectively deployed. Learning support assistants are always busy and interact very effectively with the pupils to help them make progress. Teachers are effectively deployed. Both teachers and learning support assistants have good levels of expertise as a result of in-service training which has increased their effectiveness. The governing body has secured significant improvements to the school's accommodation which is well used to promote pupils' learning.

Financial control and all aspects of administration are good. At the time of the previous inspection, there was not a scheme showing the powers delegated by the governing body to the headteacher. This is now in place. A recent auditor's report found that the controls and procedures for financial administration were sound or better.

The school uses the funds it receives from the local education authority for pupils with special educational needs to pay for the learning support assistant who provides good value for money. Additional funds are allocated towards special educational needs expenditure from the school's budget. The expenditure is effective as the pupils make good progress.

The school provides good value for money because pupils' attainment on entry is above national averages and they make good progress during their time in the school. By eleven, pupils' attainment is well above average, and their personal development is very good. The school provides a good education. The school's value for money has improved since the previous



inspection.

## **PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS**

### **AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN UNDER FIVE**

The Reception class contains 26 children at present. The class is divided according to birth date. Older children attend full time whereas the younger children are mornings only. The youngest children will attend full time from January. At the time of the inspection, there were 20 children aged under five. Most of the children have had experience of a nursery or a play group. Children enter school with attainment that is above national expectations. They make satisfactory progress so that, by the time they are of statutory school age, their attainment remains above national expectations. The policy for early years is out of date and is in the process of being revised. Opportunities for outside play activities using wheeled toys and large apparatus are very limited. The school continues with the desirable outcomes for learning until the summer term by which time many children are of an age to be following the National Curriculum at Key Stage 1.

Children make very good progress with their personal and social development. They respond politely to adults and to each other. They can follow instructions and comply with requests. They work well in groups and, when they have completed the set task, they check the activity board and move on sensibly to the area that has been designated for their group. They are well behaved in the classroom and show thorough understanding of the class and school routines. They move quietly as a class, enter and leave assembly in silence, and settle quickly to tasks in their classroom. The teacher makes her expectations clear and firmly reinforces them with praise and encouragement.

Attainment in language and literacy is above national expectations and children make sound progress in this area. Most children can write their names although some need to copy from cards. They write their names automatically on any piece of written work they do. The majority are beginning to recognise initial sounds and some can write simple words unaided. They are learning to make use of first dictionaries to find out the initial letter of familiar objects. Children have a good knowledge of the conventions of books and stories and some are beginning to read. They handle books with care and many show a great interest. They listen in class and are happy to contribute to class discussions.

In mathematics, attainment is above national expectations. Children know a number of counting rhymes and sing counting songs enthusiastically. They are familiar with mathematical language, such as *behind* and *in front*, and can use a number line to check the answers to simple questions. They were able to show their understanding of words demonstrating relationships by practical work in the hall and later by drawing various animals relative to their position to a tree, for example, *on*, *off*, *in front*, and *behind*.

Attainment in knowledge and understanding is above average. Children can talk confidently about themselves and their environment. A variety of well-structured experiences encourage children to look, discuss and record what they encounter. They talk about past and present events in their lives, for example, birthdays, parties and holidays. They gain an understanding of materials as they plan and construct their models, and when building with Lego.

Children make sound progress in creative development. They can cut and glue competently when making a party hat. There was good development initiated by the classroom assistant in terms of the correct vocabulary to use, for example, triangle and the names of different colours. Children apply paint confidently and discuss their work and choice of colours. The role-play area is set

out as a school at present and children act out with enthusiasm the various roles of headteacher, pupil and school secretary.

Children make sound progress in their physical development. They run, skip and jump confidently in the outdoor play area, taking care not to bump into each other or trip over. They have good control over their actions and show an awareness of others. They have regular physical education lessons, which also help to improve the control they have over their movements. Children handle scissors, paint brushes and pencils with satisfactory control and play appropriately with construction toys.

