

# INSPECTION REPORT

## ST NICHOLAS SCHOOL

Canterbury, Kent

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 119059

Head teacher: Mr Daniel Lewis

Reporting inspector: Mr Declan McCarthy  
23886

Dates of inspection: 12 - 15 June 2000

Inspection number: 190691  
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 category:	Community special
Age range of pupils:	4 to 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Holme Oak Close Nunnery Fields Canterbury Kent
Postcode:	CT1 3JJ
Telephone number:	01227 464316
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Roger O'Shea
Date of previous inspection:	November 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Declan McCarthy	Registered inspector	Mathematics	What sort of school is it
		Equal opportunities	How high are standards: the school's results and achievements
			How well are pupils or students taught
			How well is the school led and managed
			What the school should do to improve further
Juliet Baxter	Lay inspector		Attendance
			How well the school cares for its pupils
			How well the school works in partnership with parents
			Links with the community
Margaret Goodchild	Team inspector	Art	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils
		Under fives	
		English as a second language	
Clive Parsons	Team inspector	Science	Staffing
		Information technology	
Alastair Younger	Team inspector	Design and technology	How high are standards: pupil's attitudes, behaviour and personal development
		Modern foreign language	Assessment
		Physical education	
David Ward	Team inspector	English	Accommodation and learning resources
		Music	
John Atkinson	Team inspector	History	
		Geography	
		Religious education	
		Special educational needs	

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

St Nicholas School is a special school catering for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties, aged 4 to 19. There are currently 102 pupils on roll, 59 boys and 43 girls. Ten pupils from the Dover catchment area are educated temporarily in the school. Three pupils have English as an additional language, 39 pupils are eligible for free school meals which is well above the national average and all pupils have statements of special educational needs. The school caters for a wide range of difficulties including pupils with autism, communication difficulties and multi-sensory impairment. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is very low. Six children in the under fives class attend full time and one attends part time. Students at post-16 transferred to their own class block on the site of Canterbury College at the beginning of the Autumn term in 1999, in order to increase opportunities to work in mainstream education. The school has grown in size over the last three years to reflect population increases in the region. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds and the school has a large catchment area. The school is the leading school within Kent and Medway Severe Learning Difficulties Schools Consortium for the National Numeracy Strategy and it is a pilot school for the National Numeracy Strategy at Key Stage 3.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

St Nicholas School is an effective school that makes good provision for its pupils. By the time students leave, they are achieving very well. The quality of teaching is good, with very good teaching for under fives, at post-16 and in English and mathematics. The school is very well led and provides very good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Children under five and most students at post-16 achieve very well in all their work.
- The National Numeracy and National Literacy Strategies are very well implemented so that the majority of pupils make very good progress in English and mathematics.
- Teaching is good. Teaching is very good for children under five, at Key Stages 1 and 2, at post-16, and in many English and mathematics lessons throughout the school; there is very effective teamwork between teachers, support staff and therapists.
- The new head teacher and senior managers provide clear educational direction and lead the school very well.
- The school's ethos for learning and its attention to the personal development of pupils is very good so that most pupils have very positive attitudes to learning, behave very well and relate very well with one another and with staff.
- The school's partnership with parents, the information which parents receive, opportunities for pupils to integrate socially and educationally into mainstream settings, and community links are all very good.

#### **What could be improved**

- Although teaching is a major strength, teaching is unsatisfactory in art and design and technology at Key Stage 3.
- Teachers' termly plans need to be strengthened in art and design and technology.
- There is a narrow range of accredited courses at Key Stage 4 and at post-16 for higher attainers.
- Assessment systems in art, design and technology, modern foreign languages and physical education need to be strengthened and Records of Achievement could be better linked to the National Curriculum.

*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 was last inspected in November 1996. Initially, the school made slow progress in tackling its action plan but since the appointment last September of the current head teacher and a new senior management team, it has made very good progress and has dealt very well with most of the issues raised by the previous inspection. Planning of the curriculum has greatly improved, with a need now to strengthen teachers' termly plans in art and design and technology, and there are many more extra-curricular activities, including trips abroad. Curriculum provision for the under fives is excellent and curriculum provision at post-16 is very good. There are excellent opportunities for primary aged pupils and students at post-16 to experience mainstream settings. Provision for pupils with profound and complex learning difficulties and autism has improved and is now good. There is a greater use of signing and cue cards within lessons to help pupils to learn but not always enough use of technological aids. Teachers make very good use of the National Numeracy and National Literacy Strategies. The school has improved the care it provides for its pupils, including child protection. The head teacher and senior management team have a shared and purposeful vision for raising standards and achieving school improvement. Governors now provide good strategic management for the school.

## 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 5	by age 11	by age 16	by age 19	Key	
speaking and listening	B	B	B	B	very good	A
reading	A	A	A	A	good	B
writing	A	A	A	A	satisfactory	C
mathematics	A	A	A	A	unsatisfactory	D
personal, social and health education	A	A	A	A	poor	E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	A	A	A	A		

\* IEPs are individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs.

The school enables pupils to achieve well and make good progress. Children under five make very good progress and in language and literacy, mathematical development and in personal, social and emotional development, they are making excellent progress. At Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils make very good progress and at Key Stage 4, they make good progress. At Key Stage 3, pupils make good progress in English and at least good progress in mathematics but they make unsatisfactory progress in lessons in art and design and technology. Pupils throughout the school make very good progress in acquiring independence skills. The progress of pupils towards their individual education plan targets is very good, particularly in mathematics where pupils often exceed their targets. A few higher attaining students at post-16 are not achieving as well as they could in some lessons because tasks are not always sufficiently matched to their level of ability and there are limited opportunities to participate in more accredited courses.



## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' attitudes throughout the school are mostly very good, they look forward to coming to school and work hard throughout the day.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils' behaviour in lessons and in less formal situations in school is very good and there are very few recorded incidents of unacceptable behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils are making very good progress in developing their maturity, independence and sensitivity towards others.
Attendance	Attendance is satisfactory with no instances of unauthorised absence.

Pupils' rarely waste time in lessons, they listen attentively to instructions and are fully involved in their activities. Pupils develop strong relationships and grow to understand that their actions have an impact on others.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5	aged 5-11	aged 11-16	aged over 16
Lessons seen overall	very good	very good	satisfactory	very good

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

The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection and teaching is now good: 93 per cent is satisfactory or better, 78 percent is at least good and 38 per cent is very good or better, with 7 percent unsatisfactory teaching. The quality of teaching in English, mathematics and in personal and social education is very good; and in science, it is good. The best teaching occurs in the under fives class, at post-16, in English at Key Stages 1, 2, and 4, and in mathematics throughout the school. The teaching of art, design and technology and religious education at Key Stage 3 is sometimes unsatisfactory. Teachers are very effective in teaching the skills of literacy and numeracy. The school is mostly effective in catering for a wide range of needs but teachers do not always make enough use of technological aids for pupils with more profound needs.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The quality of the curriculum is good and some aspects are very good, with a wide range of activities on offer. Statutory requirements are met but planning should be improved in art and design and technology and more accredited courses should be offered to higher attainers at post-16.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for social and personal development is excellent. Provision for moral and cultural development is very good. Provision for spiritual development is good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school takes very good care of its pupils.

The school is very effective in working with parents. Staff involve parents in the life of the school, there are mutually supportive relationships and parents are kept very well informed by staff.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the head teacher and other key staff	The head teacher is a very effective leader and manager, and is very well supported by the senior management team. There have been vast improvements since the appointment of the current head teacher.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Governors provide good strategic support for the school and monitor its work effectively.
The school's evaluation of its performance systems	The school has made vast improvements since the appointment of the head teacher. The school's action plan is rigorously followed and developments evaluated.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are used well, but more consistent use should be made of technological aids to support communication for pupils with more profound learning difficulties.

The school has made very good progress towards implementing a system of performance management. Although subject co-ordinators have a clearly defined role, in art and design and technology effective co-ordination has yet to be fully realised. The school is effective in using the principles of best value to achieve value for money in its spending.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>Most parents say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• their children enjoy school</li> <li>• the staff are very caring and expect pupils to achieve their best</li> <li>• the school is well led</li> <li>• the school helps their children to become more mature and responsible</li> <li>• they are very comfortable about approaching the school with suggestions and concerns</li> <li>• they are kept well informed about their child's progress</li> </ul>	<p>Some parents say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• they would like to see more homework set but many think that this is sufficient</li> <li>• they feel that behaviour could be improved</li> <li>• they would like to see more newsletters sent home</li> <li>• that there is not a sufficient range of interesting activities outside lessons</li> </ul>

Inspectors' judgements confirm parents' positive views. There is some evidence that not enough homework is set, particularly for the higher attaining pupils, and the occasional minor incidents of disruptive behaviour of a few pupils could be better handled but there is no evidence to suggest that there are insufficient extra-curricular opportunities for pupils.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and achievements**

1 It is inappropriate to judge the attainment of pupils for whom this school caters against age-related national expectations or averages. The report does, however, give examples of what pupils know, understand and can do. Judgements about achievement and progress take account of information contained in pupils' statements, annual reviews and individual education plans.

2 Pupils throughout the school are achieving well. Children under five make very good progress, with excellent progress in language and literacy, mathematical development and in personal, social and emotional development. Higher attaining children under five and children with more profound learning difficulties are also achieving very well. Pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2 are making very good progress, particularly in English, mathematics and science, and in acquiring independence skills. Pupils at Key Stage 3 make good progress in English and mathematics, geography, history, music, physical education and religious education. They make satisfactory progress in science and French but unsatisfactory progress in art and design and technology. Pupils at Key Stage 4 are achieving very well in English, mathematics, music and in gaining independence skills. They achieve well in design and technology and information technology, and satisfactorily in the remaining subjects. Students at post-16 achieve very well and make very good progress in preparing for life when they leave. Their progress is also particularly good in communication, mathematics and information technology, also in the leavers' programme and in the Transition Challenge which is an accredited course designed to help students to become more independent.

3 Opportunities for pupils in the primary department and students at post-16 to be included in mainstream educational settings are excellent and have a positive impact on their achievements. For example, students at post-16 acquire new skills in using the Internet at Canterbury College and take part in a number of courses in the college.

4 There are no differences between the progress of pupils of different abilities towards targets in their individual education plans. All pupils, including those with more profound learning difficulties, and autism, make very good progress towards their targets and some pupils exceed their targets in mathematics. The progress of pupils with more profound learning difficulties has improved greatly since the last inspection. These pupils achieve well and in some lessons, where switches and communication aids are consistently used, they make very good progress. In other lessons, progress of pupils with more profound learning difficulties is not always as good as that of other pupils because teachers do not always use switches or other technological communication aids to support their communication. Progress of the very few higher attaining pupils, including gifted and talented, at Key Stage 4 and of students at post-16 is at least satisfactory and good in some lessons. At post-16, it is excellent where students take part in classes in the college but work is not always challenging enough for these students and they would benefit from opportunities to work on a wider range of accredited courses. At Key Stage 4, higher attaining pupils do now have the opportunity to gain awards in mathematics through the 'Edexcel' accreditation scheme and are making very good progress in mathematics.

5 Pupils are achieving very well in English at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4 and at post-16. At Key Stage 3, pupils make at least satisfactory and often good progress in English. Pupils are making very good progress in reading and writing. At Key Stage 1, pupils are learning the letters of the alphabet and can link some letter sounds to the names of the letters. Some higher attaining pupils are making excellent progress in reading, for example, one pupil at Key Stage 1 reads sentences which include such words as 'where', and another can use the computer to read the story in his reading book and click on key words in a sentence correctly. At Key Stage 2, pupils can give very good answers to the stories they hear and add

meaningful words to sentences. Pupils with more profound learning difficulties are making very good progress in learning positional language, for example, 'over' and 'under'. At Key Stage 3, pupils can read simple words and write their names and short sentences. At Key Stage 4, pupils are increasing their understanding of grammar, and know the difference between sentences such as 'I am swimming' and 'I swam'. At post-16, students understand spoken and written instructions and formulate words and sentences in Makaton sign language. Pupils throughout the school make at least satisfactory progress and sometimes good progress in speaking and listening.

6 Pupils are achieving very well in all key stages in mathematics. They make very good progress in their knowledge and understanding of new mathematical concepts such as averages, number, shapes and measures, and in their understanding and use of mathematical language such as, 'more than', 'less than', 'difference', 'cuboid', 'cylinder', 'budget' and 'accounts'. Pupils at Key Stage 1 can count to twenty in twos and at Key Stage 2, they can identify common two-dimensional shapes. Higher attaining pupils can draw a triangle unaided and pupils with more profound learning difficulties can hold different shapes and look at them. Pupils at Key Stage 3 can recognise three-dimensional shapes such as a cone and a cube, and pupils at Key Stage 4 can count to a hundred in tens. At post-16, students can prepare a simple budget for shopping and cooking. Pupils' achievements in mathematics are further enhanced by the contribution which other subjects make to their learning, for example, when younger pupils sing or listen to counting songs or older pupils are learning about the passage of time in history and using the computer to match colours to objects.

7 Pupils achievements in science at Key Stages 1 and 2 are very good and they make very good progress in developing the use of their senses to observe and explain their environment, for example, higher attaining pupils know that plants need water to survive because the soil is too dry. At Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils' achievements and the progress they are making in science is only satisfactory because the teacher does not always keep the pupils sufficiently involved and focused on their work. Most pupils in Year 9 can recognise that veins on a leaf carry water and nutrients and most pupils at Key Stage 4 can identify the main parts of a plant.

