

INSPECTION REPORT

Downs Barn County First School

Milton Keynes

LEA area: Milton Keynes LEA

Unique Reference Number: 110372

Headteacher: Mrs M. Hart

Reporting inspector: Mr P. M. Allen
OIN 17531

Dates of inspection: 28th February – 3rd March 2000

Inspection number: 189892

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	First
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 – 8
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	69 Downs Barn Boulevard Downs Barn Milton Keynes
Postcode:	MK14 7NA
Telephone number:	01908 604430
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs H. Wright
Date of previous inspection:	23 rd September 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject Responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mr P. M. Allen	Registered inspector	English	What sort of school is it?
		Religious education	How high are standards?
		Geography	How well are pupils taught?
		Music	
		Physical education	
		Under fives	
		Equal opportunities	
		Special educational needs	
		English as an additional language	
Mrs S. Stevens	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well does the school care for its pupils?
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Mr B. Potter	Team inspector	Mathematics	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
		Science	How well is the school led and managed?
		Information technology	
		Art	
		Design and technology	
		History	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Downs Barn First School is a small school catering for children from nursery age to the end of Year 3. Pupils transfer to the local middle school when they are eight years of age. The school is situated near the centre of Milton Keynes and serves children from a variety of backgrounds. Around seven per cent of the children who come to the school have English as an additional language. The Nursery serves the wider local area and, although there are 26 children who attend in the morning on a part time basis, at the end of their time in Nursery between a third and a half of the children switch to other local schools. In the main school there are 130 pupils on roll divided into six classes. There are 38 pupils on the register for special educational needs, none of whom have a statement. Although there is a wide range of attainment on entry into Reception, overall attainment is below average. The school aims to work together in partnership to ensure that all children are given the opportunity to achieve their full potential within a supportive environment.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective school which is becoming more effective. Although most children achieve well in relation to their abilities, standards for a significant number are lower than expected nationally in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Standards are low in reading and particularly low in writing. The school is benefiting from the very good leadership of the recently appointed headteacher. The quality of teaching is mainly good. In light of the costs involved, the standards achieved in relation to attainment on entry and the quality of education provided, the school gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- ◆ The headteacher is providing very good leadership.
- ◆ There is a strong commitment to raising both standards and the quality of teaching and learning.
- ◆ The staff work very hard with a strong commitment to the school and its children.
- ◆ There are very good systems for promoting good behaviour.
- ◆ The personal development of the pupils and relationships in the school are very good.
- ◆ The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

What could be improved

- ◆ The standards in reading and writing.
- ◆ The performance of the higher attaining pupils.
- ◆ The arrangements for assessing and recording in order to better monitor pupils' attainment and progress.
- ◆ The curricular provision for children in the Nursery and Reception years.
- ◆ The effectiveness of the governing body so that there is a clear strategic plan for future development.

Most of the areas are covered in the school's development planning. This list of areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The previous inspection in September 1996 was critical of the school but since then there has been a steady improvement. Most of the issues identified in the previous report have been addressed, although some work still remains to be done. The school has developed appropriate planning systems which identify learning objectives and clear policies and schemes of work for most subjects have been produced. Although some work has been done, reliable and consistent assessment procedures need to be further developed. There is also a need to further develop procedures for the headteacher and the curriculum co-ordinators to monitor and evaluate the quality of educational provision. Firm plans are in place to address these issues. Since her recent appointment the headteacher has started to take the school forward across many aspects of its life in a positive and purposeful way. There is a shared will to build on what the school does well and to improve the quality of education through a continuing programme of review and development.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 7 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
Reading	E	C	D	D
Writing	E	D	E	E*
Mathematics	E	D	D	E

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

very low E*

Standards in the Nursery are broadly in line with what might be expected. Most children will attain the standards which have been prescribed for children of this age and a small number will exceed those expectations. A significant number of children go to other schools after the Nursery year. In light of their abilities, pupils in the main school achieve well and make satisfactory and often good progress. There are a significant number of pupils with special educational needs. At the time of the inspection, 34 per cent of the Year 2 pupils were on the special educational needs register; of the group who were tested in 1999, 28 per cent had special educational needs. Many of these pupils' needs are concerned with the development of basic literacy skills and this disadvantages learning in most areas of the curriculum. This has an adverse effect on the standards it is possible for the school to achieve in the national tests. At the time of the inspection, standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 and the end of Year 3 were judged to be below national averages. The school now recognises very clearly the need to raise standards, especially in reading and writing.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes of the pupils	Pupils show positive attitudes to school and a desire to do well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils generally behave well in the classrooms, the playground and around school.
Personal development and relationships	Personal development is very good and is supported by the very good relationships throughout the school.
Attendance	Levels of attendance are satisfactory and broadly in line with the national averages.

The quality of learning is enhanced through the positive attitudes, good levels of behaviour and the high quality of the relationships.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5 - 8 years
Lessons seen	Satisfactory	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.

The quality of teaching is mainly good. It was good in 50 per cent of the lessons observed, very good in 14 per cent and satisfactory in all the remainder. In nearly all the lessons there is evidence of teachers' good subject knowledge and understanding, good management of pupils and good use of time, support staff and resources. The good provision of homework supports the teaching. Although the skills of literacy and numeracy are generally taught well, the teaching needs to more clearly target strategies to raise standards in the basic skills, especially reading and writing. The teaching generally meets the needs of the pupils, including those with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs. Pupils are generally engaged in their learning, with clear evidence of interest, concentration and, often, independence.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum in the Nursery can benefit from a review to consider the range of activities and their supervision. In Reception there is a need to provide a wider range of experiences, making more efficient use of the time available. At Key Stage 1 the curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. The quality of the information technology curriculum needs to be improved through the development of resources.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The provision and support for the significant number of pupils with special educational needs is good and

	pupils make good progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The pupils are well provided for and make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	The school makes good provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and pupils respond well in these areas.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school has a caring, community ethos and looks after its pupils very well.

The school takes good care of its pupils and is mindful of all aspects of their welfare. Within the curriculum there is a need to more closely target progress in reading and writing.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Although relatively recently appointed, the headteacher, aided by a committed deputy, is providing very good leadership.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The governing body is supportive of both the headteacher and the school and benefits from a new, enthusiastic chairperson. Given the falling roll and the budget deficit, the school needs a strategic plan for its future development.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The headteacher is providing very clear leadership in important developments in self-review and evaluation of performance. Clear identification of goals to raise standards are being developed.
The strategic use of resources	Recent improvements are enabling the school to manage its resources in a systematic and prudent way.

The spacious accommodation is generally used well. The school is adequately resourced for most subjects, except information technology. There is an appropriate number of staff. Overall, the school manages its finances carefully applying 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 standards of behaviour. ◆ Good teaching. ◆ The approachability of the school. ◆ The expectation that children will work hard and do their best. ◆ The support given to help the children to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Some would appreciate clearer guidance and more consistency in the provision of homework. ◆ Parents would value some extra-curricular activities. ◆ Some would value more flexible timings for parents' evenings.