The quality of the teaching is sound, and no unsatisfactory lessons were seen during the inspection. The teacher and the classroom assistant work very well together and the classroom assistant plays a valuable teaching role in the small groups she helps. The class teacher introduces the lesson and the expectations in a friendly manner, and the children are encouraged to accept responsibility for themselves and their learning from the very beginning. Daily structured play sessions provide a broad, interesting range of activities and the class is managed to ensure that each child has a broad experience of tasks. Occasionally, the pace of work in whole-class teaching is a little slow. In a lesson where the children made good progress, planning was clear with the objective to provide experience and understanding of some appropriate mathematical language. The lesson started with the whole class reading a big book together which included such words as *behind* and *in front of*. This was followed by the older children going to the hall for some practical activities based on these words while the younger pupils stayed in the classroom for a story with the learning support assistant. These activities were followed by all of the pupils making a drawing to illustrate these words. There was a brisk pace to the activities and very little slack time. The adults had very good relationships with the children, and worked busily with individuals and groups as they encouraged talk and extended the children's understanding.

The teacher makes home visits before the children start and this helps to ensure that children enter school feeling less apprehensive. Parents are involved in their children's education from the outset. Reading books are sent home and each book has a set of questions and suggested activities, prepared individually by the teacher, that the parents can do with their children. Good records are kept of a child's achievements in all areas of learning. Activities are well prepared although there is a lack of challenge in some of the tasks for the more-able children. Adults use questioning well to encourage children to express their ideas and thoughts, and to assess their learning.

## **ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE**

### **English**

At the end of both key stages, overall attainment is well above the national average. This is reflected in the national assessment tests in 1999, which were well above national averages for both seven-year-olds and eleven-year-olds. Results were well above average for similar schools.

At the last inspection, spelling in Key Stage 1 was said to be weaker than the other areas. The school has focused on improving spelling and standards have been raised considerably. The last report also noted that, while standards achieved in lessons were sound, there was underachievement at both key stages in relation to pupils' abilities. This too has been addressed by the school and attainment in lessons is good.

By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment in speaking and listening is above national averages.

Pupils are confident in speaking to small groups and to the whole class. They discuss their work thoughtfully. They listen to complex instructions from adults and follow them correctly. Pupils listen to each other politely. The standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are above national expectations. Pupils are fluent and confident speakers, and they have a good vocabulary. They listen to the opinions of their peers and respond accordingly. There are few opportunities provided in the curriculum, however, to augment their skills by way of planned argument or by using discussion as a forum to extend their debating skills.

Pupils' reading skills at both key stages are above the national average. The school has acknowledged that there is a gender imbalance in reading at Key Stage 1, with boys having lower attainment than girls. The school has already taken positive steps. New books have been purchased throughout both key stages including poetry books and factual books. Boys were asked to select books they would like to read from choice and these were purchased. In group reading sessions during the Literacy Hour, pupils from both key stages read well. In an older Key Stage 2 class, a group were reading a play on their own with excellent expression to make it really come alive. The school places a high priority on reading and there are quiet reading sessions as well as reading during the Literacy Hour. Pupils of all ages show a great interest in books. They read with understanding, confidence and fluency. They have various strategies to help them when unfamiliar words present problems. They read with increasing understanding of setting, character and plot. Most can evaluate the text they read and refer to relevant pages to support their opinions. Some pupils belong to a public library but most have a good selection of books at home. The school library lacks appeal. Although the number of books is limited, they are of good quality. However, improvements have been made recently and the school is aware that these need to continue. Pupils, even at the end of Key Stage 2, are unfamiliar with the simplified Dewey system used by the school.

At the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment in writing is well above the national average. Pupils at the beginning of the key stage are starting to write in clear sentences using guide words and phrases. Older pupils were able to write instructions for playing games of their own invention while others could write instructions on how to make a jam sandwich. The attainment in writing at the end of Key Stage 2 is well above the national average. Pupils' handwriting is fluent, joined and legible. There are good examples of writing for different purposes and audiences, from note taking at the lower end of the key stage, to different styles of diary writing at the top end. Presentation of work is good from pupils of all abilities. Pupils clearly take a pride in their written work.

There are good opportunities in Key Stage 1 to develop pupils' literacy skills through other subjects. For example, during a science lesson, plants and animals were used to reinforce phonic work. In history, pupils learned about Pepys' diary and wrote their own diary for a day during the Great Fire of London. The correct mathematical vocabulary is used in mathematics lessons from Year 1 onwards. In Key Stage 2, there was good development of literacy during a mathematics lesson on interrogating graphs. Many questions were formulated and the appropriate vocabulary was promoted, for example, *identical*, *popular*, and *interrogated*. In music, extracts from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" were used as a stimulus for a musical accompaniment. The passages were discussed and then appropriate instruments selected.