8 Progress in information technology is satisfactory. But pupils make good progress in information technology, where it is used in other lessons. Some pupils use a mouse to click on words and other pupils use a mouse or tracker ball competently to match colours and shapes. In some English lessons, pupils with more profound learning difficulties use a switch to answer questions, clearly demonstrating very good progress in communication. However, computers and technological aids are not always used consistently in lessons.

9 Pupils' achievement in art is satisfactory at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4, and good at post-16. Higher attaining pupils produce interesting surface paint effects with varied colour shades and good drawings when they are given the opportunity to do so, but progress as pupils move through the school is no better than satisfactory because medium-term planning requires further development. This, combined with some unsatisfactory teaching at Key Stage 3, gives rise to unsatisfactory progress in art at Key Stage 3.

10 Pupils throughout the school are making unsatisfactory progress in design and technology because the curriculum has not been sufficiently developed and not enough time is spent teaching the subject.

11 In geography, pupils are making good progress in developing geographical skills such as mapping and in history, pupils are making very good progress in understanding past and present; old and new. In French, pupils achieve at a satisfactory level over a broad range of activities and experiences, including learning about life in other countries, which helps them to build up a small but useful vocabulary. Pupils are achieving well and making good progress in music. They vocalise, clap, play tuned percussion instruments and listen to music from other cultures. Pupils with more profound

learning difficulties can turn their heads or move their bodies when appreciating music. At Key Stage 2, pupils' musical achievements are further enhanced by allowing them to work at a higher level as they take part in a lesson along with pupils from a mainstream school. Pupils make good progress in physical education, achieving well in relation to their ability in activities such as floor exercises and team games. Progress for older pupils is further enhanced by lunchtime sporting activities such as football and cricket. The work of physiotherapists makes a particularly valuable contribution to the physical development of pupils with more profound learning difficulties. In religious education, pupils achieve well and make good progress in their knowledge of different religions, beliefs and festivals. However, progress is only satisfactory at Key Stage 3 because behaviour in lessons is not always managed well and pupils do not learn as much as they could.

12 Pupils throughout the school are making very good progress in gaining independence skills. Many pupils work more independently in lessons as they get older and are achieving well in their work experience. Children under five and students at post-16 make excellent progress in becoming more independent due to a variety of factors which include high quality support and mobility training. The school makes very good use of a specialist teaching method that addresses pupils' functional mobility needs and helps them to develop physical skills through their wider educational programme. Pupils achieve greater independence through the very high quality partnership with parents, the very good work of therapists, excellent college links and, a highly relevant and very good post-16 leavers programme.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

13 Pupils' attitudes to school are very positive. They look forward to coming to school, are cheerful when they arrive and work hard throughout the day. They soon settle down to their work in lessons, listen attentively to instructions and involve themselves wholeheartedly in their activities. Their commitment to learning is shown in the delight they take in recounting things they have learned in previous lessons. When they sing simple rhymes to help reinforce the learning they do so with gusto. It is not just attitudes to learning that are strong but also their enthusiasm to participate in all activities such as the cricket club at break and the willingness to become fully involved, as shown in photographs of adventure activities. A small minority of Key Stage 3 pupils are more talkative in lessons and less inclined to work unless they are particularly well taught.

14 Behaviour in lessons and in less formal situations, such as breaks and lunchtimes, is very good. Lessons are very rarely disrupted and a very light reprimand given by staff is usually sufficient to bring errant pupils back to their work. This means that lessons run unhindered and this positively promotes learning. On the few occasions when a pupil behaves inappropriately, for example when rude to a visitor, other pupils are shocked and try to make amends through their own apologies and explanations. A tiny minority of pupils, especially at Key Stage 3, show that they can at times be stubborn and test the patience of staff. Most pupils are well behaved, courteous, polite and well mannered to visitors and staff alike. Records show that there are very few serious incidents and no exclusions, though a very small number of pupils have been transferred to residential schools in the past year because their behaviour at home became very difficult to manage.

15 Throughout their time at the school, pupils make very good progress towards developing as sensitive and mature people. The fostering of mutual respect between staff and pupils and towards other pupils, leads to the formation of strong relationships and the understanding that when they work cooperatively in lessons, they achieve well. They also grow to appreciate that negative behaviour, such as interrupting a lesson, has a negative impact on other pupils and adults in the classroom. They learn that saying 'please' and 'thank you' and helping others, such as clearing up at the end of lessons which helps them to become more responsible in school. At lunchtimes, pupils show a good degree of maturity as they queue patiently and make simple, polite conversation with one another during their meal. At breaktimes, many pupils give up their own time to help younger or less able pupils and this helps to build up a very good communal spirit.

16 A very strong programme for including pupils and students in mainstream settings, makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development, as well as to their educational progress. For example, when students at post-16 participate in college courses in floristry and plumbing and when pupils at Key Stage 2 participate in singing at a local primary school. These opportunities raise pupils expectations and foster self worth as they experience more challenging learning opportunities when they mix with pupils and students in school or college.

17 When pupils arrive at school in the morning they show eagerness and enthusiasm and this contributes to a satisfactory rate of attendance that has been steadily maintained since the last inspection. The well-kept attendance records show that authorised absence is only for medical reasons or off-site educational activities. It is to the credit of the school, pupils and parents that there is no unauthorised absence and that the consistent rates of satisfactory attendance continue to make a contribution to pupils' achievement and progress.

### **HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

18 There have been significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection and teaching and learning throughout the school is now good. A much larger proportion of teaching is very good, particularly for children under five where sometimes it is excellent, at post-16, and in English and mathematics throughout the school. Teaching is now at least satisfactory in 93 per cent of lessons. It is at least good in 78 per cent, very good in 38 per cent and excellent in 2 per cent. In the previous inspection, teaching was judged to be satisfactory or better in 89 per cent of lessons and particularly good for children under five and at post-16. Teaching has improved for children under five, so that in some lessons it is now excellent. The improvements in the quality of teaching are due mainly to the successful implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. They are also the result of very good support for teachers and pupils provided by classroom assistants and therapists which enables pupils with more profound learning difficulties and those with autism to participate fully in lessons. The strong team work between support assistants and teachers has not only been sustained, it has improved since the last inspection, particularly in the use of signing which is more widely and consistently used in lessons.

19 The quality of teaching for children under five is very good and at times excellent. At Key Stages 1 and 2, teaching is very good. At Key Stage 3, teaching is satisfactory. It is good in mathematics, music, and personal and social education, and satisfactory in English and science. But it is unsatisfactory in occasional lessons in art, design and technology, French, physical education and religious education. Teaching is good at Key Stage 4, with very good teaching in English, mathematics and music. The quality of teaching for students at post-16 is very good. Teaching is mostly very good in English and mathematics throughout the school. Teaching in science is very good at Key Stages 1 and 2, and satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4. Teaching in art and design and technology, is generally satisfactory with a few good lessons in other key stages, but some unsatisfactory lessons at Key Stage 3. Teaching was good in the one history lesson observed and although geography was not taught during the inspection, there was sufficient evidence from pupils' work to show that teaching is also good in this subject. Teaching is generally satisfactory in information technology. Only one lesson was observed in French and although teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory, further evidence from a video, analysis of pupils' work and discussions with pupils showed that this was an exception and that teaching is generally satisfactory. Teaching in music is usually very good but varies from satisfactory to very good. In physical education and religious education, teaching is good with very good teaching at Key Stage 2 but instances of unsatisfactory teaching at Key Stage 3.

20 Teachers' subject knowledge is generally good in most of the subjects they teach; it is often very good and for children under five it is excellent. Where subject knowledge is excellent as for children under five, lessons are informed by the teacher's excellent understanding of the six areas of learning for

under fives. For example, thoughtful links are made between children's different learning experiences in order to deepen their knowledge of the world around them. Where teachers' subject knowledge is good, they use the information on pupils' individual education plans to accommodate their difficulties and differences. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, the speech and language therapist worked closely with the teacher, using thorough assessment procedures to ensure that activities were well planned and suitably matched to the language needs of individual pupils. The teacher and therapist used a variety of well chosen activities and resources to extend pupils' vocabulary, such as a lotto game to match words and pictures, rolling a dice to identify the parts of an insect's body and matching the parts of a body to a picture. As a result of this, pupils enjoyed their lesson, participated in their activities successfully and practised their speaking and listening skills effectively, making good progress in acquiring new language skills. In design and technology and art where teachers' subject knowledge is more limited, they do not always know how to extend pupils' vocabulary and practical tasks are not always well conceived. This leads to unsatisfactory progress as pupils are not learning as much as they should.

21 Teachers are competent in teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Most teachers structure their English and mathematics lessons very well within the guidance of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. For example, most teachers teach spelling and the blending of sounds very well so that the pupils can make words. They pay particular attention to balancing pupils' work in reading, spelling and matching words, and writing sentences, to reflect the National Literacy Strategy to the particular needs of individual pupils. In mathematics lessons, teachers always start off each lesson with some 'quick fire' mental mathematics before teaching new skills directly. For example, in a Key Stage 1 lesson, pupils quickly counted to twenty before learning how to count to twenty in twos and fours, using real flowers to further enliven the activity.

22 A strong feature of very good teaching is the detailed planning with specific individual targets set for all pupils, which are very well used to inform the organisation of the lesson. For example in a very well planned physical education lesson, the teacher is able to focus totally on giving pupils much guidance and encouragement so that they make maximum effort throughout the lesson, which proceeds at a pace keeping pupils interested and motivated. Planning generally matches work very well for most pupils. However, there is insufficient planning for the use of technological aids to help pupils with more profound learning difficulties interact more with others in lessons so they cannot join in with activities as much as they could. Sometimes teachers' planning does not include sufficient tasks and activities to challenge the few higher attaining pupils. For example, one higher attaining student at post-16 spent too much time counting thirteen £1 coins which he could do easily because more challenging work had not been planned for him. A major feature of the unsatisfactory teaching, particularly in art, design and technology, physical education and religious education, at Key Stage 3 is the distinct lack of planning to show what pupils will achieve by the end of the lesson and as a result, many pupils are unsure about what they should do, they lose concentration and behave inappropriately. This was particularly evident in a Year 9 art lesson where the teacher focused on an activity of making animal models out of dough. Pupils were not informed about what they would achieve by the end of the lesson and although most pupils remained focused on this task, a few pupils briefly wasted time until the teacher prompted them back to their activity.

23 Most teachers challenge and inspire pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding. For example in a good science lesson, higher attainers were able to identify colours and group objects such as pebbles, found on their earlier visit to the beach, because the teacher provided the stimulation and challenge for them to do it. The excellent teaching for children under five is characterised by excellent challenge for higher attainers who are able to fulfil their potential. For example, in a lesson where children were counting together up to ten, gifted children were challenged to count backwards from ten and to count as fast as they could, and they achieved this with maximum concentration and effort. In unsatisfactory teaching, there is a distinct lack of challenge, such as in a physical education lesson at Key Stage 3 where pupils were not encouraged by the teacher to exercise or participate as hard as they might in team games. This led to the pupils' loss of interest and reduced effort in the lesson.

24 Teachers use a range of effective methods to help pupils to learn more effectively and this is a particular feature of very good teaching. Lessons are carefully structured to enable pupils to predict routines and work more effectively at their own pace. For example, in a Year 7 mathematics lesson the teacher started off with a warm up 'quick fire' mental mathematics activity, enabling all pupils to participate, before teaching the whole class about average numbers. He then explained what they would achieve by the end of the lesson and what activities they would be engaged in throughout. Pupils then worked in small groups with support assistants who used prompts, mathematical aids, cue cards and well-conceived worksheets to develop pupils' greater understanding of averages. At the same time, the teacher circulated between the groups to clarify any of their misconceptions about the topic and the lesson finished with a final whole class session to discuss what pupils had achieved and further illustrate how to calculate the average of a set of numbers. This ensured that all pupils remained highly focused, worked at a fast pace and gave very good responses to questions demonstrating their understanding of how to calculate an average. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, pupils are often given exactly the same task with no attempt to adapt it to the particular needs of the pupils or use particular resources to help pupils learn more effectively.

25 Most teachers manage pupils' behaviour very well in school by showing a great deal of personal respect towards pupils. In lessons, this promotes courteous behaviour, turn taking, listening to what others have to say and asking for help only when required. Teachers also show their authority by insisting on high standards of behaviour when necessary. This very good management of behaviour has a positive impact on pupils' learning, as they remain very well motivated and enjoy their lessons. They listen as hard as they can, which in turn ensures very good progress. Teaching is unsatisfactory when challenging behaviour is inappropriately managed, leading to disruption and a lack of focus to the lesson. This happened in a religious education lesson and led to deteriorating relationships between pupils and staff with a tense atmosphere in the lesson.

26 Most teachers make very good use of time and support in lessons which nearly always start promptly, finish on time and proceed at a very brisk pace. Very good teaching occurs when pupils learn a lot in the lesson, because the lesson is so lively and the teamwork between support assistants and teachers is very effective. For example, in a communications lesson at post-16 students were not only able to learn the signs for new words but were quickly placed into groups to work with support assistants and the teacher to develop the new words into whole sentences, which were then signed back to the whole class by the group leader. Students remained focused, tried their hardest, listened appropriately and only spoke or signed when others had finished talking, enabling all students including those with more profound learning difficulties to achieve very well in signing. In an excellent lesson with children under five, the teacher and support assistants created a magical and captivating multi-sensory experience for the children by enacting a boat trip to another land. They were transported by boat across the classroom to music, passing toy fish as they went and were sprayed with 'sea mist' and blown with 'wind' by support assistants. At the end of their journey, they pulled out objects beginning with the letter 's' for sea from a bag, sounded the letter and traced the 's' into the shape of a snake. The richness and variety of these activities would not have happened but for the excellent teamwork with support assistants, the excellent resources used to develop literacy and the extremely fast pace to the lesson which meant all children were learning to the best of their ability. But unsatisfactory teaching at Key Stage 3 is demonstrated by the poor use of lesson time so that pupils become bored or disrupt the work of others. For example, in a design and technology lesson, the teacher took too long to get the lesson started, resulting in pupils losing interest and becoming uncooperative, slowing the pace of the lesson further and presenting behaviour management problems for the teacher.

