

INSPECTION REPORT

VRANCH HOUSE SCHOOL

Pinhoe Road

Exeter, Devon

LEA area: Exeter

Unique reference number: 113571

Headteacher: Ms. M. Boon

Reporting inspector: Janet Bond
2642

Dates of inspection: 15 – 17 January 2001

Inspection number: 189904
Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Special school for pupils with physical disabilities

School category: Independent

Age range of pupils: 2 - 12

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Pinhoe Road
Exeter

Postcode: EX4 8AD

Telephone number: 01392 468333

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Appropriate authority: The Trustees

Name of chair of governors: Mr. S. Torlot

Date of previous inspection: 30.9.1996

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	11
Provides good teaching that enables pupils to make good progress	
Promotes very good attitudes to school and very good behaviour and personal development	
Promotes very high levels of care and safety for pupils	
Promotes a very effective inclusion programme	
Provides very effective multi-disciplinary management that effectively supports children and their families	
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	15
Planning, monitoring and reviewing of educational developments	
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	16
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	17

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Vranch House is a school for pupils with physical disability. Many of the pupils have significant communication difficulties and a small number have additional learning difficulties. All pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need. Most pupils enter school with levels of attainment below those expected for their age. There are 24 pupils on roll between the ages of 3 to 12 years. Nursery pupils attend on a part time basis. Fewer pupils attend the nursery, for shorter periods of time, than at the time of the last inspection; currently there are 3 pupils of nursery age. There are no pupils from ethnic backgrounds or from homes where English is an additional language. Additional provision for pupils is made by the physiotherapy service, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and nurses based at the school. The school serves as a base for physiotherapy for over 100 mainstream pupils. The school has a corporate management structure comprising the head teacher, the superintendent physiotherapist and the chief executive. Nearly half of the pupils take part in an inclusion programme with their local mainstream school, to which many transfer on a full time basis before school leaving age.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very effective school. Teaching is consistently good and pupils make good progress. Each year nearly half of the pupils transfer to their local mainstream school. The corporate management structure is very effective in making very good provision available to the pupils. There are weaknesses in whole school strategic planning for raising standards. Despite this, the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Promotes excellent relationships and provides very high levels of care and safety for pupils.
- Provides good quality teaching that enables pupils to make good progress.
- Promotes pupils' very good attitudes to learning and very good behaviour and personal development.
- Promotes a very effective inclusion programme of pupils attending their local mainstream school.
- Provides very good joint education and health management and outstanding financial management that effectively supports children and their families.

What could be improved

- Setting priorities for school improvement, to raise standards, within a long-term strategy for the development of the school.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the action plan prepared by the appropriate authority.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvement since it was last inspected in September 1996. The school has been effective in addressing the majority of issues identified for improvement in the previous inspection report and has also adopted some of the strategies in the National Literacy and Numeracy projects. Pupils have gained significant benefits in their learning from the extensive improvements to accommodation and resources. Curriculum planning now reflects National Curriculum requirements. Pupils have far more opportunities for using information and communication technology across the curriculum than at the time of the last inspection. Assessment now informs teaching and recording and reporting are consistent. Curriculum monitoring is now in place although it is in the early stages of development. There has been some improvement in spiritual and cultural awareness and both are now satisfactory. Information to parents has improved and is now good. Although there is more professional development for support assistants, little is linked to the curriculum. Currently the staff development programme is not planned to support whole school educational developments.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets by the time they leave the school.

Progress in:	by age 11	Key	
speaking and listening	B	very good	A
reading	B	good	B
writing	C	satisfactory	C
mathematics	B	unsatisfactory	D
personal, social and health education	A	poor	E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	B		

IEPs are pupils' individual education plans

Pupils make good progress across all areas of the curriculum and towards their targets in their IEPs. They attain very well in their personal, social and health education because of the very effective high level of therapy support they receive and because all staff have a very good knowledge and understanding of the pupils learning and physical needs. Pupils make good progress in reading and in speaking and listening and pupils with communication difficulties achieve well in using augmentative aids. This good progress is enhanced by the many opportunities that are provided for them to practice and use their skills in other subjects. Pupils achieve well in mathematics and numeracy although older pupils have difficulties with some mathematical concepts. Annually, nearly half of the pupils attain sufficiently well to transfer to their local mainstream school before the age of eleven. The school is in the early stages of setting whole school targets to further raise standards.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils enjoy school, are keen to do well, try hard and have very positive attitudes to their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils behave very well. They respond to the very positive ethos within the school and are aware of the high expectations staff have of them.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils have excellent relationships with staff and each other, they are kind and caring. Pupils take the many opportunities provided in class to make choices and try very hard to be as independent as possible.
Attendance	Attendance is very good because pupils enjoy coming to school.