Progress in Key Stage 1 is good. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs also make good progress. They benefit from the close attention given to them by class teachers and learning support assistants. The Literacy Hour ensures that the texts selected are thoroughly analysed, and pupils participate in the understanding of the learning objectives. This leads to greater understanding of English construction. Pupils in Year 2, for example, were able to

transfer their knowledge of verbs in isolation and could pick them out in a given text. In Key Stage 2, progress is very good. Pupils in Year 6 have studied Shakespeare and have been able to demonstrate their understanding through their written and spoken work. In lessons, they were able to expand short diary entries to longer, more literate ones using descriptions, feelings and opinions. The emphasis the school has placed on extended writing has ensured a substantive impact in this area at both key stages.

All pupils have a positive attitude towards their English work. They concentrate well in lessons. They are keen to participate during the discussion at the start of the lesson and at the plenary at the end. They are very supportive of each other and try to couch any criticism in a kindly way. They can work independently from the beginning of Key Stage 1. They work well in pairs and in groups. They are focused on the tasks set and do not waste any time. They can take responsibility for their own learning. For example, in Year 1 a system of literacy leaders, one for each table, initiated the discussion with their class teacher and ensured that each pupil in the five groups knew exactly what to do. There were some good examples of pupils seeking out and using reference material to help them with their class work.

The overall quality of teaching is good, with examples of very good teaching in Key Stage 2. Pupils made good progress in most lessons seen. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and lessons are taught confidently. Their planning is very good and takes account of the ages and differing ability ranges within their classes. Plenary sessions are well used to reinforce work from the lesson and teachers make good use of the pupils' contributions to make further pertinent teaching points. Resources are appropriate for the set tasks and are well prepared. Pupils are motivated and encouraged when teachers celebrate their good work by clear praise and by sharing their success with other pupils. The pace of lessons is good with teachers informing pupils regularly how long they have to complete certain tasks. Marking is a strong feature of the teaching and the helpful comments are useful in raising pupils' standards. The individual targets in the pupils' books also improve their performance. Learning support assistants work well with small groups and make significant contributions to the pupils' progress.

English is well managed by an experienced co-ordinator. She monitors the subject regularly and effectively. There is a well-structured planning programme based on the National Literacy Strategy. The English curriculum extends beyond the Literacy Hour to give pupils opportunities for extended writing. Since the last inspection report, the school has worked hard in tackling the areas for improvement. This has been successful and effective. There has been considerable progress in each of the aspects and their impact has been a feature in raising standards.

## **Mathematics**

Pupils' results in the 1999 national tests at Key Stage 1 were above average. Attainment in lessons and previously completed work is above average. In the Key Stage 2 tests, results were well above the national average for all schools and well above the national average for similar schools. The results show a continuing rising trend and a marked improvement since the last inspection. These high standards are confirmed by the work from last year's Year 6 pupils and the good start that the current Year 6 pupils are making. Standards are similar in all aspects of mathematics.

Pupils of all abilities are making good progress at both key stages. They are involved in setting their own half-termly targets and this has contributed to the good progress they make. Pupils in each year have good numeracy skills. Pupils in Year 1 recognise number patterns and know the

names of simple shapes. This is reinforced and extended in Year 2. Pupils demonstrate good understanding of their knowledge of shape and their skills with number when they apply these to making games or recording their findings on a block graph. In Key Stage 2, pupils make good progress in all aspects of mathematics. Lessons start with a brief class session of mental and oral skills. This was particularly effective where pupils rose to the challenge to improve their speed. In one class, pupils were able to consolidate their knowledge of the properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes by devising puzzles for others to solve. In another class, pupils made good progress in their understanding of the relationship between decimals, fractions and percentages. Pupils made good progress in the lessons seen.

Pupils' numeracy skills are well used in other subjects. For example, in science, Key Stage 2 pupils are often involved in measuring as part of their investigative work and present data as bar and line graphs, which they then interpret. In geography, as part of some fieldwork on the River Stour, older Key Stage 2 pupils calculated the water's surface speed and drew cross sections of the channel, while younger pupils drew and interpreted climate graphs.

Pupils have good attitudes to mathematics. They are enthusiastic, keen to answer questions and they enjoy working at the tasks prepared for them. They co-operate well when working in pairs. For example, in the Year 2 class, they discussed the rules for the games they were making and were engrossed in the task. Pupils are confident when answering questions and in explaining their work. They work well independently and show a responsibility for their own learning. They take pride in their work which is neatly presented and well organised.