27 Most resources are very well used. For example, in a Year 1 English lesson with a focus on the development of speech and language, the teacher used switches, photographs and a communication board to ensure pupils of all abilities could answer questions. Very good teaching includes the systematic use of signing, cue cards and switches, in lessons, which enables all pupils to fully understand



what is taught and to listen to their teachers to the best of their ability. Some teachers use information technology effectively, but technological aids are not always used enough by teachers to support pupils' learning.

28 Most teachers use assessment well to clarify pupils' understanding in their learning, by giving feedback on what they have achieved, suggesting how they might move forward and taking the cue for the next bit of teaching from the pupils. For example in a Year 1 mathematics lesson, one pupil who had successfully counted the flowers in twos now wanted to count them in fours. The teacher immediately challenged him to do so and only provided him with help when he really needed it. At the end of his effort, the teacher praised him, telling him how well he had done and suggesting how he might like to practice counting in fours over and over again, by doubling in twos. Most teachers assess pupils' work thoroughly and use assessments to help and encourage pupils to overcome any difficulties. Therapists also work very effectively with the teachers and support staff to promote pupils' learning, through a systematic high quality assessment of their needs. This is followed by very good planning, focusing precisely on the areas pupils need to work on, the methods and resources to be used, and the organisational arrangements for the classroom. Pupils sometimes make outstanding progress in a very short space of time as a result of this high quality teamwork. For example, a pupil with a degenerative illness is making excellent progress and communicating more in sentences - contrary to the predicted medical pattern for the condition. Another pupil has made substantial progress in a very short space of time, in spite of the extremely profound difficulties manifested due to the very high quality outreach support provided by school and the systematic use of assessments to plan a programme. This involved an assessment of the most appropriate switches to use and led to an extremely effective, highly individualised programme for the pupil. This is due in part to the very important contribution the therapist makes in working with teachers and support staff in assessment and planning to ensure pupils with more profound learning difficulties maximise their learning.

29 The school works closely with parents, advising them on ways that they can consolidate and extend their children's learning at home. However, teachers do not always set homework tasks to extend pupils' learning, and this is particularly true for high attainers. But wherever homework is set, most teachers provide positive feedback to pupils on what they have achieved, and this promotes a positive attitude to homework.

30 The unsatisfactory teaching at Key Stage 3 is mainly due to one newly qualified and inexperienced teacher who has yet to establish predictable lesson routines, more effective ways of using lesson time and resources to promote learning, and authority in the classroom to maintain better control and pupil discipline.

## **HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?**

31 There have been systematic improvements to the curriculum since the last inspection. Many aspects of the curriculum are very good and the curriculum arrangements for children under five and for students at post-16 are in many ways exemplary. The curriculum offers a wide range of activities and is generally well matched to the abilities of its pupils. Statutory requirements are met, including provision for religious education and improved provision for collective worship. At the time of the last inspection, curriculum co-ordination was poor with vague long term planning, and inadequately focused monitoring and evaluation. The school did not ensure balance between National Curriculum subjects. The governing body has adopted a useful curriculum statement, which takes account of statutory requirements and most of the issues concerning the curriculum from the last inspection have been addressed. The school is on course to complete the few remaining curriculum issues which include the co-ordination of teachers' termly plans for art and design and technology.

32 The school is divided into departments, which works well and supports the different emphases

needed at different stages in pupils' development. The primary department runs on the lines of a primary school and pupils spend much of their time in class with flexible groupings for therapy and the sensory curriculum, with a considerable focus on communication, interaction and the early skills of number, reading and writing. The secondary department reflects the model of a secondary school, with different subjects taught by different teachers. Secondary pupils now have increased opportunities to participate in competitive sports, for example, they have played basketball, football and cricket with other schools. They also participate in a number of lunchtime sporting activities.

33 The primary and secondary curriculum consists of English, mathematics, science, information technology, religious education, art, design and technology, history, music, physical education, and personal and social education. In addition, secondary pupils are timetabled for geography and modern foreign languages. Primary pupils are taught within the context of a topic approach and secondary pupils through themes within National Curriculum subjects. The curriculum is relevant to the needs of pupils with severe and profound difficulties, with a strong emphasis on personal and social education, literacy and numeracy. No pupils are disapplied from the National Curriculum but one pupil is withdrawn from collective worship. In general, these arrangements ensure an appropriate balance of subject coverage, although timetabling in the primary department does not always make it clear exactly how much time is to be spent on each activity.

34 Curricular provision for children under five is excellent. Planning is very closely linked to all six areas of learning for this age. Precise planning and target setting ensure that each child receives a curriculum which promotes the best possible achievement. As a result, children make very good progress and their achievement is excellent in language and literacy, mathematical development and in personal, social and emotional development.

35 At post-16, planning is very good and the recent siting of the department at the local college of further education has done much to extend the opportunities available to students. There are excellent link courses with the college, which complement the curriculum provided within the post-16 base. The staff have made excellent progress in establishing the post-16 group in the Canterbury College base over a short space of time and liaison between the head of the school's post-16 department and the college is of very high quality. The leavers' programme focuses primarily on preparation for adulthood and the outside world, with an emphasis on developing assertiveness, respect and dignity, and developing students' ability to make choices and decisions. Students have access to college courses in a range of subject areas, including animal care, floristry, plumbing and use of the Internet. For most students, this provides a highly relevant range of opportunities, including accreditation through the ASDAN Transition Challenge and some college accredited shorter courses. The school could, however, provide greater extension - by means of a broader range of accredited courses - for the minority of higher attainers.

36 The school has made very good progress in improving its curriculum planning since September 1999, when the new head teacher was appointed. Prior to that, progress towards the necessary improvements identified in the previous inspection report was slow. Long-term planning is now in place for all subjects. Thorough whole-school termly teaching plans have been developed for English, mathematics, science, music and religious education and have a positive effect on teaching and learning. The termly plans produced by individual teachers in geography, history, French, and physical education have recently been co-ordinated to form effective whole-school schemes of work in these subjects. In information technology, a thoughtful scheme of work has recently been put into place and is beginning to impact on pupils' progress. In art and design and technology, individual teachers refer to the school's long-term plans when devising termly teaching plans. However, the detailed planning of individual teachers has not yet been co-ordinated into an overall scheme of work for use across Key Stages 1 to 4. The school has rightly identified the need to do so and this is the next action scheduled in its overhaul of curriculum planning for National Curriculum subjects. The topic approach in Key Stages 1 and 2 ensures that pupils achieve at least satisfactorily in art and design and technology lessons. Unsatisfactory teaching on occasion in art and design and technology at Key Stage 3 is compounded by

the lack of a fixed scheme of work and on these occasions, leads to unsatisfactory progress. There is evidence from the scrutiny of pupils' work at Key Stage 4 of some very good work in design and technology and of satisfactory achievement overall in art.

37 The curriculum is constantly developing to take account of new initiatives. The school has been very effective in implementing the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and in adapting these to the particular needs of its pupils. This has done much to raise teachers expectations and pupils' achievements, giving rise to much very good teaching and learning in English and mathematics across the school. A scheme of work is not in place for personal and social development but this has little impact on the very good progress pupils are making in this area of the curriculum. Such progress is due to the very good targets for personal and social development in pupils' individual education plans which are used to guide teaching.

38 The school makes good provision for health and drugs education and for sex education. Provision for sex education is seen as part of an overall strategy in preparing pupils for adult life and is handled sensitively, through the personal and social education curriculum and individual or group sessions relevant to needs. There is some effective involvement of other professionals such as the school nurse. Parents are also invited to attend workshops and meetings about sex education.

39 Communication, independence skills, and personal and social development are seen as central to the curriculum and they are strong. Independence skills such as feeding, toileting and self-care are rightly emphasised. The multi-professional approach to meeting individual needs and the contribution of therapists are clear strengths in provision. The school undertakes a detailed early multi-professional assessment, which includes the views of parents / carers. The curriculum for pupils with autism is now based on a mixed approach which effectively uses aspects of recognised therapies for autism within individual programmes. Visiting teachers of the visual and hearing impaired services support the curriculum for pupils with multi-sensory impairments. The school has improved its provision for pupils with more profound learning difficulties who now receive most of their education in classes with other pupils of a similar age. In addition, they have a range of therapy and sensory sessions each week. The school works closely with the charity SENSE in ensuring that targets, resources and strategies match the individual needs of pupils with multi-sensory impairment. The teacher responsible for the sensory curriculum is able to support teachers further with ideas and strategies to develop the curriculum for pupils with more profound learning difficulties. The school is using the skills of two teachers who were recently trained in 'Supported School Self-Review' to analyse and develop equal opportunities for pupils with profound difficulties. Generally, provision to meet these pupils' needs is good but in some lessons, more use could be made of switches and other technological aids to support their communication.

40 Extra-curricular provision is very good and has improved significantly since the last inspection. There is regular provision for horse riding, visits to places of interest and shopping expeditions. Pupils participate in a Christmas play for parents and friends. The school places great emphasis on the importance of integration of pupils into the local and wider community in preparation for their lives ahead as citizens of those communities. It has developed strong and very good links with a large number of organisations thus providing a wide variety of opportunities for the enrichment of pupils' educational and leisure experiences. Swimming is very popular with most pupils and is enjoyed through sessions in the hydrotherapy pool at the nearby general hospital and at local leisure centre pools. Older pupils participate in residential visits at centres in Surrey and Gloucestershire, which they thoroughly enjoy and which make a strong contribution to their personal development. Many photographs around the school illustrate the strength of the relationship with similar schools in Germany and Holland, to which there have been exchange visits. Relationships with the mainstream schools in which a number of pupils from St Nicholas are regularly included for lessons are strong and effective as are the links with other special schools in the area.

41 Provision for work experience for older pupils is very well conceived. Local community

members come into school to support work experience when pupils at Key Stage 4 are first introduced to the world of work in school. As they become older and transfer to the college base at post-16, they benefit, as students, from the strong and supportive links with local commerce and industry where they access and enjoy a variety of work experience placements. The school's secondary department works closely with the careers advisory service in the development of the work experience programme that has provided an increased number of opportunities for this valuable experience. Provision for post-16 students, with the added bonus of their teaching base being located on the campus of the college of further education, is a clear indication of the excellent relationship that exists between the school and the college. This enables students to not only continue with the 'Link Course' programme but to socialise with other college students and take advantage of all its facilities and amenities.

42 Positive and purposeful links with the community are a strength of the school. There are also excellent opportunities for pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2 to experience some lessons in mainstream schools, and for students at post-16 to socialise and attend courses within Canterbury College. The school is now looking at further opportunities for including pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 in some lessons and activities in local secondary schools. There has been an increase in the number of opportunities for work experience at post-16. The school is now also developing a work experience programme, in partnership with the careers service, for pupils at Key Stage 4.

### **Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development**

43 The school has made considerable improvement in its provision for spiritual development, since the previous inspection. It is now good. The approach taken has been to not necessarily write provision for spiritual development into lessons and plans, but rather to ensure that a calm and tranquil atmosphere is created so that teachers can spontaneously take advantage to promote spiritual development when pupils are receptive and enthusiastic. This works effectively. In both the main assemblies observed during inspection week, pupils arrived in the hall clearly aware of the importance of a school community gathering and with an air of anticipation that this was a familiar occasion to be enjoyed and relished. The opening hymn on the occasion of the secondary department assembly, 'Be Still in the presence of the Lord', is a good example of how a gentle, spiritual atmosphere was created to calm and relax pupils with the result that their response was joyous and positive. Likewise in the primary department assembly, pupils were presented with the opportunity to reflect on the life of Anne Frank in celebration of her birthday that week. Again, their response was positive and many were able to grasp the significance of the events of her life with a sense of awe and understanding. Throughout the school day, all staff take the opportunity to enhance pupils' spiritual development at registration times and in lessons, and the school is now well placed to improve this aspect of its provision even further.

44 Provision for pupils' moral development is very good and has been well sustained since the previous inspection. Pupils are taught right from wrong through the effective implementation of the whole school behaviour policy and this is endorsed by parents' views. Parents feel that pupils are very well controlled and understand clearly that they need to behave well in order to learn well. Staff in the school provide excellent role models and pupils are left in no doubt whatsoever as to what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour. The school's very good provision for this aspect of pupils' development enables them to grow up with a strong moral code that supports their relationships and teaches them to be aware of how their behaviour and conduct affects others.

