

INSPECTION REPORT

RIVERHEAD INFANTS SCHOOL

Riverhead Sevenoaks

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118453

Headteacher: Mrs Christine Dyer

Reporting inspector: Mrs Patricia Davies
22460

Dates of inspection: 22nd - 24th May 2000

Inspection number: 189425

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 to 7
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Ms Jenna Leight
Date of previous inspection:	September 1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Riverhead Infants has 274 pupils on its roll, which is larger than other similar schools, and the school is often oversubscribed. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is very low at 0.7 per cent. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is slightly lower than at the time of the previous inspection, at 22 per cent, and this is broadly in line with the national average. Of these pupils, a very small percentage have statements of educational need. A few pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds, or have English as an additional language. The pupil population is stable, with little movement in and out of the school. There have been a lot of changes in teaching staff since the previous inspection, and some of the current staff are temporary appointments. When children enter compulsory education at the age of five, their attainment is above what is nationally expected, though the school's initial assessments show that the social and personal skills of some are not as high as in other areas, such as language and literacy and mathematics. Since its last inspection, the school has been awarded both Beacon School status and a Certificate of Excellence by the Department for Education.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Riverhead is an effective school, with considerable strengths in its high standards of achievement, and in the very good attitudes of pupils to their learning. The quality of teaching is good overall, with a significant proportion of very good teaching. The school is very well led and managed by highly committed staff and governors, who are constantly seeking to improve the learning experiences of all their pupils. The unit cost of spending for each pupil is high, and when all these factors are taken together the school is currently giving good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Teaching is good, and as a result pupils make good progress in their learning, so that by the time they leave the school at the age of seven, they achieve standards which are well above what is nationally expected in English, mathematics, science and information technology;
- The school very effectively promotes pupils' social development, and consequently pupils' attitudes and behaviour, and the quality of relationships throughout the school, are of a high calibre;
- Leadership and management are very effective, and the governing body plays a major role in planning and influencing the strategic direction of the school;
- Parents think very highly of the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- The opportunities for independent written work, and for pupils to experience a wider range of writing styles, particularly those which are creative and evocative.

The school has already taken steps to tackle the issues relating to the quality of pupils' writing, and has made this aspect of its work a priority for further development. The area for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made a good level of improvement since it was last inspected in September 1996. Most notably, the school has successfully secured planning permission for a new site and buildings. High standards in English, mathematics and science have been maintained, although standards in writing need further attention. Standards of handwriting have been improved, and are no longer an area for concern. Pupils' achievement in information technology has improved, considerably enhanced by the development and use of the computer room. Strengths which have also been retained are the very high quality of leadership and management, the good levels of care for pupils, and the quality of the teaching. The school has maintained the breadth, balance and range of the curriculum, with good improvements to equal opportunities. The key issues for action relating to history and physical education have been successfully addressed, although physical activities are still constrained by lack of space. Pupils now receive many opportunities to develop independence, both in lessons and through opportunities to show initiative and responsibility within school life. Cultural experiences have been well extended. However, opportunities for spiritual development remain satisfactory, and the school is appropriately focusing on this area as needing attention within its self-review programme. The quality of marking has been improved satisfactorily, but does not yet consistently contain enough detail to show higher attaining and older pupils how to improve. There has been a significant improvement to parents' views of the school, as a result of the school's continuing efforts to increase communication.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by seven year olds based on National Curriculum test results.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
reading	A*	A*	A*	A
writing	A	A*	A	B
mathematics	A*	A*	A	B

Key	
Excellent	A*
Well above average	A
above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E

The results in the table above show that pupils achieve consistently high standards in the national tests for seven year olds. In the national tests in 1999, pupils achieved standards in reading which were very high against the national average, falling within the top 5 per cent of schools nationally. Standards were well above national averages in writing and mathematics. In comparison with those schools having a similarly low percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals, the school was well above the national average in reading, and above the national average in writing and mathematics. Teacher assessments showed that pupils were also achieving very high standards in science in comparison with the national average. Results of the tests in 1999 were not as high as those in 1998 in writing and mathematics. This is because the group of pupils taking the tests in 1999 had a group of pupils with higher than usual levels of special educational need.