The quality of teaching is good. There were no unsatisfactory lessons seen during the inspection. This shows a great improvement since the last inspection. Lessons are well planned in line with the National Numeracy Strategy. The most effective had a short session to improve pupils' speed in mental mathematics. Some lessons started slowly and, although pupils were taught good strategies for mental calculation, they were not given the opportunity to practise them quickly. At the beginning of lessons, pupils are told what they are expected to learn. This is referred to during the lesson and discussed at the end by the way of reinforcement. In some lessons, not enough time was allowed for this summing up and discussion. Teachers question pupils effectively, both to check their understanding and to encourage them to find answers for themselves. They have a good knowledge of pupils' needs and work is set appropriately. However, in one class, the explanations and instructions were not precise enough for all pupils to understand what they had to do. There is a good balance between practical work and investigations, and pupils are taught to work independently. In some classes, teachers set time targets for different tasks, which encourages pupils to complete a good amount of work. Marking is good. In some instances, older pupils take responsibility for marking their own work. Teachers check this and write points for future development. Homework is used effectively and parents are given clear guidelines as to what pupils are expected to do.

The curriculum for mathematics is good. The National Numeracy Strategy has been introduced successfully with appropriate emphasis on mental calculation, number work and vocabulary. The school has also retained some of their previous good practice, which encourages pupils' independent learning. The monitoring of standards and teaching is very effective. Pupils' work is assessed effectively by analysing annual tests and tracking the progress of individual pupils. There is a portfolio of pupils' work that staff have agreed is representative of each National Curriculum level. There is clear direction for the subject and plans to raise standards further. Staff work well together, led by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable co-ordinator. Since the last inspection, there has been progress in planning and assessment, and the standards of attainment have improved in both key stages.

## Science

Pupils' standards of attainment have improved since the previous inspection. Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 in 1998 were above average, and the attainment of the current Year 2 pupils is above average. Pupils sort objects by the type of material from which they are made, and by the extent to which their shape can be changed by different forces, such as twisting. They test materials to find which are waterproof, and investigate the conditions needed for seeds to germinate. As at the previous inspection, there are appropriate standards in investigative science in Key Stage 1 and pupils predict results but do not support their observations with simple measurements.

In 1999, the results of the national tests taken by eleven-year-olds were well above average for all schools and for similar schools. Current standards are well above average. Year 6 pupils understand terms such as dissolve, filter, sieve, condense and saturate, and are able to apply their knowledge by devising ways of separating different mixtures. They complete plenty of investigative work which is very well structured and includes prediction, formulation of hypotheses, measurement and drawing conclusions from their findings. A particular strength of the investigative work is that pupils are starting to use their knowledge to explain their findings. Key Stage 2 pupils have many opportunities to use their numeracy skills in their investigative work.

All pupils make sound progress during Key Stage 1 and good progress during Key Stage 2. During the lessons seen at both key stages, pupils made good progress. In a Key Stage 1 lesson, for example, the group working with the teacher made good progress as they learnt about reversible change. Key Stage 2 pupils made good progress when they were required to apply their knowledge of circuits to a challenging new problem. They completed several experiments with different types of circuits and attempted to explain their findings. Pupils with special educational needs made similar progress to other pupils. For example, younger pupils were able to sort living things into plants and animals, and give simple reasons for their classification, and older pupils were fully involved in discussing the definition of terms such as evaporation.

Pupils' response to their science lessons was good at both key stages. In a lesson where the pupils response was very good, they were all thoroughly engrossed in the task, persevered as they tried to solve problems, worked well in pairs and stayed calm although the activity was a test. Occasionally, a few younger pupils lacked self discipline and found it difficult to persevere with the task set.

The quality of teaching was good in Key Stage 1 and very good in Key Stage 2. In a good Key Stage 1 lesson, the teacher reviewed the progress made in pupils' knowledge of materials by adding to the brainstorm diagram completed during the first lesson on the topic. She reinforced appropriate expectations about pupils' behaviour and work. There was clear teaching of a focus group about solids, liquids and reversible change. Pupils had very good stocks of resources with which to work. In a very good Key Stage 2 lesson, the teacher gave very clear instructions to pupils who were set a new problem to solve. The task was made fun and related to everyday life. Realistic deadlines were set which required a brisk pace of work. The teacher encouraged the use of scientific vocabulary throughout and assessed the progress of individuals. Instances of weaknesses in teaching included pupils running out of time and so unable to complete their tasks, and some pupils being confused as to whether they should be clearing up or writing their conclusions. A particular strength of the teaching is the high quality of marking. This identifies scientific errors and shows pupils how they can improve their work.