Pupils show a high level of respect for other pupils. They are caring, supportive and encouraging to each other, both in lessons and during social occasions.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 5-11
Lessons seen overall	Good

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

Teaching is consistently good or very good in all classes because teachers have a good understanding of the learning needs of the pupils. In the lessons observed during the inspection teaching was good in 62 per cent of lessons and was very good in 33 per cent of lessons. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of pupils' needs is effectively supported by very good multidisciplinary planning which considers and plans for the academic, physical and communication needs of each pupil. As a result pupils make good progress across all areas of their curriculum. The teaching of literacy is good because teachers have successfully adapted their planning and methods to incorporate some of the National Literacy Strategy and because of the effective support of the speech and language therapists for pupils using augmentative communication. Teaching in mathematics is good, pupils make good progress although older pupils have difficulties with some mathematical concepts. Teaching in science is taught through topic work and pupils develop a good interest in enquiry.

Teachers have high expectations of pupils and lessons are well planned to enable all pupils to participate at an appropriate level and make progress. A good range of activities and resources are used well to ensure all pupils remain interested and challenged. The good teaching and support for personal, social and health education enables pupils to make very good progress. Pupils are consistently encouraged to be as independent as possible, and very appropriate personal targets are set for each pupil. Support assistants make a very good contribution to the progress of individual pupils because they have a very good understanding of pupils' physical and communication needs. As a result of the consistently good teaching and high level of individual support, pupils try very hard to apply physical and intellectual effort in all that they do.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant for all pupils and includes good quality provision for their physical and communication needs. Pupils' learning and independence skills are supported well and enriched by a wide range of visits into the community. Most pupils benefit greatly from the opportunities to attend mainstream schools and to work in school with mainstream pupils.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Personal, social and moral development are very good. Staff consistently, in their planning and in all learning sessions, encourage maximum independence from pupils. Very effective opportunities for social development are provided through the extensive inclusion programme where pupils attend their local mainstream school. The ethos of the school and the positive role models of staff ensure that pupils' moral development is very good. Spiritual and cultural development are satisfactory but are not yet fully promoted throughout the curriculum.

How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides a very high level of care for pupils and all staff have a very good understanding of pupils physical and emotional needs. Lifting and handling is sensitively carried out with respect and dignity for pupils. Monitoring and supporting of pupils' personal development is good and procedures to support and monitor attendance are very good.
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The school works very effectively with parents to support pupils' progress. Good home/school communication ensures information is regularly shared. Parents work in school, with their own child and with other groups of children, to further support pupils' physical and educational progress.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The very effective corporate management team have established a very good school ethos, with high expectations and excellent relationships that encourage pupils to achieve well. The school aims and values are reflected in all aspects of the work of the school and there is a shared commitment to succeed. However, whole school strategic planning lacks rigour and clarity to ensure the school continues to improve and raise standards.
The school's evaluation of its performance	A good start has been made in monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and of the curriculum. Systems for target setting and evaluating pupil achievements are developing. However, the information from these initiatives is not yet being used to identify the priority areas for whole school educational development. The lack of clear criteria to measure how successful whole school developments have been prevents the school being able to formally evaluate the impact they have had on pupil achievements.
The strategic use of resources	Budget planning and financial management are outstanding and have significantly contributed to the improved quality of provision for pupils. The principles of best value are very well applied. Accommodation has significantly improved and resources are good. Very good use is made of staff, time and resources. Pupils are well supported in participating in the large inclusion programme with mainstream schools. The allocation of funding provided by local authorities is average for other schools of a similar type. Pupils make good progress and benefit from good teaching, very effective physiotherapy, speech and language therapy and medical support. The school provides very good value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children enjoy school and pupils behave well Teaching is good and children make good progress because the school expects children to do their best and work hard People are very approachable and parents are kept well informed The school is well led and managed and works closely with parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is an insufficient range of activities outside lessons