Inspection evidence shows that the current group of pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 are achieving standards which are well above national expectations in mathematics, science and information technology. Pupils are also achieving standards which are well above expectations in English, particularly in their reading and speaking and listening skills, and in the more formal aspects of writing, such as spelling and punctuation. However, the development of the content of their writing is inhibited by limited opportunities for independent writing, and for writing in a wider range of styles.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils enjoy coming to school. In lessons they are attentive and responsive. They listen well, work hard, and concentrate on their tasks over long periods of time.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in classrooms and around the school is very good. The absence of any anti-social behaviour ensures that the school is a calm and industrious community.
Personal development and relationships	The personal development of pupils is very good. Pupils soon learn school routines and develop greater maturity. Relationships are a strength, fostered by mutual respect and consideration, and make a significant impact on the school's learning environment.
Attendance	Very good over many years. All classes have attendance levels above the national average. Despite the difficulties of access to the school site, punctuality at the start of the day is very good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good

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

The overall quality of teaching is good. All lessons were satisfactory or better, and teaching was good or better in over 75 per cent of lessons. It was very good in a third of all lessons. Probing questioning and challenging tasks ensure that pupils are highly motivated and interested, apply good levels of effort to their work, and progress well in developing their knowledge and understanding. The very effective management of pupils' behaviour is almost invisible, and largely achieved as a result of the high quality of relationships between staff and pupils throughout the school. Only very occasionally does the pace of lessons flag, or questions and activities fail to fully explore and extend pupils' thinking. English and mathematics are well taught overall, although opportunities to write independently are inhibited by the overuse of worksheets. Information technology is very well taught as a discrete subject, and pupils are making rapid gains in the use and application of their skills in other curriculum areas. The teaching of all other subjects is also generally good, with effective opportunities for developing independent learning skills, particularly in art, music, science and design and technology.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced, and pupils benefit from a good range of learning opportunities. The curriculum is enriched by many extra-curricular activities and good use of the local area. Good attention is paid to equal opportunities for all pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Individual Education Plans are thorough and targets are specific to the needs of pupils. All staff are well involved in the support of these pupils.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	There is satisfactory provision for this small group of pupils from multinational backgrounds.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school makes very good provision for social and cultural development, and actively seeks to extend pupils' multicultural experience. The good support for moral development ensures that all pupils understand right and wrong. Opportunities for spiritual development are satisfactory, and are in the process of further development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school is diligent in its care for pupils. It has very effective procedures in place to promote the best interests of all, and these make a positive contribution to pupils' development. There are very good systems for monitoring and promoting attendance, and child protection issues are well addressed. Health and safety procedures are also very good. Nevertheless, although the school continues to exert its best endeavours to overcome the disadvantages of the constricted playground areas, some minor accidents still occur.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides very effective leadership, which is quietly purposeful and based on a deeply-held commitment to ensuring that pupils have the very best learning experiences. Management structures at all levels ensure that staff are well supported, and work together very closely and productively. There are very good levels of appropriate delegation and responsibility.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The contribution of the governing body is outstanding, and particularly in respect of securing planning permission for a new school. Governors are well informed and reflective, and use their wide range of professional expertise with conspicuous success to promote and improve the school and its work.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There are very good systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and planning, and for helping staff to develop and improve professionally. Newly qualified and recently appointed staff are very well supported. Test and assessment data are carefully scrutinised and analysed for broad trends of achievement. However, this analysis is not as yet sufficiently refined to identify specific features needing improvement in pupils' writing skills.
The strategic use of resources	There is thoughtful financial planning, which very effectively targets appropriate funding at the school's priorities. There are also effective administrative systems, and all these factors together ensure the very good use overall of all the school's resources, including those relating to its status as a Beacon School. The school is making good use of the principles of best value.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The children are encouraged to work hard and do their best, and they make good progress; • The school is well led and managed; • The teaching is of good quality; • Children are helped to become mature and responsible, and they behave well; • Children like coming to school; • Parents feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or problems, and the school works closely with parents; • The work pupils are asked to do at home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range of activities the school provides outside lessons.