The vast majority of views expressed, including those contained in a number of letters, were supportive of the school. Inspectors' views are that the provision of homework is clear,

appropriate and well organised and that the timings of parents' evenings are fair and flexible. The school is considering the possibility of introducing extra-curricular activities. Overall, inspectors' views support parents' positive views of the school. Parents generally value, and are valued by the school and they make a positive contribution to the quality of the education provided.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Standards in the Nursery are broadly in line with what might be expected. Most children will attain the standards which have been prescribed for children of this age and a small number will exceed those expectations. Between a third and a half of the children go to other local schools at the end of the nursery year. These children are often the higher attaining ones in the group.
2. In light of their abilities, pupils in the main school achieve well and make satisfactory and often good progress. There are a significant number of pupils with special educational needs. At the time of the inspection, 34 per cent of the Year 2 pupils were on the special educational needs register; of the group who were tested in 1999, 28 per cent had special educational needs. Many of these pupils' needs are concerned with the development of basic literacy skills and this disadvantages learning in most areas of the curriculum. This has an adverse effect on the standards it is possible for the school to achieve in the national tests.
3. In the 1999 Key Stage 1 National Curriculum tests, the school's results were below the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. When compared with similar schools the results were below average in reading, well below in mathematics and very low in writing. In writing, the number of pupils gaining level 2 or above and the number achieving level 2B or above were both well below the national average. In the teacher assessments undertaken for science, the results were below and sometimes well below the national average. In spite of the low scores, the school's results indicate a slight trend upward since the previous inspection, except in writing where the results have been very erratic. The available evidence indicates that the results in reading, writing and mathematics in summer 2000 will be similar to those of 1999. Taking the four years from 1996 to 1999 together, the performance of boys in relation to that of boys nationally is similar to the performance of girls in relation to that of girls nationally. The low standards in writing are evident across the same four years.
4. At the time of the inspection, standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 and the end of Year 3 when pupils leave the school, were judged to be below national averages. These judgements reflect the previous year's results and the predicted outcomes of the test results for summer 2000. This year, as in previous years, the number of pupils achieving the higher level 3, will probably be well below national averages, even though there are some pupils, albeit a minority, who attain well. All the data informs two issues for the school to address. One is to raise standards in the basic skills of reading and especially writing; the other is to target raising the standards of the higher attaining pupils. The school has increasingly become aware of these issues and of the need to develop clear, focused strategies to address them.
5. Although the content of the written work needs to be improved, careful handwriting is promoted throughout the school and many pupils are able to produce neat, fluent handwriting. Standards in spelling are generally low. Standards in speaking vary significantly; whilst some pupils are confident and articulate when speaking with adults, some lack confidence in more demanding talking contexts. Most pupils listen attentively; for example, in assembly, at story time and during the plenary sessions of the literacy and

numeracy hours.

6. The National Literacy Strategy has been effectively introduced and is helping the school to begin to raise standards. Useful daily reading sessions are helping to focus on this skill and to promote reading in a more systematic way. Helpful support is being provided by many parents who listen to their children read at home on a regular basis. There needs to be more time given to opportunities for extended writing including the development of detail. There is a need to add more writing tasks into the work in the literacy hour and to encourage writing for a wider range of purposes. More writing tasks could be built into the lessons in the foundation subjects and teachers need to raise their expectations of what the pupils can achieve.

7. The National Numeracy Strategy is also in place and is beginning to have an impact on the standards attained. Pupils generally have a positive approach to the work and standards are improving. By the end of Key Stage 1 and by the end of Year 3, most pupils have acquired a good range of skills to enable them to make simple calculations, but in other aspects of numeracy an insufficient number attain the national standards.

8. Standards in science are below average at the end of Key Stage 1 and the end of Year 3. Most older pupils understand the need for fair testing, but few have the competency to achieve it. Standards in information technology are sound overall although they could be higher with more regular access to computer hardware and software. In religious education, standards are sound across the school and meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. Evidence suggests that pupils attain standards which are broadly appropriate for their age in art, design and technology, geography, history, music and physical education.

9. The school has recently begun target setting and recognises that the analysis of assessments to inform target setting is an area for further development. The immediate target is clearly acknowledged as the need to raise standards in reading and writing. Across the school, most pupils achieve well in light of their abilities. Pupils make sound and often good progress, effectively gaining and consolidating appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding. Progress is slightly more marked in the three oldest classes. The school promotes pupils' achievement and progress through the mainly good quality of teaching. Pupils with English as an additional language generally attain well and make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in relation to their individual targets, particularly in the acquisition of basic literacy skills.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

10. The pupils, including those in the Nursery, generally have good attitudes to their work and learning. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in their attitudes which make a significant contribution to their progress and achievements. Pupils are eager to attend, mostly punctual and ready to work. The previous report found the attitudes of pupils to be positive towards their learning and the parents at the inspection meeting confirmed these findings to still be the case. Parents agree that the school teaches right from wrong and emphasises an attitude of kindness and caring for one another.

11. Pupils of all ages show good levels of concentration, responding enthusiastically with a burst of spontaneous applause, for instance, when a fellow pupil's action merits

praise. Pupils respond well in question and answer sessions, listening well to their teachers and generally showing courtesy when others are speaking. In assemblies which are supervised by one teacher, a small number of pupils lose concentration and behave inappropriately. Pupils collaborate well on tasks sharing resources and helping each other; for example, in completing a new list of spelling words on the computer in Year 1 prior to printing out the result.

12. The behaviour of the pupils is good and has a beneficial impact on the orderly atmosphere in the school. Teachers set good role models and all staff have consistently high expectations of polite and considerate conduct. Staff emphasise the importance of thoughtfulness for others and the pupils show good awareness of their own class rules. Bullying is very rare, is known by pupils to be unacceptable and strategies are in place to deal swiftly with any inappropriate behaviour. Parents generally feel the school is helping their children to become mature and responsible and appreciate the way the school teaches pupils to help one another and be kind to each other. Behaviour is considered to be generally good and parents are informed of any incidents of unacceptable behaviour concerning their child. The school dealt appropriately with the exclusion of one pupil during the school year previous to the inspection.

13. The personal development of pupils overall, and the quality of the relationships between children and staff and amongst pupils and their peers, are a strength of the school. Pupils of all ages are considerate for the well being of others, mostly sensitive to the needs of others and polite in a number of ways, such as holding open doors for others to pass through. All pupils are encouraged to socialise and co-operate and are confident in approaching adults and visitors to talk about their work; for example, in the Nursery where children are happy to explain the workings of a helicopter. A sense of responsibility for others is a strong feature of the school; pupils discuss and share ideas, listen to other viewpoints, organise tasks and show respect for one another, for their teachers and other staff. They accept challenge with great enthusiasm and delight in sharing a successful outcome.

14. Levels of attendance are satisfactory and broadly in line with national averages. Absence rates are sometimes affected by pupils being taken on holidays in term time, although parents are encouraged to support the regular attendance of their children. Unauthorised absence levels largely reflect lack of acceptable reasons for non-attendance. Pupils are generally punctual; registration periods are brief ensuring a prompt start to the working day.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

15. The previous report was critical of the school, including the teaching. Although the vast majority of the teaching observed at that time was judged to be satisfactory or better, some of it was judged to be unsatisfactory. It is very clear that the quality of teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection. The quality of the teaching is now mainly good. It was good in 50 per cent of the lessons seen, very good in 14 per cent and satisfactory in the remainder. There was no unsatisfactory teaching.

16. In nearly all the lessons there is evidence of teachers' good subject knowledge and understanding, good management of pupils and good use of time, support staff and resources. The good provision of homework supports the teaching. Although the skills of literacy and numeracy are generally taught well, the teaching needs to more clearly target strategies to raise standards in the basic skills, especially reading and writing. The

teaching generally meets the needs of the pupils, including those with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs, although there is a need to provide more challenging work for higher attainers. Pupils are generally engaged in their learning, with clear evidence of interest, concentration and, often, independence. The quality of teaching has a clear impact on the good levels of motivation seen in most pupils, who have a desire to do well and make progress.

17. There are many strengths and few weaknesses in the teaching. The quality of teaching in the Nursery is satisfactory and benefits from the hard work and working partnership of the teacher and the nursery nurse, both of whom are new to the Nursery. The organisation of the curriculum can benefit from a review to consider the number of activities on offer and the planned input of the two adults. During the time of the inspection, there were so many activities on offer over the extensive teaching areas in the nursery that it was difficult to provide consistent, good quality intervention.

18. Although the small number of children in the Reception class benefit from the generally good teaching and a good level of supervision, there is a need to broaden the curriculum to provide a wider range of experiences making more efficient use of the time available. There are some lessons when children spend long periods of time sitting and listening, instead of being directly involved in practical activity. The teaching can become more effective with the increased promotion of work which supports children being involved in a wider range of practical and creative activities and a reduction on the amount of direct teaching in which children take a passive role. More use could be made of the resources in the adjoining Nursery, especially during the afternoon sessions. The review and development of the teaching in the early years can usefully be undertaken in line with the new Early Learning Goals which all schools will need to work with in the next school year.

19. The teaching makes good provision for pupils with special educational needs and for pupils with English as an additional language. There is clear recognition of the need to focus more clearly on raising standards, especially in reading and writing. There are too few pupils attaining the higher, level 3, in the national tests and yet there are a small number of higher attainers in each class. There is recognition in the school of the need to target raising the standards achieved by the higher attaining pupils.