45 Pupils' personal development is excellent and this is achieved by the school's meticulous attention to its provision for this aspect of pupils' growth. The school is concerned to provide opportunities wherever possible for its pupils and students to take part in educational activities in mainstream schools and college, and to mix with others on visits and residential experiences. It also works to ensure all pupils feel integrated within its own school community and have opportunities to contribute and, thus, develop. All classes have a range of helpful tasks to carry out around the school and these are designed to develop independence and confidence. Pupils with severe learning difficulties

competently take registers to the school office on their own is an example of the high expectations all staff have of pupils' personal development. Older pupils have the opportunity to participate in the secondary department's school council resulting in an understanding of teamwork, democracy and representation. Pupils are expected to show concern and compassion for others and an excellent example of this is the way in which post-16 students, on their own initiative, organised a Bring and Buy Sale in response to the Blue Peter Appeal for premature babies. Others helped to fund-raise for the victims of the Mozambique floods and the establishment of long-term links with a charity project in India enhances cultural development and understanding on the part of pupils and their families. Parents comment that the school's extensive use of public facilities in the city, for instance shops and cafes, fosters positive behaviour and familiarises their children with what is expected of them. This leads to improved behaviour within the family setting and on family outings. This excellent provision for personal development shows considerable improvement since the last inspection. Hours of staff time and effort are put into enhancing pupils' social and personal development. This results in very well behaved and mature young persons.

46 Provision for pupils' cultural development has also improved since the last inspection. The school makes full use of all that the city of Canterbury has to offer pupils, culturally and historically. Pupils have taken part in a combined festival, 'JC 2000', at the cathedral to mark the Millennium. Festivals of different cultures are celebrated and currently the links with a charity project in India have resulted in an array of colourful Indian artefacts around the school to stimulate pupils' and to widen their cultural horizons. Participation in the European Education Comenius Programme has resulted in the exchange visits to Germany and Holland. Further provision for cultural development was observed through the African music project in the school with traditional dress and food, and a steel band visit to the school in the near future, in the form of a workshop for all pupils. The school's attention to the cultural and multi-cultural development of its pupils provides a strong foundation for their future lives in the communities in which they will grow up.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?**

47 The school has done much to rectify some weaknesses identified in the last inspection report. There is now a well-written policy for child protection, the head teacher is the designated officer for child protection and child protection procedures are thoroughly understood by all staff. A detailed health and safety policy is now not only in place but fully implemented. Governors take these responsibilities seriously and regular risk assessments are undertaken, recorded formally and reported to full governing body meetings. Teachers planning notes contain clear risk assessments when any outing is due to take place. All minibus escorts and drivers have training in safety. Regular fire drills take place and many of the school's staff are trained in first aid. Individual feeding programmes are fully implemented and provide good opportunities for social interaction and learning.

48 Attendance registers are monitored effectively every Friday afternoon, when the register for the post-16 unit is brought over to the school to be checked also. Parents are contacted if there are concerns over absence and all are aware of the requirement to provide written notification to the school if pupils are absent.

49 Pupils' behaviour and personal development is under constant scrutiny by staff leading to thorough and detailed monitoring on a daily basis. The senior management team regularly and effectively monitors pupils' personal record files, and individual programmes changed and revised if necessary.

50 A large number of dedicated professional staff from other agencies provide strong support to the school and parents comment that the way in which the school refers parents to specialists supports the progress of pupils. They also say that the open door policy and directness of speaking about disabilities means that the whole family is better for contact with the school.

51 Although currently there are no schemes of work in place for pupils' personal, social and health education, provision for this aspect of their education permeates the school throughout each day and is an integral part of the educational and social curriculum provided. A large number of high quality support staff and assistants play a significant role in the devoted pastoral care afforded each pupil resulting in their continued good learning and progress.

52 There is comprehensive and good assessment of each pupil within seven weeks of admission. This establishes very clearly what each pupil knows, understands and can do and enables teachers and therapists to start developing well targeted programmes without delay.

53 There is very good assessment of personal development, especially behaviour, and this leads to very good behaviour management plans which offer all staff strong and useful guidance which helps with the smooth running of lessons and hence facilitates better learning opportunity.

54 There is extensive specialist assessment that helps to inform annual reviews. School reports for annual reviews show that teachers know and understand their pupils well. They are stronger in core subjects where reports make it very clear what pupils know, understand and can do.

55 English assessment is very good. The co-ordination of English and literacy gives a very clear picture and a firm basis for the monitoring of individual progress. Well co-ordinated assessment also gives a very good clear picture of pupils' achievements and provides for good monitoring of individual progress. Mathematics assessment is very good and science assessment is also good. The school now has a good system for assessing the most relevant switches for pupils with more profound learning difficulties. These have been used effectively, so that pupils now have the opportunity to use the most appropriate switch in lessons. However, there is no school wide assessment in art, design and technology, French, or physical education and this is a weakness because pupils do not always know how well they are achieving and teachers cannot use this information to ensure that planned activities are always relevant, which leads to unsatisfactory progress.

56 Records of Achievement are good but would be more informative if achievements were clearly linked to the National Curriculum to provide a clearer picture of progress.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

57 The school is very clear it can only do its best for pupils if it has a flourishing and mutually supportive partnership with parents. This aim is met in a highly successful manner and the resultant relationship with parents is an outstanding strength of the school. It is very effective in working closely with all parents and genuinely involving them in the life of the school. In the previous academic year a questionnaire was sent to all parents inviting them to comment on procedures and make suggestions for improvement in any aspect of the management of the school. This resulted in all parents participating in the formulation of the home-school agreement which they all signed to help the school move forward. Parent governors play a key role in raising parental issues with the governing body and the Friends Association works hard to raise-funds to benefit the school. Those parents involved in this association greatly appreciate the support and help they receive from staff at all organised events of the association.

58 Parents feel very well informed and communication is very good. The head teacher sends out one newsletter a term and a number of parents said they enjoy this so much that they would like more. Parents find annual review reports very helpful and have a direct input into the formulation of their child's annual review targets. The annual review reports are clear and inform parents well, of the progress pupils are making in some subject areas. Precise information of what pupils know, understand and can do, is also clearly stated in the reports. There is an open evening for parents each term and additionally Individual Education Plan targets are sent home. Parents are kept well informed of progress

against these targets although they do not have any part in drafting them. Reports from therapists with space for parents to add their own opinions are another example of the very good communication from the school and its wish to involve parents in every part of their children's education.

59 The quality of the school's home contact book is most impressive and an example of best practice in daily communication between the school, parents and carers. It consists of a daily dialogue between families and teachers, which can be brief or detailed depending on what is necessary at the time. Reading these books gives the outsider a most comprehensive idea of the confidence parents have in the school and of how well the school supports each and every family consistently and continuously. Teachers give of their own time tirelessly and endlessly to ensure that these daily dialogues and records provide the best possible liaison between home and school.

60 The response from parents in the form of the pre-inspection questionnaires and the pre-inspection meeting makes it quite clear that they support all that the school does for them and their children. This is a partnership in the strongest sense and one which makes a most positive contribution to the education and personal development of all pupils and students, who gain so much from being part of this particular school community.

### **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

61 Leadership and management have improved substantially since the last inspection, particularly since the appointment of the new head teacher who is a very effective leader. In just nine months, he has vigorously and systematically tackled the action plan of the previous inspection. He has revised the aims of the school to reflect more closely high achievement and school improvement and established very relevant targets to fulfil these aims, which are clearly specified in a thoughtful school development plan, based on a three-year cycle of school improvement. These targets are already proving to be highly effective and have been evident in the significant improvements in teaching and learning and in pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development. There is now a very obvious ethos in the school for high achievement and a care that permeates the life of the school which is reflected in the good, and often very good, progress pupils are making.

62 The head teacher is supported by a very strong senior management team, and they all share the same drive for school improvement and raising standards. Together they have successfully achieved the Investors In People standard, which has made a significant contribution to staff development, appraisal, monitoring and performance management. The school is now en route to achieve the Quality Mark for raising standards in basic skills.

63 Strategic management by the governing body has also improved and is now good. Monitoring occurs through governors' planned visits to the school with a specific focus; through the well-developed committee structure; and through the full governing body which meets regularly and holds the school to account for its provision. This has had a positive direct impact on the quality of provision with improvements in the consistency of whole school policies, which promote high quality teaching and learning; the fine tuning of aspects of internal financial control to ensure greater efficiency; and significant improvements in Health and Safety to promote the welfare of pupils.

64 Subject co-ordinators are now in place and their role has developed since the last inspection. They all now have relevant job descriptions, manage a budget for their subject and some co-ordinators monitor teaching and learning, such as in English and mathematics. However, there are no subject development plans in the foundation subjects and this is an important omission.

65 There are sufficient teachers and support staff to meet the demands of the curriculum and the needs of the pupils in the school. Despite a significant turnover of staff in recent years, this has been managed well to minimise any disruption to learning, by building up staff confidence and staff morale.

Indeed, the influx of new staff has enabled the senior managers and governors to take a fresh look at various aspects of the school and encouraged some very positive development. There is a good balance of experience and expertise overall, although a lack of expertise occasionally reduces the quality of teaching in some lessons in art, design and technology, and physical education. Support staff make a very good contribution to the quality of learning and very good use is made of external, specialist expertise. Very good administrative support enables the school to function effectively. There is a very good focus on the development of all staff in the school. There is now a programme of induction that provides generally sufficient support and guidance for new staff; this is a major improvement since the previous inspection. The school has implemented an appraisal cycle and professional development review. This programme is effective and well placed to lead into performance management next term, although the school has yet to remove all unsatisfactory teaching. There are good links with other institutions to develop and extend expertise through training, including other schools and colleges of higher education.

66 The school's good quality accommodation has a positive effect on pupils' achievement. Classrooms are large, well maintained and effectively used. The reception area is very welcoming. Displays of pupils' work are attractive. The facilities for speech therapy and physiotherapy are adequate; much of the therapy is initiated effectively within classrooms and shared areas. Good use is made of the local swimming pool and the hospital's hydrotherapy pool. There is a well-equipped sensory room, which is used well. The school library is now located in a mobile classroom and well stocked. It is used particularly well for teaching and learning of literacy. The library has also been adapted to provide a space for music therapy. The school buildings are in a good state of repair and are well maintained. The whole site is very attractive and has very good facilities for environmental study, games and other recreational activities.

67 Resources for learning are good, but vary in quality and quantity between subjects. There are some shortages of resources in design and technology and physical education which restricts teaching and learning activities, so that pupils do not always achieve as much as they should. The shortage of communication aids and information technology resources identified in the last inspection report has been rectified. There were a number of examples during the inspection where computers and technological aids were used very effectively, although teachers do not always make maximum use of technological aids. Much has been done by the school to identify which aids will benefit which pupils, so it is now a matter of ensuring that teachers use technological aids in all situations where they are likely to benefit the pupils concerned. The school makes excellent use of the immediate locality and also of more distant venues as resources for learning.

68 Financial planning is very good. The school fully involves the governors in reviewing the previous year's budget and setting a new budget which reflects the priorities within the school development plan. Internal financial control and school administration are very good. Systems are fully computerised and the Chair of governors has been particularly active in improving the system to ensure greater efficiency. Although there has been no external financial audit since the last inspection, the school has ensured that security for handling cash, cheque books and computer software is fully in place. Specific grants are very well used for their intended purposes and they have been spent wisely on staff development and school improvement initiatives. The school applies the four principles of best value very well to ensure the cost effectiveness and educational impact of its spending. Very good use is made of staffing and accommodation and good use is made generally of learning resources.

69 Pupils achieve well across the curriculum and very well in English, mathematics, personal and social education, and in meeting targets on their individual education plans. The quality of teaching and learning is very good for children under five, for pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2, and for students at post-16. At Key Stage 4, teaching is good with a significant amount of very good teaching. At Key Stage 3, teaching in English is good and in mathematics it is at least good, although there is some unsatisfactory teaching in some lessons in some foundation subjects. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that they are



achieving at least satisfactorily at Key Stage 3 and well in a number of subjects. There have been substantial improvements in the curriculum and it is now good, with some very good features. Where further refinement is needed in the termly planning of art and design and technology, the school is aware of this and plans are underway to rectify the situation. The school is very well led and managed by the new head teacher and the senior management team, and it makes very good use of an income which is relatively low compared with similar schools nationally. In view of these factors, the school provides very good value for money.

## **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

### **70 In order to improve further the quality of education, the head teacher, senior managers and governors should:**

I. Further improve the quality of teaching and thus raise standards\*, by:

- ensuring that any unsatisfactory teaching at Key Stage 3 is remedied to bring it in line with the teaching at other key stages;
- increasing teachers' subject knowledge, where necessary, in art and design and technology.

(\*See paragraphs 9, 11, 19, 22, 24-26, 67 and 69)

II. Make further improvements in the curriculum\*, by:

- co-ordinating termly planning in art and in design and technology into a scheme of work for use across Key Stages 1 to 4;
- ensuring that a whole-school scheme of work is in place for personal and social education;
- extending the range of accredited courses at Key Stage 4 and at post-16 to meet the needs of the small minority of higher attainers.

(\*See paragraphs 9, 22, 35-37, 51, 67 and 69)

III. Strengthen the system of assessment\*, by:

- developing a whole school assessment system in art, design and technology, modern foreign languages, and physical education, and ensure that it is used effectively to inform teaching and learning;
- ensuring that Records of Achievement are referenced to the National Curriculum in order to provide a clearer picture of progress.