The findings of the inspection entirely support parents' very positive views about the school, expressed both in the high number of returns to the parents' questionnaire, and at the meeting before the inspection. In contrast to the views of some parents, inspection evidence found that the school made good provision for extra-curricular activities. At their meeting before the inspection, some parents expressed concerns about current admission arrangements to the reception classes. Inspection evidence found that the school gave thoughtful attention to these arrangements, and that a well-planned curriculum for children aged under five, and in all the reception classes, enables all these pupils to make good progress in their learning.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- 1. Teaching is good, and as a result pupils make good progress in their learning, so that by the time they leave the school at the age of seven they achieve standards which are well above what is nationally expected in English, mathematics, science and information technology:**
2. The strengths of teaching outlined in the previous inspection report have been maintained. Indeed, they have been improved upon by the absence of any unsatisfactory teaching during this inspection, and in the increase of good and very good teaching. During this inspection, all lessons were satisfactory or better, of which 76 per cent were at least good. Teaching in a third of lessons was very good. The core subjects of English, mathematics and science are well taught, and the teaching of information technology skills is very effective, particularly in whole class, discrete sessions. Since the previous inspection, the school has been granted Beacon School status, and the school has shared its expertise in the teaching of English with other schools. The introduction of the Numeracy Strategy has had a positive impact on standards in mathematics, particularly in mental mathematics skills, and on the understanding of number generally. Exciting investigations and practical activities during Maths Week gave very good opportunities for pupils to use and apply their skills, and this approach is also taken to a more limited extent in lessons. Optimum use is made of the computer room, and all classes have a weekly skills lesson, and one where they use what they have learned within another curriculum area. There is skilled and knowledgeable teaching from staff and the specialist technician.
3. The quality of teaching for children aged under five is also good, as learning experiences are well planned to meet the needs of all these children. Those pupils with special educational needs benefit from the close attention of well-briefed and committed specialist and support staff. All other subjects are also well taught overall. As a result, all pupils make good gains in knowledge, skills and understanding in lessons.
4. The very high calibre of relationships between pupils and staff throughout the school ensures that the management of pupils is almost invisible. Warm and encouraging teaching, often accompanied by liveliness and good humour, creates an atmosphere of trust in which pupils are attentive and responsive. Activities and direct teaching sessions are well planned and interesting. In literacy sessions, texts and activities are chosen to be fun as well as instructive. For example, the enjoyment of pupils in one reception class was captured by the quiet, but dramatic reading of ‘The Guinea Pig Grass’, and they responded by reading aloud with great expression. Other reception-aged pupils, in a mathematics lesson, were fired with enthusiasm by their activities, in which they had to sequence the events in a day and during a week. As a result, they were keen to take part and very supportive of each other, particularly when others made mistakes or needed help.
5. The school’s commitment to high expectations and hard work was endorsed by parents in responses to questionnaires, and at their meeting before the inspection. The sharing of learning objectives in many lessons gives direction and purpose to pupils’ understanding of their learning. In a literacy session in Year 1, for example, good progress in both phonic knowledge and poetic appreciation was well supported by constant reinforcement of what the lesson intended to teach. Work in lessons is challenging, and probing questions encourage

pupils to think carefully. For example in a design and technology lesson at Year 1, there was a thorough introduction to the design task, which was well balanced, with open-ended questions. This effectively helped pupils to consider in detail how they would make their playground equipment, and what materials would be best. Subsequently, pairs of pupils worked diligently and with great effort to complete their tasks. In contrast to the findings of the previous report, there are many opportunities for pupils to work together, and to develop initiative and independent working habits, most particularly in the foundation subjects, such as design and technology, music and art, but also in science. Planning is of a good quality, and work is matched well to pupils' needs in most activities. Ongoing assessment is used effectively in many lessons to gauge the levels of pupils' understanding and ensure that future planning takes account of this information.

6. Pupils throughout the school make good progress in their learning over time, including the children aged under five, pupils with special educational needs, and those from multi-national backgrounds. Inspection evidence shows that the current group of Year 2 pupils are achieving standards which are well above national expectations in English, mathematics, science and information technology. Pupils also achieve well overall in all other subjects. Results in the national tests for seven year olds have remained high over recent years, and consistently very high in reading. In the national tests in 1999, pupils achieved very high standards in reading against the national average, within the top five per cent of schools nationally. Standards were well above national averages in writing and mathematics. In comparison with those of schools with similar percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals, standards were well above national averages in reading, and above in writing and mathematics. These results represented a drop from those of the previous year in writing and mathematics, as the group of pupils taking the tests in 1999 contained a number of pupils with higher than usual levels of special educational need. Teacher assessments for science in 1999 showed that pupils were achieving standards which were very high in comparison with the national average, in all areas of the subject.