20. Most of the teaching seen during the inspection was effective. In the most effective teaching seen there was evidence of very thoughtful planning with clear, focused learning objectives. The work takes appropriate account of the capabilities of the pupils who are grouped carefully. The high expectations of the teacher impact very clearly on the amount and the quality of the work produced. There is brisk pace with a lot of encouragement. There are clear targets which the teacher shares with the pupils who then have a vested interest in meeting the targets successfully. The pupils are well trained and there is no calling out. Pupils work productively because of the high expectations of the teacher. Where teaching is less effective, the management of pupils is less secure and pupils do not produce as much work.

21. Although the teaching often benefits from the support provided by useful computer programs, this area can be better exploited when the school has more hardware and software resources. The lack of resources has a negative effect on this important area and the teaching in it. There is a need, recognised by the school, to develop more effective systems for monitoring pupils' attainment and progress and such practices can improve the quality of both the planning and teaching.

22. Literacy and numeracy skills are generally well taught. Teachers have worked hard to implement the national strategies, adapting them to the needs of the pupils. The pupils within both Year 2 and Year 3 are organised into three ability sets for both literacy and numeracy with an equitable sharing of sets by three teachers. This arrangement has made for closer matching of the work to the ability of the pupils but the school needs to continue to review the arrangements to ensure that they best meet the pupils' needs. A review of the use made of literacy sessions needs to be part of the school's strategies to raise standards in reading. In numeracy sessions, pupils are becoming skilled in using a range of strategies for solving mental calculations which reflect the quality of teaching observed during the inspection.

23. In all the lessons seen, teachers provided useful feedback to pupils, often through good quality marking which takes learning forward. The school makes effective use of regular homework to reinforce and extend what is learned in lessons. Overall, the quality of teaching has a positive impact on the pupils' learning and progress. There are firm plans for a systematic programme to improve teaching by observing lessons and providing feedback to inform targets for development. This can help to raise standards of teaching and learning throughout the school and enable the pupils' standards to improve.

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

24. The quality of the curriculum overall is good, broad and balanced and in keeping with the aims of the school. It fully meets statutory requirements, including the provision of religious education and all pupils receive their full entitlement to the National Curriculum. The curriculum effectively promotes the pupils' intellectual, physical and personal development. The quality and range of opportunities for learning provided by the school for its pupils is good and prepares them well for the next stage of education. The arrangements for health and sex education are good and these are appropriately linked to the science curriculum. The provision for personal, social and health education is very good and appropriate attention is given to drugs awareness.

25. The curriculum provided for children under the age of five is carefully planned. It is based on the six areas of learning and enables children to make satisfactory progress towards the Desirable Learning Outcomes. Strong emphasis is placed on children's personal and social development, on speaking and listening and on the development of early reading, writing and numeracy skills. The Nursery curriculum can benefit from a review of the range and number of activities offered, and this could be done in light of the new national Early Learning Goals which are about to be introduced. In the Reception class, although the curriculum provides well for the development of basic skills, there is a need to broaden the curriculum to provide a wider range of practical and creative experiences, making more efficient use of the time available in shorter, more focused sessions.

26. Effective strategies for the teaching of literacy and numeracy are in place and a suitable amount of time is allocated to them. The school has adapted the national strategies to its own particular circumstances with specific support focused on pupils with special educational needs. Foundation subjects are taught through a cross-curricular approach.

27. All pupils have equal access to all areas of the curriculum. There were no extra-curricular activities at the time of the inspection although the school is considering the

possibility of introducing some. The needs of all the pupils are generally met, including those with special educational needs and English as an additional language. The significant number of pupils with special educational needs receive good support which ensures that these pupils make good progress.

28. The school enjoys good community links, such as those with the church, the playgroup and a nearby home for the elderly. Worthwhile visits are organised for classes and these are linked well to a curriculum focus; for example, the visit to an environmental centre for science work and a visit to Bradwell Abbey to support work in history. Visitors to the school share knowledge and experience with the pupils; for example, as part of a history topic grandparents talk to pupils about what it was like to live through the Second World War.

29. Liaison with and visits from teachers from the middle school help to ensure the smooth transition of Year 3 pupils. The schools visit each other on special occasions such as Christmas concerts and the middle school headteacher and some pupils visit once a term to take assembly. Staff at Downs Barn join with colleagues from other local schools for useful group meetings.

30. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Spiritual development is supported through collective acts of worship, school assemblies and religious education. Broadly Christian beliefs are promoted effectively throughout the school and during celebrations such as the harvest festival at the local church. Other religions, including Judaism and Hinduism are explored through religious education lessons, where some pupils talk of their own experiences of celebrating Diwali and the Chinese New Year. Pupils develop a sense of wonder at the intricacy of Chinese script and show a pride in translating the text to a visitor.

31. The school sets a strong moral code and the provision for moral development is good. Pupils know right from wrong, a view shared by parents. Consideration and respect for others are consistently reinforced by staff and pupils themselves and are written into the pupils' own mission statement. Pupils generally understand when behaviour is unacceptable and respect the rewards which politeness and courtesy can bring. They are encouraged to discuss problems especially during circle time, and story time is often used to promote discussion about feelings and attitudes. Staff act as good role models, consistently teaching worthwhile values and praising thoughtfulness or spontaneous acts of kindness, such as befriending a lonely, younger pupil. Some parents referred to the personal qualities and the sense of values the school promotes.

32. Co-operative work is strongly encouraged amongst pupils and social development benefits from the support pupils give each other in the classroom and in the playground. Opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their understanding of their own roles in the school community, where even the youngest pupils in the Nursery are given tasks as helpers. Pupils happily respond to responsibility as class helpers, door attendants or book box helpers and delight in earning praise or stickers for a job well done.

33. Cultural development is good with pupils developing a sense of community and an appreciation of the diversity of cultures within their school. Opportunities are provided to study the local area during geography topic visits or visits from local people describing their wartime experiences. Children gain an insight into the lives and cultures of pupils in their school who have close family links with different countries and share their experiences during class discussions. Visits to a local theatre and the school's own productions, for example, of a nativity play, broaden pupils' own cultural experience. Pupils are encouraged

to play a full part in school life and the provision made for the pupils, including those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, enables their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development to be well addressed.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

34. The previous report found the school to be a caring community which effectively supported and guided its pupils. This is still the case and the good quality of pastoral care provided by the staff is much appreciated by many parents. Pupils enjoy a safe and secure environment where courtesy, care for others and kindness are fostered. The very good relationships between teachers and their pupils is an important element of the care provided for the children and enhances their learning. The promotion of positive values in personal development helps to create a pleasant community and staff consistently encourage these values. Pupils with special educational needs, those with English as an additional language and the very young in the Nursery are very well supported. There are good induction procedures which enable children to settle quickly and happily into the new routines. Parents are encouraged to bring their children to school on time and collect them promptly at the end of the day. Some informal monitoring procedures for assessing pupils' progress and attainment are in place but are not yet fully developed.

35. Procedures for monitoring and promoting regular, punctual attendance are satisfactory. Absences are followed up effectively and registers are rigorously monitored. Parents are reminded through newsletters to encourage regular attendance and to advise the school of reasons for absence. Punctuality is closely monitored and parents are discouraged from taking their children on holiday during term time. The majority of parents co-operate very well, although the above average unauthorised absence figure does reflect leave taken without the school's authorisation.

36. Staff are consistent in their strategies for promoting good behaviour and dealing with misbehaviour. Pupils are confident in expressing their worries to adults, knowing they will be supported. Praise and encouragement through rewards such as stickers are valued by pupils, who generally moderate their own behaviour well. Procedures for child protection are well established and documented. The designated member of staff is well supported and new staff are informed of any change in procedures or developments of which they need to be aware. Health and safety of pupils is an important priority for the school and the trained first aid personnel have detailed information on a range of allergies and established medical conditions for all pupils on the medical file. Pupils are taught about healthy eating, hygiene and safe practices. The wide-ranging discussion in circle time contributes to the development of pupils' awareness of others in the context of the 'family' of the school.