(\*See paragraphs 54, 55 and 56)

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

- class timetables should be more precise so that it is possible to calculate the exact time individual teachers allocate to individual subjects; (*paragraph 33*)
- homework should be better used to extend higher attaining pupils, for example, in mathematics; (*paragraph 29*)
- resources for gymnastics should be improved; (*paragraph 145*)
- teachers should make more consistent use of switches and communication aids where appropriate. (*paragraphs 4, 8, 22, 27 and 39*)



## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### *Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection*

Number of lessons observed	92
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	26

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	38	37	15	7	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*

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	102
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	39

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	6
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	3

### *Attendance*

<b>Authorised absence</b>	%
School data	13

<b>Unauthorised absence</b>	%
School data	0

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

### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	84
Any other minority ethnic group	2

### ***Teachers and classes***

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	14
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	7.3
Average class size	7.3

#### **Education support staff: YR – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	39
Total aggregate hours worked per week	937

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

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

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

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	1999 - 2000
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	£
Total income	779,261
Total expenditure	777,479
Expenditure per pupil	8,937
Balance brought forward from previous year	10,676
Balance carried forward to next year	12,458

***Results of the survey of parents and carers***

**Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	102
Number of questionnaires returned	31

**Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	87	10	3	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	68	32	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	60	33	0	0	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	48	34	10	3	3
The teaching is good.	77	23	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	74	23	3	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	84	16	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	84	16	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	68	29	3	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	81	19	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	76	24	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	67	20	7	3	3

## **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**

71 Provision for children under five is a strength of the school and many aspects are excellent. This marks a further improvement on the situation reported at the time of the last inspection. Children's achievement is excellent in language and literacy, mathematical development and in personal, social and emotional development. It is very good in creative development and physical development. From evidence in lessons, work scrutiny and photographs, children achieve well in their knowledge and understanding of the world. Higher attaining children make excellent progress and there are examples of individual children achieving well in advance of the early learning goals in some aspects of numeracy. Children with more profound learning difficulties achieve well in lessons and they develop very well over time, when their prior attainment is taken into account. Children for whom English is an additional language achieve very well and make very good progress in learning to communicate. All children are making very good and sometimes excellent progress in meeting their individual learning targets.

72 The very positive and supportive learning environment in the under fives class enables children to make excellent progress in their personal, social and emotional development. They are happy and settled and take part readily in all learning activities. The children listen carefully, share with one another and take turns. Relationships between the children and between the children and staff are excellent. Those children who have more profound difficulties exhibit tremendous trust when the teacher or support assistants help them to engage with an activity. Children know the routines very well and readily co-operate. They concentrate very well for their age and try very hard. They sit nicely round the table for drinks and snacks and line up patiently by the door when it is time to leave the classroom. They are invariably very well behaved, know right from wrong, and are kind to each other. During the daily reflection period, most lie down quietly and listen to the music. When watching a television programme on numeracy, the children listened intently and were almost totally absorbed in the sounds and images. Occasionally, one or two children become fractious but they are soon calmed by the staff and keen to get involved in activities again. Some higher attaining children behave impeccably and readily undertake responsibilities, for instance taking the register to the office. As far as they are able to, they are becoming independent in dressing and in doing other little jobs for themselves. The excellent feeding programmes ensure that all children are making systematic progress in feeding. Children with more profound difficulties are making very good progress in gaining an awareness of themselves in the context of others.

73 In language and literacy, all children enjoy listening to stories. Higher attainers read short sentences with which they have become familiar, ranging from three-letter words to more challenging sentences such as, 'Who is there today?'. Most children pick out the card with their name on, they all know that print conveys meaning, and they know that words are arranged from left to right. Average attaining children turn the pages of the book, point to characters, and know the beginning and end of a story in a book. Higher attainers match words in the 'big book', identify some images from pictures and say the word. They look, listen and respond to questions or instructions. Most are much more advanced in listening and understanding than in speaking, although some higher attainers know a number of words associated with a given activity, for instance, 'feet', 'hands', 'socks', 'shoes' and 'marching'. In the 'Hello' song, some vocalise clearly, whilst others are beginning to speak audibly or use signing to communicate. The use of a karaoke machine, which involves children speaking into a microphone for certain speaking activities, is an excellent way of encouraging them to articulate as much as possible. They know a number of rhyming songs. Children hear initial sounds in words where there is a focus on one letter of the alphabet, and many say them together. Some are proficient at tracing letters and higher attaining children are beginning to write random letters. One child writes his name, printing quite evenly and using upper and lower case letters appropriately. The 'write dance' sessions make a very good contribution to children's physical co-ordination and poise, as well as raising their awareness of the

different shapes and movements used in writing.

74 In mathematical development, progress is particularly good in numeracy but children are also making very good progress in matching and sorting. Some children count beyond five or even ten on their own, sometimes using objects, others say or sing numbers up to ten as a group. A higher attaining child writes numbers to ten, sort numbers in order up to ten, reads a range of numbers and joins up numbers to create an image. He also counts from one to 120, and in hundreds to one thousand, which is an exceptionally high achievement for this age group and reflects the excellent challenge provided for gifted children. The same child also matches picture cards even when they convey a relatively complex photographic image, sort small and big teddies, match colour to colour when the object is different, and sort six different coloured beads into the correct trays. Other children match colours and objects, and copy two colour patterns. They fill, pour and empty containers of sand and water. The teacher is beginning to build the necessary understanding for subtracting small numbers, usefully asking higher attainers, "Four fat sausages, one went bang, how many are left?". Most are not yet quite able to answer this but higher attainers are aware of the idea of some being 'left' when others are taken away. All children are beginning to learn positional language such as 'on' and 'off' and many put their understanding of this into practice in physical activities.

75 In their knowledge and understanding of the world children are making at least good progress. They are familiar with places around the school and visits to places such as the pet shop, the beach and the park, increase their knowledge of the wider world. A higher attaining child already knows some days of the week. Children explore materials, playing in the sandpit, and investigate objects using all their senses. Average attaining children select materials they want to use. All children are beginning to learn about how materials change, for example, when heat is applied to sausages in cooking. Average attainers build in three-dimensions when copying an adult but cannot initiate this activity. Higher attainers build in three dimensions, including with bricks. They are beginning to grasp differences and patterns. Some children know that the computer mouse has to be pressed to make certain things happen and touch the screen to make images move. They show fascination for the computer and enjoy watching a story or a series of events unfold in the screen.

76 Children are making very good progress in their physical development. Children are gaining in control of smaller equipment, such as felt-tip pens and paintbrushes. They are also gaining in controlling their bodies through the use of equipment within the well resourced outside play area. Most ride tricycles, run, jump and climb. Most can bounce, with a little adult support, on the small trampoline. They are gaining in their confidence, for example, in climbing up the steps and coming down the slide. Some can balance, adjusting their weight accordingly, on a piece of moving apparatus, and one child has almost grasped the combination of movements needed in skipping. Most can move around confidently in water, splashing, dipping and walking. They show awareness of themselves and others in space. They follow instructions, for example, to try to march around the circle. Higher attainers make a good attempt at flying movements to represent the buzzing bee. Emerging co-ordinational skills are evident in such activities. Some higher attainers isolate parts of the body and recall how they moved them. They handle tools, objects and materials with increasing control. Most spread margarine onto a slice of bread or apply glue. They tear and stick, but most find cutting difficult. Higher attainers can hold a pencil or pen sufficiently well to print accurately.

77 Children are making very good progress in their creative development through a variety of imaginative activities and the visually stimulating environment created in the classroom. They know a number of songs and join in with actions to accompany the words. Some dance to music and most keep to the beat, for example, by clapping and all children enjoy shaking percussion instruments. Higher attainers shake the bells and know when to stop in time with the guitar. They are exposed to a very good range of artistic experiences, including painting, printing and making different things, and they are exploring a range of materials, colours and textures. Higher attainers draw recognisable images of a cat, dog and hand. Children recognise some colours and say them. One higher attainer copies the main

features of a picture of an animal's face, placing the eyes, ears, nose and mouth in the correct position. Higher attainers are beginning to grasp the skills needed for colouring in. All children are involved in dressing-up and imaginative role-play. Some engage in imaginative pretend play, for instance, dressing a doll and holding it carefully to feed it or wearing a toy stethoscope and 'listening' to the doll's breathing.

78 The teaching of children under five is very good. It is always at least good and at times, it is excellent. Expectations are consistently high. Lessons are very carefully planned with clear learning objectives and precise individual targets, so that work is closely matched to children's different abilities. Higher attainers receive excellent challenge and plenty of opportunity to fulfil their potential. For example, in a lesson where children were counting in unison up to ten, any who were able to were challenged to count backwards from ten and to count as fast as they could. All lessons are informed by the teacher's excellent understanding of the six areas of learning for under fives, and very good use is made of elements from the National Literacy and National Numeracy Strategies. Excellent use is made of resources, giving rise to inventive teaching, which motivates the children and makes learning fun. Thoughtful links are forged between children's different learning experiences in order to deepen their understanding, so that a reference to 'starfish' in a lesson on the theme of the seaside was quickly followed by a song popular with the children, 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star'. Appropriately, much attention is given to language and literacy (including the use of signing and cards which combine an image with the printed word), mathematical development and personal, social and emotional development. Several different areas of learning are included within any given activity, to create a learning environment, which is rich and offers much opportunity for all round development.

79 The teamwork between the teacher and the learning support assistants is seamless: each member of the team works with a shared purpose and learning support assistants are exceptionally clear about what they need to do at any given moment to maximise children's learning. Every member of the team works with enthusiasm, relating warmly with the children and missing no opportunities to promote learning. The creation of a very safe and enjoyable environment encourages children to apply themselves and focus on learning. All of the staff have excellent skills in dealing with children's behaviour and the management of autistic children is exemplary. In an excellent lesson, the teacher and support assistants created a magical and captivating multi-sensory experience for the children by enacting a boat trip to another land. The children were transported across the classroom in a plastic boat, to background music of Rod Stewart's song, 'We are sailing'. The boat passed between toy fish spread out on the floor, while a support assistant sprayed a fine mist of water above the children's heads and the teacher evoked the sensation of wind by moving a hoop of fabric up and down around them. At the end of their journey, the children took part in a literacy session on the letter 'S'. Each took it in turns to reach into a bag and pull out an object that began with 'S', they sounded the letter each time and traced the letter into the shape of snake on the flipchart. When they had finished, they travelled back in the boat to St Nicholas School in time to line up by the door ready to go off to lunch.

80 Before under fives enter the school, parents are provided with tapes and pictures to acclimatise their children to classroom activities and to the staff who will work with them. Baseline assessment is undertaken within the first few weeks and more personal information is collected from parents, so that staff have a clear profile of each child's prior attainment. Excellent assessment and record keeping practices subsequently ensure that the teacher and learning support assistants know exactly how each child is developing and what they need to learn next. This is a major factor in the high quality teaching, as individual learning needs are the basis of curriculum planning and teaching methods, giving rise to steady progression in learning. Children with more profound difficulties receive a combination of therapy sessions and careful integration in lessons. Liaison with and the involvement of therapists ensures that therapy programmes are incorporated into a child's total learning experience. There are very strong links with parents and parents receive much support from the school. Use of the home-school diary to communicate ongoing developments to parents is exceptional and the reports provided for annual reviews give parents a very full picture of what each child is achieving in each area of learning.



## ENGLISH

81 Pupils are achieving very well in English. At Key Stages 1, 2 and 4 and at post-16, they are making very good progress. At Key Stage 3, pupils' achievements and progress are good. At Key Stage 1, pupils learn the letters of the alphabet and many understand the difference between capital letters and lower case letters. A few pupils know both the alphabet names and the associated phonic sounds and some have begun to blend sounds together in a whole word, which is very high achievement in relation to their abilities. Many pupils speak well, especially in response to their teacher's morning greeting which is often incorporated into a song. Pupils with more profound learning difficulties, including autism, also respond well to the morning greeting and most of them understand the routines and purposes of lessons. Most pupils remember stories and the characters in them when reminded by pictures and puppet characters. Many pupils with widely varying capabilities succeed well in 'Writedance'. This is a specially designed activity in which movement and music are used to help them to use their bodies fluently, understand shapes and co-ordinate arms, hands and fingers. They then use these movements successfully to make marks in preparation for writing, which clearly demonstrates very high achievement in relation to their abilities.

82 Pupils in Key Stage 2 continue to develop their co-ordination well in order to make very good marks with pencil and crayon. In one lesson, they followed their physical activity by using crayon on fabric in order to design a T-shirt. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties learn prepositions very well, for example 'over' and 'under' in a game in which they hide under a cloth. This is excellent achievement. In another blindfold game played in the sensory room, these pupils communicate very well by touching someone's head in order to identify them. Good progress in speaking and listening and very good progress in reading and writing is clearly seen in pupils who are in Year 6. They give very good answers to questions about the stories they hear, and add meaningful words in sentences, the beginnings of which have been given by the teacher. They also develop reading skills very well by focusing on common phonic elements of words presented to them in a game of 'word lotto'.

83 Pupils make good progress at Key Stage 3. Their progress is reinforced by regular practice in phonics. For example, many pupils know the alphabet names and sounds of all the letters, they read simple words and brief text and write their names. Their writing in connection with other subjects is often achieved by tracing over the faint outlines of letters and words. Some pupils in Year 9 can converse with confidence and most of them listen well in lessons. Pupils in Year 7 follow stories well in their literacy lesson and many understand and correctly respond to questions about the story. Some make very good fine phonic distinctions, for example between 'Molly' and 'Polly'. Pupils with more profound learning difficulties, including autism, communicate effectively, with help, to understand instructions, for example in a music game where they invite others to play, offer help in playing and exchange instruments. Pupils with particular communication difficulties use switches and a speech simulator in order to greet their teacher or to signify 'yes' or 'no'. They also use switches effectively in the sensory room to choose 'on' or 'off' for special lighting effects. However, work at Key Stage 3 is sometimes a repetition of earlier work by younger pupils and this is why pupils at Key Stage 3 make less progress.