7. Speaking and listening skills are very good. Pupils express themselves with confidence and clarity, and many are fluent and articulate speakers. In lessons they listen attentively to adults and to each other. Reading standards are also very high. Pupils in Year 2 read accurately, and many with considerable fluency. They show a wide range of reading experience, and some higher and middle attaining pupils comfortably discuss the relative merits of different books, or those by the same author. Many refer to the text to support a comment, and are beginning to use deduction to empathise with characters. For example, in a Year 2 literacy lesson, pupils were identifying well with the main character in 'Amazing Grace'. They expressed opinions about her possible feelings, and also about the story's challenging themes of gender and race. The majority of pupils are also very comfortable with the use of the more formal aspects of writing, for example with punctuation and spelling. Handwriting skills have been improved since the previous inspection. Most pupils form letters correctly and legibly, and higher attainers use joined handwriting.

8. In mathematics, pupils' learning is enhanced by a good level of questioning in discussion to extend their thinking, and by challenging activities for all ability groups. By the end of a numeracy session in Year 2, the majority of pupils were accurately applying their knowledge and understanding of the values of numbers, to those beyond one hundred. They used mathematical vocabulary confidently to explain how they had calculated their answers, and higher attaining pupils worked with high levels of independence. Most Year 2 pupils can use bar charts to represent and interpret information, and are familiar with the names of two-

dimensional shapes. They investigate number patterns within the four and five times tables, and work comfortably with addition and subtraction, creating their own sums. They are also beginning to use standard measures. During 'Maths Week' pupils design board games, and take part in shape and counting trails around the school.

9. In science, pupils successfully experience a wide range of topics, and have good opportunities for independent and investigative work. For example, in a lesson at Year 2, pupils devised their own categories for classifying the similarities and differences between humans, for instance by gender or hair colour, and all described what they had discovered. These pupils are also able to give simple explanations of why electrical circuits work, or not, and to sort instruments by the sound they make.

10. The comprehensive timetabling, and the very effective use of the computer room for teaching both discrete skills and their application within other subjects, leads to high levels of knowledge and understanding in information technology. The standards of independent use of equipment are also high for all pupils. For example, pupils in Year 2 log on and close down, open programs, change font size and style, and copy and paste confidently. They operate the e-mail to contact an ex-pupil, and use their literacy skills with accuracy when word processing. A significant factor in the support of these high standards is the school's very successful use of a skilled technician to attend to the daily maintenance of resources and to give pupils extra help and guidance in lessons. The school is well aware that the next stage in the development of this subject is to extend the application of skills into classroom work.

11. The school very effectively promotes pupils' social development, and consequently pupils' attitudes and behaviour, and the quality of relationships throughout the school is of a high calibre:

12. The school's strong sense of community and social ethos are conspicuously reflected in the pupils' very positive attitudes to their learning, and in their keenness to come to school. There are always high levels of industrious, concentrated effort, and all these factors contribute significantly to pupils' achievement. Attendance levels are high in every class, and there is little lateness. In lessons, pupils are enthusiastic, and keen to contribute during whole class sessions. They are mature and sensible, even the very youngest children. For example, in a literacy session for children aged under five, the children stayed on task during group activities even when they were not directly supervised, and tackled their work with confidence. These youngest children are quickly and effectively introduced to school routines and, as a result, pupils throughout the school show high levels of independence and personal responsibility. For example, in a literacy session at Year 1, pupils efficiently organised themselves, quickly collecting their equipment and settling to their tasks.

13. The school successfully ensures that there are also good opportunities for pupils to undertake small but important tasks to develop initiative, take responsibility, and feel part of the community. These include helping to clear tables, returning registers, or taking notes in pairs to other classes. In addition, all pupils in Year 2 have received basic first aid training. In a wider context, there are several features which make a good contribution to the pupils' personal and social development. They include the school's support for a number of charities, chances for pupils to take part in a good range of extra-curricular activities, and the many visits within the immediate and local environment. Examples of these are trips to Knole House for an Elizabethan day, singing at a local residential home for the elderly, and links with the English National Ballet. Opportunities for cultural development overall are

very good, and multicultural events successfully introduce pupils to the world community. African and Indian dancers have visited the school, and the school has information technology links with Norway and America. In lessons, pupils work well together, either in pairs or in larger groups. For example, in a science lesson at Year 2, pupils worked in groups of six to classify the similarities and difference between humans, such as hair colour and height. They co-operated very well, and this enabled them to make group decisions about their choice of categories.