Planning is sound and the school has adopted the Qualification and Curriculum Authority's scheme of work. It will be important, as the school intends, to continue with the process of teaching and reviewing this scheme. There is a good portfolio of pupils' work to demonstrate the school's understanding of the National Curriculum levels and to guide teachers as they make their own assessments. There is a sound system for assessing pupils' progress in science. The new co-ordinator has achieved much in a short time. There was some good monitoring of pupils' work at the end of last term. This identified strengths and weaknesses and has started to help raise standards further. Resources have improved since the previous inspection and are now sufficient for the National Curriculum.

## **OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES**

### **Information technology**

The school has recently upgraded its computers and also adopted the Qualification and Curriculum Authority's scheme of work, which are both improvements since the previous inspection. However, these changes have not been in place long enough to make a significant improvement to pupils' attainment. Consequently, pupils have not had the opportunity to make enough progress over time and their attainment is below national expectations at the end of both key stages. However, their rate of progress over time is improving.

In Key Stage 1, pupils have some sound skills, for example, in using the mouse to operate a program for sorting objects. Work on word processing, data handling and control is planned later in the year. At the end of Key Stage 2, the keyboard skills and knowledge of saving and loading files are relatively weak for a significant number of pupils. Pupils in various Key Stage 2 classes have used information technology for a number of different uses but eleven-year-olds have not had the systematic teaching of the full range of skills during the key stage. Examples of the variety of uses include Year 5 pupils integrating text and graphics to make simple posters, and pupils from Years 5 and 6 last year using information from the internet together with word processing to successfully create a newspaper as part of a national competition. Some older pupils have created web pages, and integrated digital images and text using Publisher. Older pupils used software to display data they had collected about themselves.

The school has remedied a weakness identified in the previous report that there was insufficient teaching of information technology knowledge and skills. Since the start of this term, a learning support assistant teaches for one-and-a-half hours per week in each class. This knowledgeable teaching is well planned and pupils enjoy working with computers although a number lack the knowledge and experience to explore software confidently. These sessions provide pairs of pupils with intensive teaching of skills and enable them to make good progress. For example, older pupils solved simple problems by putting formulae and numbers into a spreadsheet, and younger pupils have learnt to change font type and size, and the colour of letters. Good assessments are made of pupils' progress. However, the learning support assistant often repeats the teaching of the same skills to each pair of pupils in a class and this approach is not efficient. Also, pupils have insufficient little direct use of computers each week.

The co-ordinator has held this responsibility for a relatively short time, and liaises effectively with the learning support assistant who provides the specialist teaching. The foundations have been laid



for improvement. Since the previous inspection, teachers' information technology expertise has improved and further training is planned for next year. The school has increased the rate at which it is investing in new computers, although the average number of pupils per computer is below the national average.

## **Religious Education**

Attainment in religious education matches the expectations of the local Agreed Syllabus at the end of both key stages. Progress over time and in lessons is satisfactory. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils are developing a good understanding of the festivals of Christianity and other faiths. They know why Harvest Festival is held and write prayers thanking God for His gifts. They learn about Hindu festivals and can recall the story of Rama and Sita. Previously completed work shows pupils have learned about Jewish ceremonies and studied the use of the special objects involved.

By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of Christianity and of some features of other major world religions. They understand that the Bible is made up of different types of books, the first five of which are also books of the Torah. They made good progress when comparing the different accounts of the 'Feeding of the Five Thousand' and comparing the parable of 'The Sower' with everyday situations in their own lives. These studies enrich pupils' literacy skills as well as their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Pupils listen attentively and are keen to answer questions. They show interest by asking questions, and are willing to share their own experiences. For example, with the help of the local vicar, they learnt about baptism and talked about christenings they have attended. Older pupils take care with the presentation of their work in which they retell stories and interpret ideas in individual and interesting ways.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Teachers have good relationships with the pupils and ask questions which encourage them to take part in discussions. They value pupils' opinions and keep them focused on the point of the lesson. Some less effective teaching was observed where the pace of discussion was slow and the written work was not sufficiently challenging. Resources are used well to stimulate pupils' interest. In one lesson, the teacher introduced a new topic by showing a video which held the pupils' attention and prompted some keen questions.