84 Progress in English speeds up in Key Stage 4 and is very good. By the end of this key stage, most pupils acquire some grammatical understanding, for example the use of the past tense, which is very good progress. Some can grasp grammatical connections such as 'am swimming' and 'swam', and some remember technical terms such as common noun and verb. In their literacy lessons, they learn about important stories and plays such as 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Through very skilful teaching they gain a very good sense of the background to the story by hearing Mendelssohn's incidental music and by smelling herbs and flowers. At this key stage, pupils who have more profound learning difficulties increase their knowledge and understanding very well through this sensory approach. Most pupils successfully write very good answers to questions about the play and a number can talk interestingly about it. Good progress in conversing is reinforced well at break times when pupils stay in and around the classroom base for refreshments. They converse freely with visitors and almost all of

them appreciate and understand the social value of question, answer and invitation.

85 Students at post-16 show a very good level of maturity in their communication with staff and with one another. This was obvious in a lesson on plumbing in which they were pleased to talk about the working process and use language very well in order to verify the best way to bend and join piping. In other lessons, they build on and extend communication skills, for example by using signs to identify a very wide range of vocabulary and sentences. Their overall communication skills are well reinforced by writing about their achievements. Students make very good progress in understanding spoken and written instructions, and in making themselves understood. This understanding, together with their good skills in formulating words and sentences, contributes very well to the excellent social and work aspects of their college experience.

86 Teaching is very good in 62 per cent of lessons in English, it is good in 25 per cent and satisfactory in the remainder. Most of the very good teaching takes place at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4, and at the post-16. At Key Stage 3, teaching is always at least satisfactory and often good. Very good teaching is characterised by very good subject knowledge, very high expectations of the pupils, use of an interesting and wide range of methods, and the establishment of a good brisk lesson pace, so that pupils behave well and co-operate well in lessons with their teachers and each other. For example, pupils help one another and are tolerant to peers who may have deep-seated problems which result in distractibility. Intentional poor behaviour is rare in English lessons. In the very good lessons, teachers use interesting resources, some of which are home made. Above all, in these lessons, teachers devise pupils' tasks in great detail, so that the needs of all pupils, as expressed in individual education plans, are very well met. They frequently expect much more of their pupils than is normally found in similar schools nationally, for example, challenging pupils at Key Stage 1 to read words such as 'where' within short sentences and taking every opportunity to extend higher attaining pupils. Furthermore, all activities, including those undertaken by support assistants, are carefully directed, monitored and assessed. The Speech and Language Therapy team make very good, and sometimes excellent contributions to lessons. The work of learning support assistants is good overall, with some examples of very good support.

87 In a few lessons which have a weaker impact on pupils' learning, teachers are not sufficiently attentive to the individual needs of all pupils, they do not incorporate enough variety in their approach to the pupils, and sometimes make technical mistakes in the exposition and instruction episodes of the lesson. For example in a lesson about the alphabet, the teacher illustrated the lower case letter 'n' as a capital letter and one pupil with more profound learning difficulties did nothing for thirty minutes because the teacher failed to match work to the particular needs of this pupil. Overall, teachers manage pupils' behaviour well, they plan and prepare lessons diligently and initiate tasks which move on at a good pace.

88 Pupils learn very well in English and they acquire very good knowledge, develop very good skills and understanding in their communication tasks. Learning is very good at post-16, where students develop effective communication, for example in connection with their lessons on everyday living. Learning tasks are also very practical in the main school, and relate very well to topics the pupils are learning. Most pupils show interest in their lessons and are clearly pleased with themselves when they complete particular tasks well. They enjoy working hard and, in most lessons, maintain a good level of engagement. Some pupils remember events and facts very well, and older pupils sometimes ask challenging questions, for example to verify why they are doing particular tasks. Most pupils willingly complete an acceptable amount of work in lessons, although in some classes at Key Stage 3, they do not always produce enough work. As they move up the school, pupils have an increasing understanding of their own capabilities and achievements. Some of the older pupils know what they need to do to improve further.

89 English is co-ordinated very well by a teacher who has very good knowledge of the pupils' needs, knowledge of current trends in the teaching of the subject, and very good organisational skills.

The curriculum is very well documented in policies and schemes which pay good attention to the individual needs of pupils as well as to the national requirements for the teaching of literacy in all schools. In the school, the curriculum includes a new national scheme which provides finely graded tasks which afford good access to the literacy curriculum. The English curriculum and the assessment of pupils' achievements are excellently supported by the Speech and Language Therapy team. Curricular provision, and assessment and monitoring of the progress of all pupils are especially effective for pupils with more profound learning difficulties. This represents a good improvement since the last inspection. Formal monitoring of teaching is being conducted by the co-ordinator. The English curriculum is significantly enriched with initiatives outside lessons, for example the European project, and the book weeks.

## **MATHEMATICS**

90 Pupils are achieving very well in mathematics throughout the school. Children under five are very well prepared for mathematics at Key Stage 1. Evidence from pupils' work shows they are making at least good progress in matching colour to objects, sequencing, development of number concepts through number rhymes and development of measures, for example, in their understanding of capacity and the conservation of volume by filling various containers with water. At Key Stage 1 pupils are achieving very well in mathematics by continuing to develop their knowledge of number, their counting and sequencing skills. They are beginning to learn their tables, for example, many pupils count 20 flowers in twos and one higher attaining pupil attempts to count them in fours and succeeds with help. Most pupils also have a greater understanding of mathematical language, for example, they respond appropriately to 'how many left?' 'What's the difference?' 'next to', 'in front of'. Key Stage 1 pupils are also achieving very well in their knowledge and understanding of shapes. They recognise a triangle and know that it is different to a rectangle. In learning their topic about the sea, most pupils identify triangles in sailing boats, they know that sails are triangles and they cut out triangular shapes to make the sails of a boat. Higher attaining pupils draw a triangle unaided and pupils with more profound learning difficulties hold a triangle. Pupils at Key Stage 1 also make very good progress in lessons and in their individual education plan targets, so that by the end of Key Stage 1 many pupils count to a hundred and more able pupils have a clear understanding of place value in tens and units, for example, they know that thirteen is one ten and three ones.

91 At Key Stage 2 pupils are also achieving very well and their knowledge and understanding of number, shape, space and measures and mathematical language has improved significantly. Many pupils know the difference between big, bigger and biggest and some can identify dresses, in class, according to their size. Most children know that they must measure their feet before determining their shoe size. They draw around their feet, cut out the pattern and compare it for size with the rest of the class. More able pupils predict who has the smallest feet in class and who has the biggest. Pupils with more profound learning difficulties, including autism, fill a bucket with sand and are increasing their understanding of measures. Most pupils sequence a series of randomly ordered and numbered caterpillar cards and they count together up to thirty. Higher attaining pupils sequence five random numbers between one and twenty, in the right order from the highest number to the lowest number. At Key Stage 2 pupils are making very good progress in mathematics in lessons and in their Individual Education Plan targets. Most pupils recognise common two-dimensional shapes, more able pupils write down the names of the shapes and pupils with more profound learning difficulties look at or hold different shapes. In one Key Stage 2 mathematics lesson, pupils were using the computer to record their results and then printing their work, after they had sorted shoes by colour.

92 At Key Stage 3 pupils also achieve very well in mathematics. They recognise three-dimensional shapes such as a cylinder, a cone and a cube. Many pupils know the days of the week and some know the months of the year. Higher attaining pupils understand what a cuboid is and add and subtract in units. Pupils with more profound learning difficulties including autism hold a cylinder and feel the difference between two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes. Many pupils count and

identify the smallest, the largest and the average in a range of numbers; and they add simple numbers mentally. Pupils achieve very well in mathematics and numeracy across the school in relation to their abilities and the targets set on their individual education plans. At Key Stage 4 pupils also achieve very well in mathematics. Most pupils make patterns with coloured shapes and they count in tens to two hundred. Higher attaining pupils count in hundreds to one thousand and repeat various number patterns. Pupils with more profound difficulties including those with autism, listen to other pupils count and watch patterns in shapes. At post-16 students are achieving very well in applying mathematics to everyday living. They prepare a simple budget for shopping and cooking, recognise 2p, 10p, 20p, and 50p coins, and count coins up to £2. Higher attaining pupils know that three £2 coins makes £6 and add on to £13.

93 The quality of teaching of mathematics is very good throughout the school. It is very good in Key Stages 1, 2 and 4 and at post-16, and good but often very good in Key Stage 3. Where teaching is very good, the teacher inspires and challenges pupils and uses prompts and cues, sometimes simplifying questions to ensure that pupils of all abilities can access the lesson. This enables pupils to learn very effectively so that they concentrate more, try harder and persist with their tasks. Behaviour is managed very well and there is very good teamwork with support assistants. For example, when a pupil with challenging behaviour wanders out of the room without permission, the teacher opens the door signalling to a support assistant to bring him back into class, so that the flow of teaching and learning for other pupils is not disrupted. As soon as the pupil returns, the teacher sets a firm expectation for his future behaviour, redirects him to the task and monitors his work more closely while continuing to pre-empt any further disturbance by targeting her teaching towards him. This ensures that all pupils remain well motivated and make at least good progress in their learning. Where teaching is good the teacher uses a variety of practical resources to demonstrate new mathematical ideas and to clarify pupils' misunderstandings in their learning, for example in a lesson where the teacher showed pupils examples of different three dimensional shapes to consolidate pupils' understanding of 'cuboid',

94 Support assistants are also very well deployed so that small group and individual work is given a focus on the particular individual needs of pupils. For example, in a Year 7 lesson pupils were learning about averages and the teacher started the lesson with whole class teaching. Pupils then worked in small groups with support assistants who used prompts, mathematical aids, cue cards and well conceived worksheets to develop pupils' greater understanding of averages. This ensured that pupils remained highly focused and gave very good responses to questions demonstrating their understanding. At the same time the teacher circulated between the groups to clarify any of their misconceptions about the topic and the lesson finished with a final whole class session to discuss what pupils had achieved and to further illustrate how to calculate an average. Teachers also make very good use of resources to consolidate understanding, for example, in using real flowers for counting in Year 1 and using real objects such as toy boats in Years 5 and 6 to consolidate learning of triangles. A strong feature of very good teaching in the secondary department and at post-16, is the use of real money, which elicits a mature response in the handling of cash and increases their understanding of the application of mathematics to everyday life. In one lesson with Years 7 and 8 pupils, it promoted their understanding of averages and in another lesson at post-16, it enabled students to understand the importance of preparing a budget and living within their means. Although teachers make very good use of mathematical equipment and communication aids to enable pupils with more profound learning difficulties to participate fully in lessons, there were no opportunities provided in lessons observed, for these pupils to use switches so that they could participate more fully in whole class mental mathematics activities.

95 Where mathematics teaching is good, teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding and there is consistently good lesson organisation within the planned scheme of work. This enables pupils to learn effectively, by building prior learning systematically upon new learning and consequently increasing their understanding of mathematical concepts. When teachers manage behaviour well it impacts positively on pupils learning, so they concentrate more on tasks, maintain good behaviour and are actively involved in lessons. Most of pupils show great interest in their lessons and are clearly pleased with themselves when they complete particular tasks well. They enjoy working hard and, in most

lessons, are totally absorbed in their activities. Some pupils remember events and facts very well, and older pupils sometimes ask challenging questions, for example, to check why they are doing particular tasks. Good teachers make very good use of time so that lessons are always lively, pupils work at a good pace and topics are well covered. Teachers set very high expectations through challenging questions to ensure pupils achieve to their fullest potential. However, insufficient homework is given to the few higher attaining pupils.

96 Mathematics is extremely well led by a very skilled and hard working mathematics co-ordinator, and there is a clear mathematics policy and very good scheme of work which is used effectively. The school is the lead school in Kent and a Key Stage 3 pilot special school for the National Numeracy Strategy, achieving well deserved recognition for its work. Very good planning is therefore in place, to match the strands of the National Numeracy Strategy to mathematics topics and individual education plans, throughout the school. This enables teachers to accommodate the individual and particular differences and difficulties in pupils' learning very well, and impacts very positively on pupils' achievements.

## **SCIENCE**

97 Pupils are achieving well and make good progress in science. At Key Stages 1 and 2, the pupils make very good progress in developing the use of their senses to observe and explain their environment. This is because teachers have high expectations and provide a good range of stimulating and challenging activities. They include all pupils in the context of the lesson and focus support and challenge appropriately to the individual needs of the pupils. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection. Higher attaining pupils at Key Stage 1 are able to identify colours and group objects such as pebbles, found on their earlier visit to the beech, on this basis. They know that plants need water to survive, identifying that their bean plants need more water because the soil was dry, for example. At Key Stage 2, higher attaining pupils know that materials have different properties and that this is useful, when selecting clothing to keep you dry. They have developed their understanding of life cycles, recognising that butterflies start as eggs and go through a series of transformations. They also develop appropriate terminology, using scientific words such as chrysalis and cocoon. Pupils with profound and multiple difficulties effectively develop their response to the environment. For example, younger pupils have made very good progress in identifying parts of their body, such as their feet, and moving these in order to create an effect in a sound beam. The pupils' achievement is very good at both Key Stages 1 and 2 because of the very good progress in individual lessons and the coherent way that this is consolidated and reinforced over time.