14. Pupils' behaviour is also of a very high quality, both during lessons and in the very restricted outside areas. Even when a few lessons occasionally flag, pupils remain well behaved and polite. At playtimes, pupils play easily together, sharing the playground facilities well. Incidents of raised voices or of bullying are rare. This equitable behaviour is well supported by staff, who very usefully initiate and take part in small games such as skipping. There is very orderly movement between buildings, most significantly for whole school gatherings. Pupils fit themselves into the small hall space with impressive common sense, even when the weather is wet and they also have to accommodate their wet coats. The school has established very effective formal systems to encourage and support good behaviour, such as 'golden' and playground rules, and the reward of good behaviour with stickers. Pupils are invited to take part in drawing up these rules, and when problems do occur, parents and outside agencies are well and helpfully involved. Significantly, there have been no exclusions for poor behaviour.

15. The headteacher and all staff have very good relationships with pupils, and provide very strong role models. Pupils are treated with good humour, care and respect by all staff, and as a result they are courteous and warm in their response to each other and towards adults. For example, in a circle time session in Year 2, the teacher showed great sensitivity, both in response to the pupils' feelings and in the use of circle time conventions to encourage all pupils to take part. As a result, the pupils emulated this respect in their own responses to one another. They listened thoughtfully to contributions, and there was a good group rapport which enabled them to confidently communicate their thoughts and concerns.

16. Leadership and management is very effective, and the governing body plays a major role in planning and influencing the strategic direction of the school:

17. The school is very well led and managed, with the well being of the pupils at the forefront of its vision for the future. The very effective leadership of the headteacher is quiet and purposeful, and contributes significantly to the creation of a school community with high expectations of its work, and of the standards its pupils both experience and achieve. This ethos is marked by a conspicuously strong commitment to continuous improvement. The governing body provides excellent active support to the school's work, and this is vividly illustrated in its recent drive to successfully gain planning permission for a new school site.

18. There is an effective management structure for the leadership of year groups and the co-ordination of subjects, and team-work is strong. Whilst the headteacher maintains a very effective overview of the school's work, the quality of delegation is also very high. The deputy headteacher is highly supportive of the headteacher, and thoughtfully and conscientiously fulfils key whole school responsibilities, for example assessment and curriculum development. Year group leaders work closely with their staff to plan and monitor work. All subject co-ordinators play a well-informed and full part in developing and managing their curriculum areas, even where subjects are not currently areas of immediate

focus, or co-ordination is of necessity temporary, as is the case this year with English. The co-ordinator for special educational needs has effectively set up systems which ensure that pupils are identified as early as possible, and that their needs are well planned for and reviewed regularly. As a result, these pupils make good progress.

19. The governing body is very well led, organised and informed, and is highly motivated. It is a reflective, self-critical group, continually seeking ways in which it can improve the contribution it makes to the school. For example, it has recently organised training for how it can more effectively fulfil its role of critical friend. There is a wide range of expertise amongst its members, which is used to considerable effect for the benefit of the school. The documentation the governing body produces is of an impressive quality, including the regular newsletter for parents, and recent surveys it has commissioned to illustrate the traffic difficulties of the school site. The governors conspicuously value the staff and their hard work. Governors' visits are frequent and focused, with subsequent formal reports. All governors have specific roles and responsibilities, but are clearly knowledgeable about all aspects of the school's work. The school development plan is detailed and thorough, and gives a comprehensive view of the school's strategic plans.

20. Formal systems for monitoring the school's work are extensive and very well established. The headteacher plays a major role in checking the quality of teaching and planning, but this area has also been very effectively delegated to all staff with management and curriculum responsibilities. All senior staff regularly observe teaching quality, basing their observations on an agreed focus, and giving formal feedback. The mathematics co-ordinators, for example, have between them observed the teaching of the National Numeracy Strategy throughout the school. There are very good opportunities for the professional development of all staff. Learning support staff, for example, have recently been working closely with the headteacher to extend their expertise. Appraisal systems are in place for all staff, and include annual professional interviews with the headteacher, and the setting of targets for development. The work of newly qualified staff is very well supported and monitored, both formally and informally, through a system of mentors and regular professional meetings. These effective systems have ensured that good quality teaching has been maintained despite many changes to staff. Planning and pupils' work is checked by the headteacher and by year group leaders and subject co-ordinators, and this ensures that the school is giving pupils a good range of learning experiences, which overall is well matched to their needs. The school looks carefully at test and assessment information to check pupils' progress and identify trends in achievement, though this analysis is not yet sufficiently refined to tease out the specific features needing improvement in relation to writing.