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The school helps children become mature and responsible | |
|---|--|

The inspection team supports parents' positive views. Although it is difficult, because of transport arrangements, to run clubs and activities after school, inspectors agree that the school could do more to provide extra-curricular opportunities for pupils at lunch-time.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Provides good quality teaching that enables pupils to make good progress

1. In the lessons observed during the inspection, the quality of teaching and learning was consistently good and was often very good. Teaching was good in 62 per cent of lessons and was very good in 33 per cent of lessons. There was no unsatisfactory teaching observed. Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are below the national expectations for their age, and inspectors confirm that over half of the pupils have a degree of learning difficulty in addition to their physical, medical and communication needs. As a result of the schools' ethos, the high quality of physical, medical and communication support and the high quality of teaching and learning, 40 per cent of pupils, annually, achieve sufficiently well to successfully transfer to their local primary school. Of the pupils who do not transfer on a full time basis, many participate successfully in part time inclusion and all make good progress given the extent of their physical, communication and learning needs.
2. Teachers plan their lessons well to enable each pupil to participate at an appropriate level. For example, in a literacy lesson with the older pupils, the teacher set three pupils to work on computers using different programmes and control devices. One pupil word-processed his news, one practised spelling using a spelling game and another identified and matched initial letter sounds. A communication board was used by one pupil to discuss his news and two pupils used pencil and paper to carefully write their own stories. During the activities the teacher and support staff moved between the pupils prompting, questioning and encouraging pupils in their work. Teachers use questions effectively to check pupils understanding and the use of a good range of resources and activities ensures pupils are interested and actively involved. For instance, in a numeracy lesson with the younger pupils, visually stimulating resources were used to support counting songs and rhymes. As a result the pupils enjoyed counting the frogs and tracing the sandpaper numerals with their fingers. Teachers have high expectations of the pupils and ensure there is an appropriate level of challenge in the lessons. In a history lesson with the eight year olds, the teacher consistently challenged the pupils about what clues the objects could give them, selecting the different objects carefully for the different abilities of the pupils. Each pupil was challenged to extend his or her thinking and all enjoyed the success they achieved.
3. The very good relationships staff have with their pupils, coupled with the interesting range of activities and resources used, leads pupils to be interested, wanting to please and behaving well. Staff manage their pupils very well, lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and time is used efficiently. For example, in the swimming pool the pupils enjoyed the range of exercises used, which were effectively linked to the class project and helped their learning about the Ancient Egyptians. Because the tasks were changed frequently and praise and encouragement were used effectively, the pupils were fully engaged, behaved well, concentrated and increased their physical effort.
4. All staff have a good understanding of the pupils' needs. The joint planning between the therapists and teaching staff ensures activities build on prior attainments and keep pupils moving forward in their learning. Effective assessment procedures help staff plan what to teach next. Special support assistants contribute very effectively to the teaching team in each class and in physiotherapy lessons. The school has a high number of support assistants who have gained considerable expertise in how to support pupils and this has a direct impact on the good achievement of pupils.

Promotes very good attitudes to school and very good behaviour and personal development

- 5 Pupils have very good attitudes to their learning and parents say their children are happy to come to school. In all observations pupils were keen to take part in all of the activities, tried hard in all they did and worked to the best of their ability. They do so because the work in class and other sessions is made enjoyable and because it is varied and activities are interesting and challenging. Pupils behave well and concentrate on what they are doing, for example when the youngest pupils' teacher was giving her attention to another pupil the others listened and waited very well. They are confident to join in class work and offer their own ideas, such as when one young pupil decided his gingerbread man had a name which he wanted to share with his teacher. Because pupils listen well and stay focused on their activities this leads them to rise to the challenge of their lessons and show they are keen to succeed. For example, in a lesson on sound work with the 9 year olds, pupils worked very hard to make and record as many words as possible in the time allowed. Because teachers plan lessons well so that all pupils cover the same topics and work is matched to ability, pupils achieve and this builds up their confidence. Pupils respond very well to the high expectations of the staff and to the positive praise given to them for their efforts. They are clear about what is acceptable behaviour and know the school rules that they helped write. In all observations by inspectors in school no incidence of poor or inappropriate behaviour was seen.
- 6 Pupils' personal and social development are very good. In all lessons they respond very well to the many opportunities provided for them to make choices and decisions. Pupils take an active part in school life; for example helping to organise sports day, although there are no regular opportunities for pupils to take on school responsibilities. All pupils have appropriate personal targets in their IEPs and records show that pupils make good progress in meeting these targets. They understand the system of certificates and star badges and are very proud of, and pleased with, the recognition given in assembly to their achievements. Pupils are encouraged to be as independent as possible and at all times during the school day pupils try very hard to be so. When they do need help they cooperate well with staff. A wide and varied range of trips and visits provides good opportunities for pupils to develop their personal and social skills, for example when making pizzas at the local pizza restaurant or when raising funds for others such as through their "Whizz Kidz week. Inclusion into mainstream school provides very good opportunities for pupils to use their personal and social skills, and in a session observed the high level of harmony and good social relationships with others in the class was apparent.