The scheme for religious education in the school is based on the Kent Agreed Syllabus with an overview of half-termly units of work. The units for Years 4, 5 and 6 are used in different years because of the mixed-age classes. The school benefits from the assistance of the local vicar and visits to the local church. The school has a good range of artefacts and books, which are readily available to give practical support to the teaching of different religions.

## **Art**

There was opportunity to observe only one lesson of art during the inspection and so judgements are based on pupils' work and discussions with teachers and pupils. Attainment in art is in line with the expectations of the ages of the pupils at both key stages. There is a systematic scheme of work in place but little reference is made to three-dimensional work and the importance of working in a variety of media. Sketchbooks have been little used with older Key Stage 2 pupils but there is little evidence that they have been used to develop art skills. There are art displays in each classroom, the hall and the library area, but they are of mixed quality and the school does not have an art-rich environment. There is evidence of art linking with history topics. In Year 3,

for example, the pupils have made their own Roman coins and begun rubbings, and in Years 4 and 5 pupils have completed Tudor portraits. Standards and provision are similar to those at the time of the last inspection.

## **Design and technology**

Pupils are working at the level expected for their ages and make satisfactory progress in both key stages. Year 6 pupils are able to develop a number of design ideas, for example, when designing toys using mechanisms such as cams. Pupils annotate their sketches to show materials that will be used. Higher-attaining pupils use more formal drawing techniques to show front and side elevations of their design proposals, and produce thoughtful evaluations of their practical work and suggest how improvements could be made. Older pupils in Key Stage 1 undertake simple research, for example, looking at the materials used to make puppets. They produce clear annotated diagrams showing how the puppets are constructed. As they move through the school, pupils develop a satisfactory range of specialist vocabulary, for example, older pupils in Key Stage 1 used the terms template and running stitch. Pupils are able to apply their design skills when entering competitions. They have successfully designed a safety poster for the railway and designed a 'friendship garden' which has been constructed in the school grounds.

It was not possible to observe direct teaching during the period of the inspection. Evidence gathered during the inspection shows that teachers' planning is now more systematic. This enables pupils' learning to build on previously completed work and is an improvement since the previous inspection. There have been significant improvements in curriculum planning since the previous inspection. There is a scheme of work which provides an appropriate range of learning experiences, using a variety of materials and processes. Appropriate assessment procedures are now in place. There is good management of the subject and regular monitoring of lessons and pupils' work. This has been effective in the identification of strengths and weaknesses, and is helping to improve standards. The school has a satisfactory range of resources.

## **Geography**

Most work is appropriate for the pupils' ages with some that is above the expected standard. For example, Year 2 pupils complete sound maps of the school's site and of their routes to school, and Year 5 and 6 pupils calculate water speed and the channel shape following fieldwork on the nearby River Stour. Older pupils compare life in the Indian village of Chembakolli with life in Mersham, and consider the arguments for and against the high-speed rail link. Pupils make sound progress with their geography work. There is some specialist teaching in Key Stage 2. Improvements since the previous inspection include more fieldwork in the school's locality and better curriculum planning with a clear termly plan for each class based on the Qualification and Curriculum Authority's scheme of work. It will be important to teach and review this over several years so that pupils learning geography in one year will be able to build on the work in the scheme for the previous year. A sound system for assessment has been introduced recently. The subject is well managed and the co-ordinator has had some release time during which she has monitored some lessons and pupils' written work. Resources are better organised than they were at the previous inspection.

## **History**

Most work is appropriate for the pupils' ages with some that is above the expected standard. In Key Stage 1, some work exceeds expectations for the pupils' ages. For example, pupils had a sound knowledge of Florence Nightingale's work in the Crimea and made very good progress as they

identified many similarities and differences between clothes, lights and nurses' uniforms now and in her times. Key Stage 2 pupils have good levels of knowledge and understanding. Younger pupils gave the differing views of the Romans and Celts on the Roman invasion. Older pupils used portraits as evidence about Henry VIII, as they drew conclusions about his character.