21. The school's work is very well supported by highly efficient administrative staff and systems. Indeed, the most recent auditors' report was very positive, and the minor areas for improvement have already been attended to. Subject co-ordinators have a full responsibility for managing and administering funding for their curriculum area. Support for other schools in budget planning and financial systems forms an extensive part of the school's work as a Beacon School, and it has initiated a very effective local network of help and guidance. Day-to-day transactions, checks and balances, and regular and frequent monitoring of income and expenditure are very well organised. The principles of best value are already being well used, for example in relation to the choice of architect for the new school. Governors are

well informed and take an active role in planning expenditure and in ensuring that decisions reflect educational priorities. They also thoughtfully consider the impact of their spending decisions, for example, in relation to the use of support staff, and plan to formalise these systems further.

22. Overall, staff and all resources are very well used. Support staff give pupils effective help and guidance during lessons, and are very well briefed. The teaching of information technology benefits greatly from the expertise and services of a support technician. The co-ordinator for special educational needs is well used to release staff to fulfil management and monitoring roles. She also provides some specialist support teaching for physical education. Every effort is made to create an attractive and stimulating learning environment, and caretaking and cleaning staff keep a difficult site clean and in good order. Throughout the school, there are attractive displays of pupils' work. The handsome funding raised by the parents' association is well spent to provide extra resources, such as outside play equipment for those children aged under five. Indeed, the school has sought to use its confined outside areas as creatively as possible, even introducing commercial schemes which specialise in physical activities for use in limited space.

23. Parents think very highly of the school:

24. Parents expressed very positive views about the school, both in their responses to the questionnaire and in their letters, and also at their meeting before the inspection. They feel that the school is effective and approachable, and that as a result their children enjoy coming to school. This represents a considerable rise in levels of parental satisfaction since the previous inspection, and clearly reflects the school's conscientious and successful endeavours to improve its communication with parents. School documentation is very professionally presented, and newsletters are frequent. At their meeting, parents spoke confidently of the improvements the school had made since its previous inspection, particularly in relation to high expectations and standards of achievement. Parents were also well aware that the school's strengths in respect of pupils' attitudes and behaviour and the quality of relationships had all been maintained. The findings of this inspection endorsed their positive views and comments. Inspection evidence also found that although some parents expressed dissatisfaction with arrangements for extra-curricular activities, the school offers a good range of activities. These include ballet, French and sport, although some of these activities do incur a charge.

25. Other areas with which parents were particularly pleased included the effectiveness of the leadership and management, the quality of teaching, and the work pupils are asked to complete at home. Some parents expressed concern about admission arrangements into the reception classes. Inspection evidence found the school to be sensitive to these issues. There is a well planned and well taught curriculum designed to meet the needs of the children aged under five, and the needs of all those pupils in the reception classes, and as a result the pupils in all these groups achieve well.

26. Parents also reflect their very positive feelings about their school in active support. A significant number serve effectively as governors, some in key roles. Many parents come and help in school, and the parents' association raises impressive sums of money to enhance resources and support visits, visitors and activities. The parents' association also runs a class network of representatives to keep other parents informed of what is happening. Most recently, the parental body as a whole rallied well in support of the campaign for a new school site.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

27. The opportunities for independent written work, and for pupils to experience a wider range of writing styles, particularly those which are creative and evocative:

28. Whilst standards in English are above national expectations overall, pupils' achievements in writing are not as strong as they are in reading and in speaking and listening skills. The majority of pupils are very confident with the more formal aspects of writing, such as punctuation and spelling, and make good progress in these skills over time. Many pupils write independently and at length, but such chances are limited, and often inhibited by the overuse of worksheets as a means of recording written work, particularly in literacy lessons.

29. Neither do pupils have enough opportunities to regularly and frequently encounter a wide range of writing experiences, particularly those which are descriptive or evocative, although many pupils show the potential for interesting and creative content. The school is well aware that writing is an area needing further attention, and is looking closely at how standards can be improved.

30. Towards the end of the key stage, higher and middle attaining pupils spell most words accurately. Other spellings are phonetically plausible, and show a good knowledge of phonics. These pupils write confidently and quickly in activities during lessons, using full stops and capital letters correctly most of the time. Higher attainers use apostrophes and commas. Higher attaining pupils are also beginning to use a good variety of vocabulary with liveliness and imagination. Sentences vary in length to create interest, and punctuation is sometimes used for effect. However, the content of the work of middle and lower attainers is more mundane. Lower attaining pupils spell common words correctly, and some use full stops. Sentences are extended with simple connectives, but the quantity of writing is limited.