37. Pupils are well supervised during break and lunch times. The school is well maintained, with clean facilities and pupils are tidy in their daily use of school resources, keeping corridors free of clutter. Overall the school environment is safe, although there are two concerns. One relates to the hard metal pillars supporting the covered section of the Nursery's outside play area. Also the school needs to keep under review its concerns regarding the significant number of parents and children who use the vehicular access to enter and leave the school instead of using the pathway created for such access. It is also the case that the layout of the building makes for difficulties in organising fire drills. The school may need to review the pathway situation at the front of the building in order to provide safer access.

38. The school cares well for pupils with special educational needs and they are well supported. Effective and consistent procedures are in place for placing pupils on the special educational needs register and support and guidance is given through helpful individual education plans. The work is well led by the recently designated special educational needs co-ordinator.

39. An issue in the previous report was to develop assessment and put in place reliable and consistent assessment procedures. This issue has not been fully addressed and the school recognises the need to develop effective arrangements for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. Some formal assessments are undertaken but not on a clear and coherent basis. Baseline assessments on entry to the school are established and provide useful information. Throughout the school a great deal of informal assessment takes place which informs the provision for individuals and for groups of pupils and means that the teachers have a good knowledge of the pupils' strengths and weaknesses. Good feedback

and simple targets are given to pupils through discussion and through marking of work, all of which are part of the school's ethos to acknowledge and promote progress. This can be better met with the planned developments in assessment.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

40. The partnership between the school and home is appreciated and supported by the majority of parents. Evidence from the inspection supports the views expressed by parents at the inspection meeting that the school helps their children to learn. The school provides practical and comprehensive information for parents. The parents of children in the Nursery appreciate the induction pack and regular newsletters provide day-to-day information. There are two opportunities for formal consultation on the children's progress during the year, with the autumn evening set to provide greater detail. Parents know that they are always welcome to contact teachers at the beginning or the end of the day if they have any concerns. Pupils' annual written reports are informative and indicate areas for development and highlight strengths. Targets are set for each child. Individual education plans to support pupils with special educational needs are good, with appropriate targets identified.

42. Parents' involvement with the school is fostered through opportunities for decision making; such as questionnaires covering aspects of the daily life of the school. Their comments are taken into account for documents such as the home-school agreement or the school development plan. The majority of parents feel they are welcomed by the school and value the invitations to attend class assemblies or participate in curriculum evenings, such as one for the numeracy hour. A small number of parents give regular assistance in classrooms and their support is valued by the staff.

43. Parents and children work together on the homework projects provided by the school which have a positive effect on the understanding and confidence of the pupils. The views expressed by some parents regarding the need for greater consistency in homework and the lack of clarity as to what is expected were not borne out by the inspection. Inspectors' views are that the provision of homework is clear, well organised and appropriate. Most parents are happy with the amount of homework that the school provides and are willing to help their children with reading, spelling, tables and project work. Parents and carers are encouraged to visit before their child attends the Nursery and the approachable atmosphere at the school is reflected in the warm and friendly welcome pupils give to the

visitors to their school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

44. The senior management team, of headteacher and deputy headteacher, function effectively in planning and decision making. Their leadership is well supported by staff who share the commitment to improve and raise standards. The school's aims and values are well promoted in all the work, there are good relationships and there is a developing corporate approach to the work of the school. The headteacher is providing very good leadership and has a clear vision for the future development of the school. In the short time she has been in the school she has worked very hard and quickly and the documentation she has put in place is of a high order.

45. The governing body fulfils its statutory duties by maintaining oversight of the budget, plans and policies and is very supportive of the headteacher. Governors are enthusiastic and hard working many of them being new to their roles. The present school management plan is only for the period 1999/2000 and this does not enable the school to make long term financial plans. In particular there is no long term strategic plan to address the issues of the falling roll and budget losses which currently face the school. The school's current plan accurately reflects the actions the school has taken and the progress made towards its short term targets.

46. Responsibilities in the school have been well deployed amongst staff who are working hard with a shared capacity to succeed. Most co-ordinators are new to their subject responsibility but are sufficiently clear about the improvements that need to be made to raise attainment. Firm plans are in place to further develop the co-ordinator roles.

47. The school is beginning to develop effective strategies for monitoring its performance. A review of the 1999 test results has provided pointers for future targets, such as those in writing. Other monitoring procedures, such as regular observation of lessons, are still to be developed. Performance management and appraisal follow an established procedure and provide a good basis for professional dialogue and feedback to teachers on their strengths and areas for development.

48. The school is well staffed by appropriately qualified teachers and classroom assistants. Present arrangements have resulted in mixed age classes but in the next academic year this should no longer be necessary. Good induction procedures are in place for newly qualified teachers. The special educational needs co-ordinator manages the provision for these pupils well and ensures that the support available is appropriately utilised. This is having a positive effect upon the good learning that is taking place by these pupils.

49. Financial management in the school is now good. Continuing careful management of the school finances is essential to address a deficit budget which came about through some imprudent decisions made before the present management structure. Specific grants are used appropriately and efficiently. Educational priorities are clearly identified, such as the raising of standards in writing, which are appropriately supported by financial planning. Less successful is the long term financial planning which does not show how governors will address the large deficit and the question of falling rolls. In 1998 an audit of the school's procedures for handling its finances was carried out and its minor recommendations were acted upon. In day-to-day financial and administration matters the headteacher is well

supported by a financial assistant and a secretary.

50. The accommodation is very good with classrooms of a sufficient size and useful shared areas which are used well. The library is of a good size and is well stocked. Other space within the building allows for very flexible delivery of the curriculum. Some good quality displays enhance the interior of the school which is kept in good decorative order. The school is clean and well maintained and provides a welcoming environment.

51. The school benefits from both hard play and grassed areas in addition to well tended flower beds and a 'sensory garden'. There is a safety issue concerning the vehicular access which is inadvisably used by many parents when delivering and collecting children. The school intends to keep this situation under review.

52. Overall the school provides satisfactory resources for learning. Provision for information technology is inadequate, there being insufficient computers on which pupils can work as a class for direct teaching of computer skills. Through no fault of the school, it is not yet linked to the Internet and the National Grid for Learning and consequently is still waiting to be connected to e-mail. These factors are the main reason that the schools' effective use of new technology is unsatisfactory. Resources for other areas of the curriculum are satisfactory although there is some need to increase the number of artefacts provided to support religious education.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The governors' action plan will set out how the areas for improvement identified during the inspection are to be addressed.

In order to further raise standards and the quality of education provided, the governing body, headteacher and staff should:

- ◆ target raising standards in reading and writing for all pupils and target raising both the standards and the results of the higher attaining pupils by:
 - *continuing to identify and develop clear strategies for effective teaching;*
 - *systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning;*
 - *raising expectations of what the pupils can achieve;*
 - *providing more challenging work for the higher attainers;*
 - *continuing to involve parents and pupils by providing clear targets for improvement.*

(paragraphs 4, 6, 9, 16, 19, 22, 23, 62, 66, 67, 69 and 70)

- ◆ review and significantly develop clear, consistent and manageable systems of assessing and recording pupils' work to enable more effective monitoring of pupils' attainment and progress:

(paragraphs 21, 34, 39, 55, 69, 77 and 83)

- ◆ develop the curriculum in the early years by:
 - *reviewing and evaluating existing practices;*

- *considering the number of activities provided in the Nursery and the planned input of the two adults;*
- *providing a broader range of experiences for Reception children to include more practical and creative activities within shorter more focused sessions.*

(paragraphs 17, 18, 25 and 55)

◆ increase the effectiveness of the governing body by:

- *building up a closer involvement in the life of the school;*
- *continuing to develop governor training;*
- *creating a strategic plan to cover the future development of the school bearing in mind the falling roll and the budget deficit.*

(paragraphs 45 and 49)

In addition to the above areas, the following less critical area should be considered for inclusion in the action plan. This is indicated in paragraphs 8, 21, 52, 59, 69, 84 and 88:

- ◆ the development of hardware and software resources to support the teaching and learning in information technology in order to better promote the development of the appropriate skills.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	42
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	20

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
0	14	50	36	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 – Y3
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE)	13	130
Number of pupils eligible for free school meals	0	23