In the two lessons seen, pupils' responses were very good. Younger pupils were very interested in Florence Nightingale and developed good learning skills as they drew conclusions from the study of artefacts. They were mostly well behaved although a few became restless during the whole-class teaching. The teaching seen was very good. In a lesson with older pupils, the teacher had very good subject knowledge, the task focused on the evidence from a wide range of artefacts and required the pupils to apply their knowledge of the Victorians. The tasks were time limited so the pupils achieved much. In the other lesson, two parents made important contributions to the pupils' very good progress by showing groups particular artefacts they had brought to school. The school has recently adopted the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's scheme of work, but does not have explicit planning to show pupils' progression in learning the key skills of history. It is good that pupils work with a variety of primary sources when they study Mersham. The good range of visits contributes strongly to pupils' progress.

### **Music**

In the few lessons seen and in the assemblies visited, standards in music were appropriate for the pupils' ages, as they were during the last inspection. The older pupils sing with accurate pitch and good volume. They were practising a song from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" for their assembly and this was performed by a group of six pupils. The class worked well in selecting different instruments to set the mood of the various scenes from the play. There was little evidence available from last year to illustrate the level of work achieved at the end of an academic year. There is an extracurricular music club which was doing bell-ringing at the time of the inspection. A peripatetic music teacher teaches the violin to a small group of pupils. There is a scheme of work in place based on a commercial set of CDs and manuals. Standards and provision are similar to those at the time of the last inspection.

### **Physical Education**

Standards in physical education are similar to those expected for pupils of their age. All aspects of the National Curriculum are taught. Year 1 pupils make good progress in throwing and catching a ball. These skills are developed well, as pupils in Key Stage 2 use them to aim at a target and practise skills and tactics in a competitive game.

Every class has a games lesson and gymnastics or dance lesson each week throughout the year. All pupils at Key Stage 2 have swimming lessons in the spring term. Generally all pupils meet the expected standard in swimming and many earn a range of distance and skills awards. Older pupils use Mersham Sports Club's ground to practise a range of athletic skills. Pupils in the top class pursue a variety of outdoor adventurous activities such as skiing, rock climbing and canoeing on their residential trip.

Pupils enjoy physical education lessons. The youngest follow instructions and concentrate well. In one class, pupils worked with enthusiasm and vigour, but were noisy and ceased to try when the tasks became too demanding. The quality of teaching in the lessons seen was at least satisfactory. Lessons are planned for pupils to warm up before starting an activity. Clear and purposeful teaching contributes to the progress pupils are making. The school has arranged for visits by local professionals to coach the pupils in football and cricket. There are a good range of extracurricular activities which include netball, football, rugby and short tennis. The school

does well in competitive sport. The small hall limits the progress pupils make in indoor activities just as the absence of a school field hinders their progress in some games. Older pupils have the regular use of the Mersham Sports Club's ground.

## PART C: INSPECTION DATA

### SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspection was undertaken over a four-day period by five inspectors for a total of 14 inspector-days. For the majority of the time in school, the inspectors visited classes and talked with individuals and groups of children. In total, 36 direct observations were made of teaching and these totalled about 35 hours. The work of a sample of three pupils from each year was evaluated. A sample of children were heard reading from each year. Planned discussions were held with all teachers, the headteacher and governors, in addition to ongoing discussions with staff. Policy documents, teachers' planning and assessment records were scrutinised. A parents' meeting was held before the inspection, 14 parents attended and their views were taken into account. The 29 questionnaires returned were analysed.

### 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	167	1	16	11

#### Teachers and classes

##### Qualified teachers (YR – Y6)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	23.4

##### Education support staff (YR – Y6)

Total number of education support staff	4
Total aggregate hours worked each week	61
Average class size:	27

#### Financial data

Financial year:	1998-9
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Total Income	230,596
Total Expenditure	236,232
Expenditure per pupil	1,675
Balance brought forward from previous year	14,818
Balance carried forward to next year	9,182

## PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:

160
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Number of questionnaires returned:

29
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### 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	52	45	3	0	0
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	62	34	0	3	0
The school handles complaints from parents well	15	56	26	4	0
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	14	55	14	17	0
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	38	45	7	10	0
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	46	50	4	0	0
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	36	46	18	0	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	21	41	10	28	0
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	41	52	3	0	3
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	41	48	10	0	0
My child(ren) like(s) school	52	45	3	0	0