31. The National Literacy Strategy has generally been well implemented throughout the school, but less effectively in relation to writing. Opportunities for pupils to write independently are limited, and although pupils are introduced to a satisfactory range of writing styles, including stories, diaries, book reviews and occasionally poetry, there is little work of a creative or evocative nature. Much of the pupils' work in literacy lessons is completed on worksheets, and although these often give useful guidance for pupils, they are sometimes too limiting or lack challenge. Occasionally, in lessons which are otherwise satisfactory, pupils are not fully briefed about the content and purpose of these worksheets, and this inhibits their understanding of the task and the completion of their work. The school has appropriately introduced a weekly session devoted to extended writing to help improve standards, and plans to review its current strategies. It has also begun to explore the use of extra funding to target particular groups of pupils. There are satisfactory opportunities for

writing through work in other subjects, such as history. However, much of this work is factual and journalistic, for example describing what pupils did on their visit to an Elizabethan house. Little use is made of the potential of these experiences to develop or initiate other writing opportunities beyond those completed during the visit, for example empathetic accounts as a result of dressing in period costume.

32. The school carefully tracks pupils' progress in English through assessments against the expectations of the National Curriculum, and through reading and spelling tests. The setting of specific targets related to the particular needs of each pupil is also being piloted, but this initiative is very new and has not yet had an impact on standards. Work is regularly marked, and written comments very helpfully praise pupils' effort and success. Teachers also readily identify areas where pupils might improve, but these suggestions lack sufficient detail for higher attaining and older pupils in particular to have a clear understanding of how that can be achieved. Test and assessment information is conscientiously considered, but this analysis is not yet rigorous or detailed enough to identify the particular areas of weakness in writing for groups of pupils or individuals.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

33. To improve the standards of work and pupils' achievement in writing, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- plan more opportunities for independent writing, both in English and in other subjects;
- plan for pupils to experience a greater range of writing experiences, and particularly for writing activities of a more creative and evocative nature;
- sharpen and refine the analysis of test and assessment information to identify specific areas in writing which need improvement, both for individuals and groups of pupils, and use the outcomes of this analysis for future planning and to target extra support;
- ensure that marking includes enough detailed comment for older and higher attaining pupils to understand how they can improve their work.

Another minor weakness which the governors should consider for inclusion in the school's action plan for improvement is:

- Continue to employ the school's best efforts to reduce the disadvantages of the constricted nature of the school's playground areas, particularly in relation to minor accidents.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	21
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	22

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	33	43	24	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery	YR- Y2
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	N/A	274
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	N/A	2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR- Y2
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	N/A	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	N/A	61

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	11

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	12
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	7

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	3
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0
<i>National comparative data</i>	0.5

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	99	44	49	93

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 2 and above	Boys	44	37	40
	Girls	49	48	48
	Total	93	85	88
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 2 or above	School	100 (100)	94 (100)	95 (95)
	National	82 (80)	83 (81)	87 (84)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 2 and above	Boys	44	41	100
	Girls	48	43	100
	Total	92	84	100
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 2 or above	School	99 (100)	93 (100)	100 (100)
	National	82 (80)	86 (85)	87 (86)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	229
Any other minority ethnic group	1

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions if pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

**Qualified teachers and classes:
YR -Y2**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	10.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	25.1:1
Average class size	30.4

**Education support staff:
YR – Y2**

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	201

Financial information

Financial year	1998/1999
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	£
Total income	478053.00
Total expenditure	464018.00
Expenditure per pupil	1872.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	38422.00
Balance carried forward to next year	52457.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	172
Number of questionnaires returned	114

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	68	25	6	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	65	32	3	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	68	32	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	53	39	6	1	2
The teaching is good.	72	26	0	1	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	47	42	9	2	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	68	24	7	1	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	82	18	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	54	40	3	2	2
The school is well led and managed.	77	19	3	1	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	69	24	3	2	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	35	37	19	4	5

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

The views of parents about the school are very positive, and this represents a considerable rise in parental satisfaction since the previous report, particularly in relation to how well the school communicates with parents. The only area of concern was the school's range of activities outside lessons.

Other issues raised by parents

At the meeting before the inspection, concern was expressed by some parents about the admission arrangements to the reception classes.