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y3
Number of pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	1	37

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	9

Pupils mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	2
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	0

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	6.2
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	1.0
National comparative data	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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	1999	25	21	46

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 or above	Boys	19	13	21
	Girls	17	14	18
	Total	36	27	39
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	78 (69)	58 (79)	85 (87)
	National	82 (80)	83 (81)	87 (84)

Teacher Assessments		Reading	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 or above	Boys	21	22	24
	Girls	17	16	19
	Total	38	38	43
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	82 (75)	82 (87)	93 (93)
	National	82 (81)	87 (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	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	3
Indian	4
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	1
White	112
Any other minority ethnic group	0

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	1	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y3

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21.3 : 1
Average class size	19.5

Education support staff: YR –Y3

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	26

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Qualified teachers and classes: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	0.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	26 : 1

Total number of education support staff	1
Total aggregate hours worked per week	17

Number of pupils per FTE adult	13.0
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	98/99
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	£
Total income	292,937
Total expenditure	308,720
Expenditure per pupil	1,464
Balance brought forward from previous year	11,735
Balance carried forward to next year	- 4,048

Results of the survey of parents' and carers'

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out:

130

Number of questionnaires returned:

72

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school	48	48	4	0	0
My child is making good progress in school	43	44	7	0	6
Behaviour in the school is good	32	60	1	1	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home	28	46	12	10	4
The teaching is good	44	47	3	3	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on	31	54	11	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem	54	36	6	3	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best	42	54	4	0	0
The school works closely with parents	28	51	16	4	1
The school is well led and managed	22	54	7	7	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible	36	53	7	1	3
The school provides as interesting range of activities outside lessons	6	22	40	21	11

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

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

53. The Nursery caters for children from the local area including ones who do not live in Downs Barn. An appropriate curriculum for children under five is provided in the Nursery which caters for 26 children. All children follow the curriculum prescribed nationally in the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning, although planning will soon need to be based on the new National Early Learning Goals. Although most children are admitted to the Nursery at the beginning of the term in which they are four, a small number enter a term earlier. At the time of the inspection, of the 26 children, 17 had just started in January, of whom six were early starters. Between a half and two thirds of the children move on to the Reception class, which is adjacent to the Nursery thus making for easy transition. The rest of the children move on to other local schools; amongst the ones who leave are a significant number of the higher attainers.

54. The work of the Nursery was praised in the previous report, commending the provision and the quality of teaching. Since that time there have been a number of changes. The nursery now operates in the mornings only, thus catering for half the previous number, where previously the Nursery was staffed by an established teacher and a nursery nurse. At the time of this inspection both the teacher and the nursery nurse were half way through their first year in the Nursery. Overall, standards in the Nursery are broadly in line with what could be expected. Most children are in line to meet the Desirable Learning Outcomes by the statutory time of entering education and a small number will exceed those expectations.

55. The quality of teaching in the Nursery is satisfactory and benefits from the hard work and the working partnership of the teacher and the nursery nurse. Staff need to be firm and consistent in their management of children during the group times so that children understand that it is not appropriate to call out. The work is planned with care and in detail but there needs to be clearer indication of which activities will have significant adult impact and who will take overall supervision of the other activities on offer. During the inspection there were so many activities on offer over the extensive teaching areas of the Nursery that it was difficult to provide consistent, good quality intervention and support. The staff enjoy good relationships with the children and a good knowledge of their individual needs. They show a good commitment to both making the provision as effective as possible and to continuing to develop assessment and record keeping.

56. In personal and social development, children progress well which enables them to reach the prescribed outcomes by the statutory age of entry into school. They quickly establish effective relationships, gaining confidence in new situations. They learn to co-operate with each other, sharing and taking turns. They gain in independence, becoming proficient in dressing and undressing for times spent in the hall. They learn to select and use resources appropriately.

57. The vast majority will meet the Desirable Learning Outcomes for language and literacy and a number will exceed them. Children listen attentively individually and in large and small groups. They are able to follow instructions; for example, when working on the computer. As they progress through Nursery their vocabulary grows. They choose books and enjoy looking at them; a general selection of large picture books would enhance the

work. Children learn that print is read from left to right and talk about the books they use, often joining in the words and phrases which are repeated in them. They show some awareness of forms of writing; for example, when filling in appointments at the 'doctor's surgery'. Children join in imaginative play and enjoy using the listening station. They develop their speaking skills and, during the inspection, they took part in a well-organised assembly on numbers which was attended by many parents, during which most children spoke out clearly.

58. In mathematics, the majority meet, and some exceed, the expected outcomes. In Nursery many children can reliably count to five and some can go beyond that. They can confidently name and identify circles, squares and triangles. They join in number rhymes and counting games and learn to write numerals. Most can sequence events in their lives. A wide range of mathematical experiences are given to children such as sand and water play, matching, sorting and sequencing.

59. Children are encouraged to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world and most make good progress and attain the prescribed competencies. They use magnets and magnifying glasses; they make vehicles out of construction kits; plans are in place for planting and growing. When learning about past events they acquire the appropriate language to express the passage of time as in a topic on the family, where they considered how they have changed since they were babies and toddlers. They learn about the seasons of the year. They draw maps about their journey to school and make a large map of the journey of 'The Jolly Postman'. Visits into the local area can help them to better develop an understanding of their own heritage. Children learn that there are different ways of joining things when they use tape and glue. Although they use the computer and show some skills there is a need to develop this area, including the provision of a wider range of programs to support their learning.

60. In the creative area of learning, most children attain competently in the range of activities provided. They enjoy painting using the easels and they make models using playdough. Although children create models and drawings, these are sometimes too adult directed. They sing a range of songs, including nursery rhymes and action songs, and develop a sense of rhythm. They learn to play imaginatively. Although there are opportunities for the children to cut, stick and make models, children could benefit from more opportunities to make decisions and choices when selecting and using materials; experimentation with various media could also be beneficial.

61. In the physical area of learning, most children attain well and some attain very well. The planning allows for a range of tasks to improve their manual skills; for example, working with tools, paintings, writing, cutting and gluing. Children have some opportunities for running, jumping and throwing and catching through regular times in the hall. They enjoy the outside play sessions when they develop physical skills, although the provision of bikes, scooters and co-operative apparatus could improve the quality of the work. In this area, as across the range of areas, an audit and review of resources would help the Nursery to plan ahead to take into account the new Early Learning Goals.

ENGLISH

62. Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 and at the end of Year 3 are below national averages in reading and writing. This is clearly reflected in the 1999 test results which were below national averages and when compared with the averages for similar schools, were below in reading and well below in writing. In reading and writing, the

numbers achieving level 2 and those achieving level 3 were below average. This evidence identifies a clear issue about the need to raise standards in reading and writing which the school has just started to address and also an issue about the higher attainers who may have the capacity to reach the higher level 3.

63. Standards in English in the previous report were judged to be broadly in line with national expectations. Over the last four years, the results in reading have shown a gradual improvement. In writing, the results have been erratic, with significantly poor results in 1997 and 1999 compared with those of 1996 and 1998. The results of 1999 are likely to be replicated in the summer 2000 results. Standards in the Nursery are broadly in line with what could be expected in early literacy skills but this picture changes when between a third and a half leave to go to other local schools. The leavers are often the higher attaining children in the group.

64. Attainment on entry to the school, although varied, is below what could be expected. A significant number of children enter main school with poor language and communication skills. Nevertheless, in light of their abilities, pupils achieve well and make satisfactory and often good progress. There are a significant number of pupils with special educational needs. At the time of the inspection, 34 per cent of the Year 2 pupils were on the special educational needs register; of the group who were tested in 1999, now Year 3 pupils, 28 per cent had special educational needs. Most of the pupils' needs are concerned with the development of basic literacy skills and this disadvantages learning in most areas of the curriculum. This has an adverse effect on the standards it is possible for the school to achieve in the national tests. Across the school levels of speaking skills vary. A minority of pupils in each class have good speaking skills and are confident and articulate when speaking to adults and can give good explanations. There are many pupils who are confident in speaking informally, for example, when discussing families and interests but less confident in more demanding situations, such as describing observations or offering explanations.