Promotes excellent relationships and provides very high levels of care and safety for pupils

- 7 The excellent relationships and positive ethos of the school encourages pupils to get on well with each other. Pupils support and encourage their classmates to do their best and are pleased for them when they succeed. In one lesson, with a focus on independent sitting and standing, they were delighted when others managed to knock all of the skittles over. Very young pupils respond well to the way staff actively encourage them to recognise and respond to others. In a physiotherapy session using plinths, the teacher began by having photographs of all of the pupils, allowing each pupil to identify the photograph and then getting all to join in and sing a greeting to them. Pupils enjoyed the songs used during the exercises, and responded well when the names of those who had tried hard were sung. They are very understanding of other pupils and are pleased for them when they succeed. In one lesson a pupil was very willing to wait for another pupil's contribution and remarked to the inspector that "you have to give her time but she will do it" about one pupil with significant physical and communication difficulties.
- 8 All staff know the pupils very well and are alert to their physical and learning needs. Effective assessment, recording and reporting procedures are in place and each pupil has a detailed file that informs staff planning. The very high quality joint planning and working between the teachers, physiotherapists and speech therapists ensures that pupils receive a very high level of appropriate and necessary support. The physical, medical and communication needs of the

pupils are well integrated with the learning needs so that all opportunities are very effectively taken to encourage and promote success. Effective use is made of specialist equipment, such as “Big Macks” to help communication and other devices are well used to make sure that pupils are always able to join in with learning. The multi-disciplinary work makes a vital contribution to the curriculum, and class topics are reinforced in all daily physiotherapy and communication sessions. Effective physiotherapy support enables pupils to be comfortable and sufficiently mobile to be able to concentrate on their school work. The effective use of a variety of communication aids ensures all pupils can participate fully in their lessons. Medical needs are well known and appropriate support is given as and when needed. External specialists hold clinics in school, which minimises any disruption to learning and enables information to be effectively shared.

- 9 Pupils are very safe in school. Very good child protection procedures are in place and staff are alert to pupils needs. Pupils are treated with respect and dignity and handling of pupils is very good. There is a total lack of oppressive behaviour in school. Risk assessments are routinely and strictly applied. Everyone works hard to make sure pupils feel secure and happy in school.

Promotes a very effective inclusion programme

- 10 The school is successful in its aim to ensure pupils have the earliest possible opportunity of a placement in a mainstream setting. At the time of the inspection eight pupils were spending at least one session a week in their local mainstream school. Over the last five years 40 per cent of pupils have transferred, on an annual basis, to a full time placement in their local school. The majority of placements are undertaken with a view to the pupil transferring on a full time basis. Where a full time transfer is not possible, pupils attend their local school, on a part time basis, for social development.
- 11 Transfer is planned carefully and parents and pupils are closely involved. Very effective liaison ensures mainstream schools are well informed, prepared and supported for the transfer. Normally transfer begins with a part time placement, for example two days a week, before full time transfer occurs. When part-time placements begin, discussions between staff at both schools ensures an appropriate curriculum is planned that maintains breadth and balance. School staff provide effective training and advice for staff working in the mainstream school to ensure they can meet the pupils physical needs. Very effective use is made of the home school diary for daily communication between the parents and the two schools involved. The teacher from the mainstream school and the teacher from Vbranch House are involved, with parents, in writing the annual review. Both schools also contribute to the end of year annual progress report and staff from both schools are available to discuss the pupils progress and achievements with parents at the annual consultation meeting. This very good cooperation between staff from both schools effectively supports pupils' progress.