98 The pupils make satisfactory progress during Key Stages 3 and 4, so that achievement by the end of both key stages is satisfactory. These standards have been maintained since the previous inspection. Again, there is a good focus on developing pupils' scientific skills through exploring and explaining the world around them. Most pupils in Year 9, for example, recognise that the veins on leaves carry water and nutrients and compare this with veins carrying blood in their bodies. Higher attaining pupils are able to use pictures to identify leaves collected from outside. Most pupils at Key Stage 4 recognise the main parts of a plant, including leaf, stem and root. Higher attaining pupils know that the root develops underground and will bring water and nutrients into the plant. They recognise, through their study of germinating beans, the life cycle of plants. Some effective use is made of the available technology to support pupils with profound and multiple difficulties. Older pupils, for example, made good progress using switches to communicate their choices - yes or no - or their ideas - leaf or stem.

99 Teaching is good, with very good contributions made by support assistants to the pupils' learning. There has been a very good improvement in the teachers' own knowledge and understanding of science at Key Stages 1 and 2 since the previous inspection. Teaching is good in one half of lessons and very good in the other half at Key Stages 1 and 2. It is consistently satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4. Very good use is made of interesting and exciting resources to captivate the pupils' so that they work

with interest and enjoyment. In a Key Stage 2 lesson, for example, the pupils were excited at observing their caterpillars. The teacher then capitalised upon this, succeeding in getting the pupils to make a series of accurate observations through careful questioning. Questions are also well used, as in a Key Stage 4 lesson looking at plant roots, to encourage the pupils to remember back to previous lessons and apply their existing knowledge to new situations. This helps them to build ideas steadily and coherently. This is particularly effective at Key Stages 1 and 2 where science activities are linked well with other subjects to reinforce each other through the topic studied, for example with English, where pupils are developing a wider vocabulary and improving their listening and speaking when they observe change in their environment. Pupils are well managed, and when minor difficulties do arise, they are particularly well handled at Key Stages 1 and 2. There is a need to develop this aspect of expertise at Key Stages 3 and 4 to keep all pupils consistently involved and focused on the task and to ensure that lulls in learning, such as transitions between activities, are managed more smoothly.

100 Teachers use science activities well to reinforce other basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy. There is a very good focus on developing specific language and reinforcing phonics, as in a Key Stage 3 lesson on plants where the teacher encouraged pupils to spell out the names of the plants being identified. Good use is also made of number, with Key Stage 2 pupils for example, sequencing the life cycle of a butterfly in six stages. More use needs to be made of information technology to support learning however, for example, using a video of a crocodile hunter, when teaching about the functions of teeth. A good contribution is also made to supporting personal development by encouraging observation, explanation, choice and co-operation, which leads to good progress.

101 Management of the subject is satisfactory, although monitoring of lessons has yet to take place. Provision at Key Stages 1 and 2 is very much improved and the quality of that at Key Stages 3 and 4 has been maintained. Curriculum planning has improved so that there is now much greater coherence to learning but the teachers' termly plans at Key Stage 4 do not build sufficiently on teaching and learning at Key Stage 3.

## **ART**

102 At Key Stage 1, pupils make satisfactory progress and experience a satisfactory range of artistic processes. Pupils with more profound difficulties experience the texture and colour of paint and other materials. Higher attaining pupils produce simple line drawings, for example, a rectangle with circles for wheels to represent an engine. In a lesson during the inspection, some pupils could recognise that mixing blue and yellow had created green. Pupils stirred and mixed the paint and applied it with a brush or their hands. A higher attaining pupil discovered several different ways of applying the paint, including stippling and dripping paint onto the paper. As a result, he achieved some interesting surface paint effects and varied shades of colour.

103 At Key Stage 2, pupils make satisfactory progress and occasionally, progress in lessons is good. A number of pupils in the middle of Key Stage 2 have sufficient skill to draw or paint figures, with appropriate facial details and quite accurate proportions. Drawings of faces include eyes, nose and a mouth in the correct position, and a higher attaining pupil produced a more oval face, added ears and the suggestion of a hat and hair. In a lesson during the inspection, pupils chose colours, arranged cut-out feet to form a patterned arrangement on a large sheet of paper and stuck them in place. One pupil knew the word 'zigzag' to describe the pattern in a photograph of 'art in nature' by the artist Andy Goldsworthy. Pupils with more profound learning difficulties painted with their hands or explored the decorative effects of glittery materials. In this lesson, all pupils achieved well as a result of good teaching and an appropriate match of tasks to abilities. By the end of the key stage, pupils are refining their cutting skills and, with prompting, can glue a stick to the centre of a butterfly cut-out. They apply paint and one pupil drew circles then filled them in to suggest the pattern on a butterfly's wings. The further development of drawing skills is not evident as pupils near the end of the key stage but the development of artistic skills across the curriculum to support other subjects brings overall progress

close to satisfactory.

104 By the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils are producing paintings which are very similar to those produced at Key Stages 1 and 2. Painting consists mainly of daubs of colour, with some colour variation and texture but there is a lack of context for individual work. It is generally only in displays of work produced by a group of pupils, under adult direction, that pupils are producing work with a clear context. Paintings of plants, after looking at the work of Leonardo Da Vinci, are of better quality and show that much more drawing and work from direct observation would develop pupils' skills. In lessons at Key Stage 3, pupils made fairly limited progress and in one lesson, their achievement was unsatisfactory. This was a direct result of weaknesses in teaching and tasks which were either ill-matched to the learning needs of some pupils or contained little learning potential. By the end of Key Stage 4, higher attaining pupils show better control when colouring in and choice of magazine images is evident in a collage. They draw and label plans, as higher attainers do at the end of the previous key stage. Some group work uses collage effectively to communicate ideas.

105 Teaching is satisfactory as a result of secure general teaching skills but the creative content of most art lessons is under-developed. A minority of lessons, one at Key Stage 2 and one at post-16, were good. One lesson at Key Stage 3 was unsatisfactory and another contained shortcomings. At Key Stage 1, teaching is satisfactory. Pupils receive ample adult support but lesson planning does not identify the learning objectives for pupils of differing abilities. The emphasis is on giving pupils direct experience of the materials, with too little attention to achieving a pleasing outcome. Pupils learn about the qualities of the paint, concentrate well and enjoy the materials. They readily share materials with one another and are absorbed for most of the time. However, not enough attention is paid to extending pupils' work beyond the level of immediate experience. A higher attaining pupil whose painting was very successful was encouraged by a supporting adult to wipe his hands across the surface, thus destroying all that he had worked hard to produce. At Key Stage 2, teaching is mostly satisfactory but sometimes good. In a good lesson, the teacher paid attention to developing pupils' communication and vocabulary and matched tasks well to three different ability groups in the class. Planning made the objectives clear and pupils tried hard, clearly enjoying the session. In a satisfactory lesson, the teacher linked the topic well to work pupils had done in science, explained clearly and managed pupils' behaviour very well. As a result, pupils interacted positively with one another and engaged in creative effort. The planning lacked detail, however, and matched work insufficiently to different abilities. Better practical tasks, though on the theme of butterflies, would have led to deeper learning and potentially more successful outcomes.

106 Especially at Key Stages 3 and 4, limited subject expertise and the lack of a whole-school scheme of work to support teachers sometimes results in tasks which have insufficient learning opportunities. In two lessons at Key Stage 3, there were missed opportunities to extend pupils' vocabulary and communication, and practical tasks were ill-conceived. In an unsatisfactory lesson, the pace was slow, behaviour management strategies were ineffective, learning objectives were unclear and all pupils – even a pupil with profound learning difficulties – were set exactly the same task. The session lacked control and focus and made little contribution to pupil's learning. Although they responded better when they moved on to painting, pupils were restless. In another lesson which contained shortcomings, planning was more detailed but learning objectives were still unclear. There were some missed opportunities for language development but the task provided reasonable scope for those pupils with greater dexterity at shaping dough. The teacher handled mildly inappropriate behaviour by a minority of pupils quite well, and most pupils showed interest in the task. Pupils made some progress in shaping dough and looking at a range of plastic animals, but the pace was slow and insufficient attention was given to developing skills through direct teaching.

107 At post-16, teaching is good. There is a very good ethos for learning and a real sense of purpose. Planning is well considered, with a close matching of tasks to different abilities. Students with more profound learning difficulties are very well integrated and all students benefit from the close relationships with all the adults in the setting. They concentrate well, help one another, and show interest

in set tasks. Higher attainers show initiative and readily talk about what they are doing. Very good resources for the India project enrich students' experience.

108 In most lessons observed and in the scrutiny of pupils' work at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4, their achievement was satisfactory. Long-term planning is in place for the subject but individual teachers interpret these in devising medium-term plans. There is not yet sufficient communication between teachers at different key stages to ensure systematic progress from one key stage to the next. This lack of a co-ordinated scheme of work for use across the school or of an assessment system for art reduces the progress that pupils make over time, especially at Key Stage 3 where teaching tends to be weaker than at other key stages. Progression in basic skills or in the context of practical work as pupils move through the senior department is not always evident. In painting especially, there is insufficient development between Key Stages 1 and 4. In the work of higher attainers, progress from one key stage to the next is more apparent.

109 The art co-ordinator took over responsibility for the subject quite recently, following absence of the previous co-ordinator. She is suitably qualified in art and is aware of what needs to be done, especially in relation to rewriting the art policy, developing a whole-school scheme of work and devising an assessment system. She already provides advice and support to staff, has begun to monitor subject coverage and achieved dramatically improved resourcing for the subject. The school now has a good range of consumable materials, though visual reference material is very limited. Across the school, teachers' subject knowledge needs to be improved. Cutting, sticking, printing and painting, but often with no recognisable image, are evident at all key stages. With few exceptions, teachers provide insufficient opportunities for pupils to draw – either from imagination or from direct observation. There are limited examples of work in mixed media and materials could generally be used much more imaginatively to foster pupils' creativity. There are few examples of work in three dimensions, beyond very basic work with dough, and teachers do not make enough reference to the work of other artists. Where they have done so, resulting practical work is invariably of a better quality. Insufficient use is made of information technology and there is no subject development plan.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

110 Most lessons and a scrutiny of pupils' work show that pupils achievement is satisfactory. Long-term planning is in place for the subject but individual teachers interpret these plans in devising medium-term plans without sufficient communication between teachers at different key stages to ensure systematic progress from one key stage to the next. So although medium-term plans exist, there is no co-ordinated scheme of work for use across the school. There is also limited teaching time allocated to the subject and no assessment system. These factors necessarily reduce the progress that pupils make and especially so at Key Stage 3, where teaching tends to be weaker than at other key stages. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory at Key Stages 1 and 2; unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3, and good at Key Stage 4. Pupils' achievement is best when they are making things with less evidence of designing and evaluating.

111 Younger pupils, in Key Stages 1 and 2, develop very simple skills for cutting materials usually with scissors and then joining different pieces together using glue. In a good Key Stage 2 lesson, several pupils contributed to the design of a pair of sandals and this also occurred in a project to design a hat to which different materials, including textiles were added for decoration. At Key Stages 3 and 4, design and technology consists primarily of cookery and woodwork which represents the areas of food technology and resistant materials in National Curriculum Programmes of Study. In the former area, pupils demonstrate that they can contribute to the preparation of a meal by peeling, cutting and mixing ingredients and stirring whilst they cook. In the latter, pupils at Key Stage 4 have produced wheeled toys of a very high standard. Accurate use of templates occurs, shapes are cut with precision and the toys painted and varnished to a very high standard. However, every toy is identical and all too often the contribution of staff has clearly outweighed the contribution of pupils.



112 Teaching is generally satisfactory but varies from topic to topic. It was good in woodwork at Key Stages 1 and 2 and for Key Stages 3 and 4 but unsatisfactory in cookery at Key Stage 3, where pupils tended to be supervised rather than taught. The best teaching is characterised by good planning which draws in references from other class work, such as stories read to the class in English. This not only helps pupils to learn about design and technology but also reinforces literacy skills and creates interest in pupils, which transfers to good learning because pupils want to finish their work to a good standard. Most pupils enjoy their design and technology lessons. There are many photographs of happy pupils being involved and there is a clear pride in finished work, irrespective of their contribution. When pupils are interested, they also present few behaviour problems, allowing lessons to proceed at a good pace. Where teaching was unsatisfactory, the teacher took too long to get a lesson started, this resulted in pupils losing interest, slowing the pace of the lesson further and presenting behaviour management problems that the teacher found hard to manage. For example, pupils at Key Stage 3 in particular are sometimes slow to settle, impatient and unco-operative. In cookery lessons, however, the pupils' mood is more one of contentment at being left to their own devices rather than real enthusiasm to do their best. Nevertheless, many make pleasant conversation with one another in lessons, show that they can co-operate when taking turns to stir a pan of food and some help to wash up and clear away at the end of the lesson. Lack of attention to detailed planning results in less experienced teachers supervising set routines rather than systematically teaching new skills and techniques.

113 The new co-ordinator has good ideas for developing the subject. At present, there is virtually no textile work at Key Stages 3 and 4, food technology is interpreted more as cookery and work with resistant materials as woodwork. At Key Stages 1 and 2, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to practice a good range of cutting and joining skills. Throughout the school, there is not enough emphasis on designing and evaluation. These weaknesses have been recognised by the school and the new co-ordinator brings with her the knowledge and enthusiasm to tackle them. More resources have already been ordered and a development plan is emerging, well informed by the good policy.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

114 Only one lesson of geography was seen during the inspection. However, sufficient evidence was available through scrutiny of pupils' work, examination of classroom displays and discussions with pupils and teachers to enable judgements to be made.