65. Pupils generally listen attentively, although less so in assemblies which are taken by one teacher with all the pupils of the school. They generally listen well to one another when reflecting on previous experiences; for example, when talking about their Christmas production of 'Who Believes in Father Christmas?' In reading, although most pupils achieve well relative to their abilities, standards are lower than those nationally. Pupils develop a sound understanding of letter patterns and although they begin to learn to use illustration, phonic and word recognition skills, for many pupils these are underdeveloped. This situation can be improved, partly through the school's plans to make more use of the new structured phonic scheme. Many parents provide good support at home for children practising their reading and this is beginning to have an impact. There is clear recognition in the school of the need to raise reading standards.

66. In handwriting, most pupils develop appropriate pencil control and present their work well. They begin to use their knowledge of initial sounds when writing. Higher attainers learn to write in sentences and give structure by using a beginning, a middle and an end when writing stories. Overall, standards in writing in Year 2 and Year 3 are below the levels expected for this age. A scrutiny of work shows the need to develop more opportunities to write for a variety of purposes and audiences and also the need for more opportunities to develop writing in other subjects, such as geography and history, especially for the higher attainers.

67. The pupils are taught well and the overall good quality of the teaching has a significant impact on the pupils' achievements, their attitude to work and their productivity. Pupils generally show interest and sustain concentration. In all the effective lessons seen,

there was a good pace, high expectations and a good quality of learning; pupils were making good progress. Work is marked regularly providing helpful comments which move learning forward. All teachers set regular homework which enables pupils to practise reading and learn spellings. The teaching now needs to target the development of reading and writing skills more closely so that standards rise.

68. The literacy hour has been effectively introduced with the school adapting it to its own circumstances. The pupils in Year 2 and Year 3 have been put into three sets; one each for lower attainers, higher attainers and the ones in between. This is enabling the teaching to be more focused on the abilities of the pupils by making the work appropriate for each group. Teachers make use of an interesting range of texts and progressively develop phonic skills. The work is well resourced, is helping to promote positive attitudes and is enjoyed by the pupils. All staff use a thorough and consistent method of planning.

69. The subject is well managed and co-ordinated. The level of resourcing is good with a good range of fiction and non-fiction books throughout the school, although the Nursery could benefit from more big picture books. Pupils could benefit from more opportunities to develop word processing skills. Wider provision of both hardware and software would better enable skills to be practised and reinforced and information to be accessed. Although a policy and a scheme of work guide the planning of the work, there is clear recognition of the need to develop clear assessment strategies to monitor the attainment and progress of the pupils. The school has firm plans to monitor and evaluate the teaching and learning in the literacy hour. This can provide useful feedback and help to identify targets for future development. There is a commitment to raise standards in reading and writing and success in this would have an impact on pupils' attainment and progress across the whole curriculum.

MATHEMATICS

70. Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 and the end of Year 3 are below the national average and below what could be expected. The proportion of pupils who attain the higher level 3 is also well below the national average. The school recognises the need to target the higher attainers. These judgements are clearly reflected in the 1999 test results which are likely to be replicated in summer 2000. Although mathematics results have been below national expectations since 1996, and below or well below the average for similar schools, they have shown an upward trend.

71. Most pupils are achieving well relative to their abilities, including those with special educational needs. The high proportion of pupils with special educational needs, both in the current Year 2 and the current Year 3 has an adverse impact on the overall evaluations for the school.

72. A good start to learning occurs in the small Reception class where children achieve appropriately for their age. They recognise numerals up to nine and can count reliably up to 10. They can sequence numbers from one to 10, knowing which number is one more or one less than any of the other numbers. In Year 1, pupils make sound and sometimes good progress, consolidating and extending their learning.

73. By the end of Key Stage 1, the majority of pupils have acquired a good range of skills to enable them to make simple mental calculations but, as in other aspects of numeracy, an insufficient number attain the national standards. The higher attainers who

are reaching satisfactory national standards are able to use a range of strategies, such as doubling and halving when making simple calculations. They count accurately both forwards and backwards in fives and tens. They understand the place value of digits and can choose appropriate methods for dealing with addition and subtraction and most know a range of strategies to carry out these calculations. They show good understanding of the process of subtraction and understand their answer can be checked by addition.

74. Many pupils show ability to solve simple problems but these are mainly confined to word sums. They are able to carry out simple investigations but there is little opportunity of a more challenging nature for the more able pupils to become involved in more complex investigations. Most pupils can recognise and name several two and three-dimensional shapes with an awareness of the different properties of the shapes. Pupils recognise and compare the difference between the representation of time on an analogue and a digital clock and develop concepts of time by estimating and then timing how long it takes to write their own name.

75. The quality of teaching is mainly good and is having a positive effect on learning and progress. During the current school year, the decision was taken to group the Year 2 and the Year 3 pupils into three sets based on ability. This has helped the teachers to more closely match the work to the abilities of the pupils. The arrangements can benefit from a review to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the system. Teachers are implementing the National Numeracy Strategy well, particularly the section of the lesson which develops pupils' mental skills. The more effective lessons show appropriately high expectations and good pace which helps to maintain interest and enthusiasm. Lessons are well planned with a strong emphasis on the development of pupils' use and understanding of mathematical language and vocabulary. Teachers use questioning to help pupils develop and explain their own strategies for working. The independent activities are well matched to individual and group abilities and the less confident are well supported.

76. The attitudes and behaviour of the pupils are very positive and they work with their teacher and each other very well. Relationships are very good. At the end of each lesson, pupils are given the opportunity to share with each other what they have learnt and this then enables the teacher to check that the learning objectives of the lesson have been met. Mathematical and numeracy skills are often reinforced in other subjects and information technology is used to reinforce number recognition and computation. There is a positive ethos for mathematics throughout most of the school and a very clear commitment for improvement with targets identified in an action plan.

77. Assessment procedures are unsatisfactory with no consistent whole school approach. This issue is well recognised by the school. Development of these necessary procedures are part of the co-ordinators action plan for spring 2000 at which time the plan is to formulate an assessment format to match the schools' scheme of work. Homework is used well to support the work; for example, the robots made by Year 1 pupils combining some of the skills of design and technology with the recognition and use of three-dimensional solid shapes such as cubes, cuboids and cones. Each pupil in Year 2 and 3 has a homework book which includes games which help to reinforce the current work by the class on mental mathematics as well as work concerned with the current main focus for teaching.

78. Mathematics is well resourced. Currently teachers use a variety of schemes to enhance their planning, although there are firm plans to introduce a new commercial scheme of work. The school intends to develop a more efficient planning system alongside the addressing of the main issue concerned with the monitoring of pupils' attainment and

progress.

SCIENCE

79. Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 and the end of Year 3 are below national averages. These standards are lower than those identified in the previous report, where standards were judged to be sound and broadly in line with national expectations. These standards were not reflected in the teacher assessments for 1999 which at level 2 were broadly in line and sometimes above national averages but below and sometimes well below when comparing the number of pupils achieving the higher level 3. The high number of pupils with special educational needs in Year 2 has a significant effect on the overall evaluations.

80. Attainment in the different aspects of science varies; for example, pupils' knowledge and understanding of such things as life processes and materials is generally better than their skills in experimental and investigative science. Most pupils are able to use simple equipment. They try to make observations in a logical way; for example, when investigating and recording what happens to rocks if water or acid is put on them or they are scratched with a nail. All pupils understand the need to conduct a fair test but few have the necessary skills to do so. Some pupils are able to think about the outcomes of their investigations and make predictions.

81. Pupils are introduced to science when they watch and contribute to experiments conducted by their teacher. These sometimes involve concepts that are too sophisticated; for example, testing materials to see if they are waterproof. More valuable activities are which allow pupils to investigate their senses of smell, touch and taste and those where pupils name and label body parts. Year 1 work provides opportunities for some active involvement of the pupils in their own learning. Investigations are carried out on the different types of paper which pupils categorise into smooth, rough, soft or shiny. Pupils are encouraged to look at the different kinds of movement in a topic focusing on forces. There is good use of homework when pupils are encouraged to visit a park and observe the different kinds of movement of the playground equipment, from this they comment on pushing and pulling movements and up and down forces. Some of the higher attainers gain some knowledge of gravity and friction.