Provides very good multi-disciplinary management and outstanding financial management that effectively supports children and their families

- 12 The management team, consisting of the headteacher, the superintendent of physiotherapy and the chief executive, provide a very effective corporate management structure. Joint management and planning ensure the pupils' physical and learning needs are appropriately addressed and met. Through effective management, educational and clinical work are integrated and delivered to effectively support pupils. This enables the school to be successful in meeting its aims. The headteacher is very successful in establishing an ethos that encourages all to give of their best and where excellent relationships are established and flourish. The physiotherapists' work encompasses work within school, work with mainstream pupils within school, work at other centres and schools and work within the County. The service works extremely well with teachers and support staff, with parents and volunteers to enable the intensive support needed by individual pupils to be successfully achieved.

- 13 The chief executive provides outstanding financial management that has enabled significant improvements, for example to the building and to resources, which have had a significant and positive impact on pupils learning. While the fees paid by local authorities provide a base budget, the majority of improvements and developments have been funded by money raised by the school and Trust. Budget planning and management are very good and show a high awareness of best value. Short, medium and long term financial planning for whole school developments and growth are very good and are a significant factor in the improved and improving provision for pupils and their families.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Setting priorities for school improvement, to raise standards, within a long-term strategy for the development of the school

- 14 The current education development plan is a useful programme of when routine events, such as reviewing policy documents, should take place. However, it does not set out the educational priorities for action, either short, medium or long term, to ensure the school continues to improve. It is not an effective management tool in guiding and monitoring the work of the school. Although monitoring of teaching and curriculum planning and delivery has begun, the information from this monitoring is not used to inform what the educational priorities for development are. The education development plan does not fit in with or reflect the very exciting whole school developments planned for and generated by the management team and the Trustees. This means that staff, governors and Trustees do not have a clear sense of direction in their work for moving the school forwards to support these developments. It also means that the budget and staff development programme cannot be planned to support educational priorities. The education development plan lacks appropriate success criteria by which the school can assess how effective the improvements have been. There are also inconsistencies in procedures to plan, monitor and review developments.
- 15 The school is at an early stage of setting whole school targets to raise standards. Currently there are limited ways used by which the school can assess how effective educational improvements have been on the standards pupils achieve. Staff and trustees do not have a clear sense of direction in their work of the school's drive to raise standards. Although pupils' assessment data is now in place, limited use is made of the information from it. There are insufficient links between IEP targets, which project the level of pupils learning for the coming year, with the accurate measurement of pupils' progress and achievement of targets over the year. The information from this is not sufficiently used to set whole school targets. This means that the school does not accurately know what it needs to focus on to improve. There are no rigorous systems in place for the school to use this information to review and compare changes or discrepancies and to set realistic but challenging targets for raising achievements. There is not a systematic plan for raising standards linked to clear programmes of action with procedures in place to monitor the outcomes. Despite this, the school is successful and pupils make good progress as a result of the very good ethos established, good teaching and the effective multi-disciplinary work

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

16 In order to further improve pupils' progress and achievements the Headteacher and governors should:

Further raise standards by:

- identifying what the school does well and what should be improved (14)
- making clear priorities for what should be done immediately, and what should be done in subsequent years (14)
- setting clear targets each year for the achievement of pupils (15)
- measuring how well pupils and teachers meet these targets (14,15)
- providing professional development for staff to match the school's priorities for improvement (14)
- making sure that school improvement has appropriate financial support (14)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	18
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	28

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	6	11	1	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

	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	24
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	1

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	4
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	1

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.2

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	24
Any other minority ethnic group	0

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: N – Y7

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	6
Average class size	6

Education support staff: N – Y7

Total number of education support staff	28
Total aggregate hours worked per week	484

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	540038
Total expenditure	540038
Expenditure per pupil	23480
Balance brought forward from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to next year	0

N.B. The school receives the money it needs annually from the Trustees, hence no carry forward

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	24
Number of questionnaires returned	11

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	100	0	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	82	9	9	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	73	27	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	50	30	9	0	0
The teaching is good.	90	10	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	73	18	9	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	91	0	9	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	82	18	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	82	9	0	9	0
The school is well led and managed.	82	18	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	73	27	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	0	36	27	18	18