82. The quality of teaching is satisfactory with some good features. This has a positive impact on the achievements of most pupils who respond well and make sound progress relative to their abilities. Teachers manage their pupils well although the time that Reception children are expected to sit and concentrate on one activity is too long. Sometimes the activities planned do not fully involve all pupils, especially the lower attainers, and sometimes the pupils need to be more actively involved in practical work, rather than taking a passive role. Teachers are positive in their science lessons and provide their pupils with good information and knowledge, often in a very stimulating way. This brings about in the pupils an initial level of interest and positive attitudes but these are not always sustained to the end of the lesson.

83. There is a need to target raising the standards of the higher attaining pupils to help more to reach the higher levels in science. The subject is adequately resourced and some use is being made of the nationally prescribed scheme of work. The school is aware of the need to develop that part of the work concerned with experimental and investigative science. Assessment is an identified area for further development in order to enable the school to better monitor pupils' attainment and progress.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

84. The previous inspection reported that standards and progress in information technology were unsatisfactory and below national expectations. This has been addressed by an appropriate scheme of work being put in place and some increase in the confidence of the teachers although they are looking forward to further training and an increase in the school's provision of both hardware and software. Judgements made during this inspection indicate that by the end of Key Stage 1, standards of attainment are in line with national averages. Pupils in Year 3 are reaching standards appropriate for their age.

85. In the Nursery, children use the mouse to move items around the screen and are able to 'click on' selected objects. In Reception, pupils begin to develop both mouse and keyboard skills. In Year 1 they assemble text using the shift key and the backspace and delete keys appropriately and competently and pupils understand that keyboard instructions make things happen.

86. Pupils develop the ability to work with confidence and growing independence. This stems from a good grasp of keyboard skills and control of the mouse which they use to save and retrieve. They are able to select appropriate tools such as they show in use of the 'Colour Magic' program. A good example was seen when Years 2 and 3 pupils recreated the work of the artist Mondrian using the flood tool, shape tool, line tool and the eraser. These good quality examples are saved and printed by the pupils. They are able to select and drag graphic images around the screen such as when making a tessellating pattern, an example of when the use of information technology is supporting mathematics. By Year 2, pupils have gained some experience in control by use of the roamer which they can program to move in particular directions. They have become aware of the use of information technology in the wider world but the fact that the school is not yet connected to the Internet or e-mail limits further development. The school makes use of its equipment to provide some opportunities for cross-curricular use.

87. Teachers have improved their own knowledge and skills in information technology and this has raised the quality of teaching; they are well supported by the co-ordinator who is taking a leading and effective role. In the lessons observed involving direct teaching of a whole class, teaching was good. Teachers give clear explanations and effective instructions on the operation of different programs. The lessons are well organised but a lack of resources prevents the pupils from sufficiently practising the skills which they have just been shown. Pupils are very well managed with care taken to ensure equal, albeit limited, access to computers. Teachers have appropriately high expectations of what pupils can do but these expectations are restricted by the lack of both hardware and software resources. Pupils are interested and keen and these good attitudes ensure that they make satisfactory progress.

88. The issues in information technology are concerned with the sufficiency of both hardware and software and the efficient organisation of resources to ensure their most effective use. Through no fault of its own the school cannot yet provide its pupils with the wealth of information that can be accessed through the Internet. The school is beginning to make use of the nationally prescribed scheme of work. The school recognises the need to develop its assessment practices.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

89. No judgements were made on attainment and progress in the previous report. Standards of attainment are judged, in this inspection, to be sound throughout the school and the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus are being met. In assemblies, pupils are gaining an appreciation of the purpose of prayer and in lessons, they are acquiring knowledge of the festivals and celebrations of the Christian faith.

90. In Reception and at Year 1, pupils identify special people in their lives, considering 'what makes my special people angry or sad?' and 'how can I make my special people happy?' Pupils are given opportunities to become aware of their relationships at home, at school and in the wider community. They learn about the Jewish festival of Sukkot, with opportunity to create a sukkah.

91. At Year 2 and Year 3, pupils listen and respond to a wide variety of Bible stories; they learn about Jesus as a storyteller. They discuss the moral of stories such as 'The Good Samaritan' and learn how the message in parables can be applied to everyday life. Very good use is made of the children's own personal knowledge of festivals; for example, knowledge is shared about Diwali, including the story of Rama and Sita and about the Chinese New Year. They become familiar with the content of different sacred writings and the significance of light and symbols in various religions.

92. The quality of teaching observed during the inspection was satisfactory and sometimes good. The very good relationships enhanced the teaching as did the good quality storytelling. Teachers use their own and pupils' experiences to teach about the qualities of caring, tolerance and responsibility for other people. Opportunities for reflection are given to pupils both in lessons and in acts of worship but more opportunities for pupils to express their feelings in writing could be offered. Pupils are taught to respect other people's faiths. The quality of learning is sound with pupils making appropriate progress and building on the knowledge and understanding they acquire. They generally listen attentively to stories and respond well to moral and social issues in lessons. They sometimes respond less well in assemblies when the activity is supervised by just one teacher.

93. There are weekly religious education lessons for all classes and daily acts of collective worship. There is a useful policy and a clear scheme of work which is in keeping with the locally agreed syllabus. There is recognition of the need to build up a collection of artefacts to support the work. The school enjoys a good link with the local church which was used for the harvest festival. Knowledge and understanding of different religious traditions is becoming well developed and this prepares the pupils well for the multicultural society in which they are growing up.

ART

94. The findings of the previous inspection were that standards in art were judged to be broadly in line with national expectations. Although the evidence is not drawn from actual lessons observed, judgements made during this inspection are based on samples of pupils' work and discussions with pupils, together with the evidence of work on display throughout the school. Using this evidence, pupils' attainment by the end of Key Stage 1 and at the end of Year 3 is judged to be in line with what might be expected for pupils of the appropriate age.

95. From the Nursery onwards, children are encouraged to experiment with various media including paint, collage, printing materials and textiles. They are introduced to both two and three-dimensional work. Children develop skills in selecting the appropriate tools and materials. They learn to organise their own work and accept responsibility for clearing up. Year 1 pupils produced a large collage of the witch's house from Hansel and Gretel showing that they could work and collaborate well together. Other work around the school, for example, the large patchwork type quilt of assembled individual blocks of pattern, gives further proof of collective effort.

96. The work of famous artists is used well across all year groups to provide pupils with inspiration and examples of techniques in colour, texture and brush strokes. Information technology is appropriately used to depict the nature of the work of Mondrian using the primary colours of red, yellow and blue. In work focused upon printing and pattern, there are good observations of the patterns that occur in natural objects such as shells. There are good cross-curricular links; for example, older pupils attempt to depict in art form the sounds they hear in music. This is a very challenging activity and shows that Year 3 pupils have become increasingly capable of imaginative work and are able to draw upon a substantial bank of experience and memory.

97. Although no teaching was seen, planning indicates that pupils are provided with an appropriate range of activities. The subject is adequately resourced and a scheme of work is in place; there are plans to introduce the nationally prescribed scheme of work.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

98. Pupils attain standards which are broadly appropriate for their age and ability both in Key Stage 1 and in Year 3. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, make sound progress. This is an improvement on the findings of the previous inspection which indicated that standards were low.

99. In Reception, opportunities are given for children to make models using various materials and technological kits. They experience cutting, gluing and joining materials together. They make sock puppets for use in promoting their speaking and listening skills. Year 1 pupils use their skills to design and make a robot using three-dimensional shapes and this provides a very good link with mathematics. There is useful evidence which shows 'cities' made from prisms, spheres, cubes and cuboids. Year 2 and Year 3 pupils look closely at mechanisms to see how they work and make toys move. They understand the need to design what they are going to make. During the inspection they planned and designed a monster which they were about to create, identifying the moving parts on their designs. Some older pupils are able to draw very simple designs of what they are going to make and can select the appropriate materials needed for their models. By the end of Key Stage 1 and Year 3, pupils can evaluate their work and suggest ways in which it might be improved.

100. Teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good. Lessons are well prepared and the teachers' questions are well focused and open ended allowing the pupils to express opinions and ideas. Pupils are provided with useful information and examples and the activities they are given engage their interest and enthusiasm. Care is taken to ensure that pupils know the process that must be followed and design is emphasised as being an important preliminary to making. There is good opportunity for the pupils to work collaboratively and share ideas such as what material is to be used and how it will look when it is finished.

101. The nationally prescribed schemes of work are used to form the basis of the planning. A useful policy is in place and the subject is appropriately resourced with good storage arrangements.

GEOGRAPHY

102. Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 and the end of Year 3 are judged to be sound and broadly in line with what might be expected.

103. In Reception and Year 1, pupils begin to investigate the local area. They study a street map of Downs Barn identifying where they live, addressing envelopes to depict addresses. They create maps to show their journeys to school and, following a local walk, they draw a large scale map of the route taken. They consider the wider area by locating Milton Keynes on a large map when they identify and locate the countries which make up the United Kingdom. They gain insights into the wider world through keeping records of the travels of 'Barnaby Bear', documented by photographs. The children enjoy Barnaby Bear and his involvement in the work could usefully be developed.

104. At Year 2 and Year 3, pupils further develop mapping skills and the drawing of simple plans. They create maps of the fictitious Isle of Struay, locating specific features and making use of co-ordinates. They compare the Isle of Struay with their own area. They learn more about the geography of their own local area and learn about their own community in relation to others. Pupils use aerial photographs of the area, noting features on a map of Downs Barn and the area around it. Through the use of photographs and maps, they learn about the geographical features of Par in Cornwall, prior to writing letters to children from a school there. By the end of Key Stage 1 and Year 3, pupils are beginning to use geographical vocabulary in an appropriate way.

105. Pupils make sound progress. They respond well, showing interest in the subject and can work co-operatively and with some independence sustaining good levels of concentration. They enthusiastically talk about Barnaby Bear and his travels. They develop their speaking and listening skills when contributing to discussions.

106. The small amount of teaching seen during the inspection was good. Planning indicates that teachers provide an interesting range of activities which are designed to develop appropriate geographical skills. In one lesson observed on the geographical features of Cornwall, the good teaching had a clear impact on the quality of the work produced and the pupils' progress, especially in the letter writing.

107. The need to create a new two yearly cycle of topics is recognised. The work is beginning to make use of the nationally prescribed scheme of work to guide teaching and learning in the subject. Good use is made of the good quality resources which include topic boxes provided by the local education authority library loan service. Visits to the local area, including one to a farm, together with ones to places further afield, such as Mop End Environmental Centre and Woburn Abbey, add to the quality of geographical experiences given to the pupils.

HISTORY

108. There is insufficient evidence to make judgements on the quality of teaching and the pupils' response to it as, due to the way the timetable is organised, no teaching was seen in history during the inspection. Teachers' planning indicates that an appropriate curriculum is provided. Evidence from a scrutiny of work and discussions with pupils indicates that the standards attained by pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 and for Year 3 pupils are broadly in line with those expected for pupils of this age. This was also the case in the previous inspection. The rate at which pupils learn is in line with their abilities.

109. From discussions it is clear that pupils know that history is about what happened in the past and there are various ways in which we can know this. In this context they mention talking with people who have lived through the period, as in the Second World War, and obtaining information from books and computers; the higher attaining pupils have some understanding of the work of an archaeologist. They mention, in chronological order, such people as The Celts, Florence Nightingale, Louis Braille, Vincent van Gogh and both Hitler and Churchill. They know that Florence Nightingale lived in Victorian times. They show a good knowledge of famous Romans such as Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar and understand that they gave their names to the months of July and August. Many show a good knowledge of the history they have studied.

110. There is no policy in place but the teaching and learning is guided by a useful scheme of work which details the topics to be covered. The school recognises the need to further develop resources. Use is made of the topic boxes from the local education authority's library loan service. Local people are used as a resource, such as the visitors who described their childhood during the Second World War. Some use is made of the local area as a resource, together with visits to places further afield such as Woburn Abbey.

MUSIC

111. The planning for music indicates that the appropriate strands of learning are covered, guided by the recently developed scheme of work. During the inspection, the lessons seen were mainly concerned with singing, percussion playing and composition. During the lessons and in assembly pupils sang tunefully and enthusiastically.

112. In Reception and Year 1, pupils learn a good range of songs including lullabies, marching songs and ones for assemblies. They begin to explore the use of a range of percussion instruments and are able to compose simple percussion accompaniments to songs. They use vocal and percussion sounds of different dynamics to accompany the stories of 'Three Rapping Rats' and 'Three Singing Pigs'. They listen to and make simple appraisals of music, such as Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata' and 'The Planets' from Holst. They investigate percussion sounds to create a soundtrack for a walk through the playground, using particular sounds to represent a seesaw, a roundabout and a swing. Overall, they develop good listening and remembering skills and some pupils show good musical ability.

113. In Year 2 and Year 3, pupils extend their repertoire of songs including ones for specific occasions such as the harvest festival. They identify how musical elements can be used to communicate a mood or effect. They can tell a story, such as 'Moles Can't Dance', using percussion. They begin to understand that each instrument is made from different materials and that each has particular qualities. They compose a piece of music on 'The Seaside' using percussion and vocal sounds. They enjoy taking part in performance such as 'Who Believes in Father Christmas?' By the end of Key Stage 1 and Year 3, pupils

confidently sing a range of songs, play simple pieces and accompaniments and have an awareness of pulse. They are able to listen carefully and make simple appraisals of both sounds and pieces of music.

114. The pupils enjoy their music lessons and join in with interest and concentration. They generally show good listening skills and can work with some independence. They sing with obvious enthusiasm and enjoyment and are confident in performance. Pupils made sound progress in all the observed activities, practising and consolidating their musical skills.

115. The quality of teaching in the observed lessons was good. The quality of singing was understandably better in the hymn practice led by two teachers, than it was in the assemblies led by one teacher. Lessons are well prepared, make appropriate use of resources and have clear objectives. The teaching supports all pupils, including those with special educational needs. The practical lessons appropriately ensured that every pupil had access to an instrument. The quality of learning is enhanced by the very good relationships.

116. There is a recently reviewed policy and good use is made of the new scheme of work. The subject is well resourced with both untuned and tuned percussion instruments, including some unusual ones. There are plans to further develop resources, including computer software, and to give pupils more access to music from other countries and cultures.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

117. Although some standards were criticised in the previous report, standards at the time of this inspection were judged to be sound with pupils achieving appropriately in light of their abilities.

118. In Reception and at Key Stage 1, pupils begin to develop an awareness of space, of themselves and of others. They can travel in different ways when using different pieces of apparatus, such as beanbags. They begin to develop and practise the skills of sending and receiving a ball. They learn to stretch, curl and balance. They begin to link a series of movements using different body parts, practising and refining them. They explore travel and learn that in doing so, different parts of the body can be used to support weight.

119. In Year 2 and Year 3, they develop the ability to work with accuracy and control in gymnastics and enjoy practising and performing different dance routines. Using a poem called 'Left Out' as a stimulus, pupils explore moods through dance with good quality movement. They explore movement, designing a movement 'phrase' and then a sequence using Celtic music. They explore ways of making a 'bridge' with a partner, involving sliding and rolling. By the end of Key Stage 1 and Year 3, pupils can link a series of movements and are able to make simple evaluations of both their own and the work of others.

120. In the lessons seen, the pupils showed positive attitudes and behaved well, listening to instructions carefully. They became involved in their tasks and worked co-operatively showing support and consideration for others. They generally show perseverance in planning, developing and refining their work and are happy to show their work to others. They respond well to the routines of the work.

121. Teachers give clear instructions and pupils are generally taught well. Good use is

usually made of warming up for, and recovery from, exercise. Lessons are well planned and taught at a good pace. Teachers expect good behaviour, have high expectations and offer encouragement and praise. Good use is made of demonstration and the music used supports the activities well.

122. There are currently no extra-curricular activities in sport. Plans are in hand to develop a dance workshop to enrich the physical education curriculum. The policy has recently been reviewed and the medium term planning is being used to develop a scheme of work. The subject benefits from a good-sized, safe hall, a playground and grassed areas. Overall the subject is well resourced, especially with games equipment.