115 Pupils are making good progress in the development of geographical skills. They carry out investigative work and record their findings, for example, when pupils recall their observations after a walk in the woods. A strength of the curriculum is the pupils' mapping skills. For example in Key Stage 1 pupils are required to keep a record of their journey when making an autumn walk. This developed in Key Stage 3 when pupils learn about the course of a river and understand that it ends up going into the sea. A strength of the curriculum is the emphasis placed on the pupils' understanding of the effect of the environment; for example, Year 6 pupils visited an owl sanctuary and a farm to broaden their experiences of the treatment of animals and birds. There is good provision for enabling pupils to understand the school's locality and contrast it with other localities; for example pupils visit the city to identify key buildings such as shops, services and places of interest. This work is then developed through visits to urban and coastal areas where similarities and differences are noted. Pupils also investigate life in other countries through the topic on India and the visits to Holland and Germany for the international music and drama project.

116 During the week of the inspection only one lesson was observed and this was good. Further more the quality of teacher's planning is good with activities planned in an appropriate sequence that builds upon pupils' previous experiences and skills. The planning indicates clear learning outcomes, good use of resources and the teaching of specific geographical language. There are good links with other subjects and there are many planned opportunities to support the development of the pupils'

literacy skills. For example, in Key Stage 1 the work on Folkestone harbour was reinforced when reading 'The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch'. There are good relationships between teachers and pupils and effective use is made of field work in and around the school. The pupils' responses to learning are good in all key stages and they behave very well on trips outside of school. They are given opportunities to work co-operatively and collaboratively and enjoy being able to do work on their own or in small groups. A particular strength of the planning is the use of sensory activities to ensure the inclusion of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

117 The co-ordinator provides good management and leadership and future priorities have been established through a detailed review of the curriculum. There is now a clear policy statement and schemes of work are well developed to provide activities in an appropriate sequence that builds upon their previous experiences. There are good procedures for monitoring the geography curriculum, for example monitoring of planning. The geography resources are satisfactory and very good use is made of the local environment to stimulate pupils' interests and improve their learning.

## **HISTORY**

118 Only one lesson of history was seen during the inspection. However sufficient evidence was available through the scrutiny of pupils' work, examination of classroom displays and discussions with pupils and teachers to enable judgements to be made.

119 In Key Stages 1 and 2 pupils make very good progress and are beginning to understand the differences between past and present and old and new. Year 1 and 2 pupils have visited a farm and the seaside to experience the changes that take place in such places. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 have visited Bodiam Castle and tried on clothes from the past to compare them with those that they wear to school. By the end of the Key Stage 2 pupils experience the challenge of sequencing a number of events when, for example, they look at life cycles in their topic on minibeasts. Key Stage 3 pupils also make good progress and develop an understanding of different periods in the past; for example, with guidance pupils are able to sequence four homes from different periods in chronological order. At lower Key Stage 3 pupils are introduced to the Second World War and focus on understanding specific words related to the time such as aeroplane, soldier, tank and air raid shelter. Strong features of the history curriculum are the encouragement of speaking and listening and the good links with other subjects.

120 Only one lesson of history was seen during the inspection and the teaching was good. However the detailed planning of teachers shows that they have good subject knowledge and place a strong emphasis on the practical investigation of history. The teaching has strong links with the books used in literacy and there are many planned opportunities to develop pupils' speaking, listening and writing skills. Teachers prepare their lessons well and focus the outcomes on the pupils' individual targets. They have high expectations of what pupils will achieve and assess and mark the pupils' work with care. Teachers clearly communicate their enthusiasm for the subject and this leads to pupils being able to discuss their topic work with confidence. The care with which pupils record their work reflects their interest in and enjoyment of history. Pupils behave very well on visits and thoroughly enjoy the opportunities to develop the understanding of history through personal experience. For example, pupils were able to identify the features that distinguish new and old clothes based upon their visit to Bodiam Castle.

121 The history curriculum is well planned using a whole school topic cycle to reflect the National Curriculum programmes of study. The co-ordinator has a good overview of the subject and provides strong leadership and effective management. Detailed schemes of work have been developed and show how pupils will be given activities in a sequence that builds upon their previous experiences. The informative displays in classrooms and around the school play a significant part in increasing pupils' interests and progress. There is a wide range of resources to support teaching, including interesting artefacts which pupils are able to handle carefully and sensibly. Pupils' understanding and knowledge

are developed through excellent use of the local community, visits to museums and other places of interest.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

122 Until the beginning of this academic year, the school had made slow progress in developing its information technology provision. Over this year, the school has made rapid progress however and there is some good use of information technology throughout the school. Work is in hand to develop the use of information technology to its full potential.

123 Older pupils, at Key Stage 4 and post-16, make good or very good progress in individual sessions intended to develop their information technology skills. Most Key Stage 4 pupils are able to load different programs and use the mouse or trackball competently to complete tasks such as matching colours and shapes. Higher attaining pupils are able to retrieve information from encyclopaedia and complete simulation programs, such as shopping. Students at post-16, with varying degrees of support, are able to log on to the college network and use a search engine to find interesting sites on the Internet – mostly about pop groups. Higher attaining students need less support and are more focused in their searches. Information technology is also used effectively in some lessons at Key Stages 1 and 2. For example, in one lesson at Key Stage 1, a pupil made very good progress in the use of the computer to develop his reading skills when, for example, he used the mouse to select a key word from a sentence which he had just heard on the computer. Sometimes, as in a Key Stage 2 mathematics lesson, pupils use information technology to support learning in other subjects. Here, pupils were sorting shoes by colour and, with some support, putting the results on to the computer and then printing their work. Pupils therefore achieve well in lessons, although their progress over time is a little less secure because the good experiences in individual lessons have not developed the pupils' ideas and skills consistently and progressively enough.

124 Good use is also made of information technology to enable pupils with more profound learning difficulties to interact with their environment. Key Stage 1 pupils were able to move their feet to interact with a sound beam, press switches to activate bells and coloured lights, and move their hands to make chime bars ring. This enabled them to make very good progress in establishing control over their environment and learning the principles of cause and effect. At Key Stage 2, pupils could push a switch to activate the program. Pupils at Key Stage 3 were able to use the touch screen to 'move' a bee on to a flower. In a science lesson at Key Stage 4, pupils were encouraged to express their opinions – yes / no – or ideas – leaf / root – using simple switches. Furthermore, the use of information technology not only enhances the interactions which pupils with more profound learning difficulties have with the environment, but also enable them to make very good progress in literacy as they make significant gains in listening and communication. For example, one pupil with severe and complex learning difficulties transferred from hospital to intensive support at home, and eventually was admitted into the school. In a very short period of time this pupil has made excellent progress in communication and interaction with the environment through the systematic use of technological aids to support her learning. Such consistent practice is not evident in all lessons, however, and there are instances when teachers do not make appropriate use of technological aids to support the communication of pupils with more profound difficulties.

125 The direct teaching of information technology is good at Key Stage 4 and very good at post-16, where an excellent contribution is made by college staff. The use of information technology in other lessons is also managed effectively. There is a good balance between supporting pupils and encouraging their independence, with their varying needs being well met in this way. The pupils enjoy using computers, concentrate well and apply themselves to their tasks. This enables teachers and support assistants to work in depth with individuals, thereby solving problems and developing skills at a good pace. The knowledge and understanding of the teachers and support assistants is sufficiently well developed to enable this to happen.

126 Since the start of this academic year, there has been a much sharper focus to development, for example, the school has carried out a full audit of switches, has purchased new switches in the light of the audit and has provided whole staff training in their use. However, not all teachers use switches in their lessons to ensure pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties achieve as well as they should. But the school is poised for greater success in the use of information technology at the start of the next term. A minimum set of resources for each classroom is being established and, in co-operation with other schools in the local severe learning difficulties schools consortium, an effective framework for the curriculum is being developed. The subject is well led and the co-ordinator has established a clear direction for further development. This includes ensuring that all teachers use information technology more extensively and systematically to support learning across the curriculum. It also requires that programmes designed to provide greater access and choice, for pupils with profound and multiple difficulties for example, are built up more progressively over time. Furthermore, it ensures that the underpinning information technology skills are themselves developed systematically and progressively throughout the school. Once implemented this will make better use of the resources that already exist and enable a realistic assessment of any additional resources needed.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

### **French**

127 Pupils make satisfactory progress in modern foreign languages and achieve at a satisfactory level over a broad range of activities and experiences. The strength of the modern foreign languages programme is that it wisely concentrates on giving pupils a taste of what life is like in other countries whilst helping them to build up a small but useful vocabulary. Most of this is French but a very small number of words and phrases (such as how to greet people or tell them what your name is) in Portuguese, German and Dutch are also learned.

128 Many Key Stage 3 pupils can count to ten in French and have a simple vocabulary that would help them to ask for what they would like in a café. They can articulate what they want by using the words 'je voudrais' or 'avez-vous?'. A good achievement in modern foreign languages is that many pupils have shared experience of language with German and Dutch children on exchange visits.

129 Most pupils enjoy learning elements of different languages. In videos, they can be seen mixing, communicating and performing at their own level with children from other countries. Irrespective of their difficulties with pronouncing new words, they are un-selfconscious and always try, knowing that other pupils will not make fun of them if they make a mistake. There are occasional problems in lessons, when the behaviour of a minority can be poor, monopolising staff time and resulting in disruption which slows the learning of the majority. In the main, however, the response is satisfactory and the subject makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development by encouraging them to broaden their horizons and relate well to people from other countries.

130 Insufficient teaching could be observed to inform judgements based on first hand evidence. The teaching in the one lesson observed was unsatisfactory but on the evidence contained in videos, from discussion with pupils and with reference to pupils' achievements, there are many reasons to suppose that this was an exception. It was caused by an inexperienced teacher being faced with the very difficult behaviour of a small minority of pupils and failing to manage this behaviour sufficiently well. Even in this lesson, however, although much of it was disrupted, it ended well when the teacher belatedly introduced more practical activities in which pupils became more involved and started to concentrate more on the work than each other. When this started to happen, the teacher was able to use good questioning to ensure that pupils were learning, pupils were being rewarded for their effort and were consequently trying harder to please.

131 There is a clear philosophy which drives the development of the subject. It is not always sufficiently linked to the practice by which it will be fulfilled but overall, the curriculum and management of the subject is satisfactory. There are particular strengths in the priorities for developing the subject through more practical experiences and through the particularly good contribution to pupils' cultural and social development. There is also a weakness, with regard to the lack of recording of what individual pupils are achieving then using this to plan and develop future studies.

## MUSIC

132 At Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils achieve well and make good progress in music. At Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils' achievements and progress are also good. In some aspects of music, pupils at all key stages make very good progress. In many music lessons, both pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties take part.

133 Pupils in Key Stage 1 achieve especially well in responding to the beat and style of music which they express well in movement. This activity is initiated especially to help pupils with writing. Pupils with severe learning difficulties co-ordinate limb movements to a standard which compares well with mainstream pupils of the same age. In their movement lessons, they also use ribbons to make circle shapes in the air. In this activity they hear a range of music of different styles, for example Satie's Gymnopedie and 'piano boogie'.

134 In Key Stage 2, pupils learn about music from other countries, for example Africa and Bali. In one lesson they listened to Gamelan music on tape whilst exploring instruments which were set up to produce a five-note scale. In this lesson, they also experienced the smells of oriental spices, and dressed in exotic clothes in order to deepen their experience of the music of far-away Bali. At this key stage the older pupils compose simple pieces with percussion instruments. They choose instruments carefully for particular effects, as well as selecting cards with graphic notation to help them shape their pieces. One of the weekly lessons for these pupils is taken along with pupils from a mainstream school. This is a very successful initiative, particularly enabling St Nicholas' pupils to work at a very high level and enjoy a wider range of musical experiences, including independent group work.

135 By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils take part, with support, in a three-part round, keep a steady beat when clapping, tapping and vocalising, and make good musical choices when composing their own music. They co-ordinate limbs and feet well in their rhythm games, and respond well to simple pictorial notation when performing their compositions. They sing popular songs energetically with a well-sustained tone matched to the style. At this stage they make connections between musical sounds and what the sounds might express, using both real instruments and everyday objects.

136 As they approach the end of Key Stage 4, pupils maintain their good achievements. They learn to associate the notes of a musical scale on tuned percussion instruments. They also combine their scales and phrases to make very good whole-class compositions which they record, play back and evaluate.

137 At all key stages, attitudes to lessons are good, and in some lessons very good. They show interest generally, and enjoy hearing music of different styles. They particularly enjoy using tuned and untuned instruments. Even the younger pupils take very good care of the instruments. In most lessons they work with enthusiasm and develop a fair sense of creativity and a communal spirit. Pupils remain interested throughout lessons. This was especially noticeable at Key Stage 3.

138 Of seven lessons observed, teaching was judged to be very good in four, two were good and one was satisfactory. In most lessons teachers are very confident in initiating activities and show a very good understanding of effective teaching methods. Lessons are very well prepared, teachers use a very good range of materials and adopt a brisk pace to which pupils respond. Lessons are interesting and engaging and also provide good opportunities for pupils to learn about other things, for example other cultural

traditions, new vocabulary and mathematical concepts. The arrangements made for teaching pupils in a variety of groupings contribute very well to pupils' social and cultural development.

139 Pupils learn well. In some music lessons, individual pupils respond very well, for example, showing good physical co-ordination through bodily movement and by playing instruments. In lessons where a multi-sensory approach is taken, learning is of a high quality. Pupils work hard and productively in lessons. This was especially noticeable when they worked in groups with mainstream peers. Many pupils of all ages and capabilities know when they are succeeding at their tasks. They recognise good standards in their own performances as well as those of their peers.

140 Music is very well co-ordinated by an enthusiastic teacher who works effectively both as a specialist and also alongside the class teachers. A good policy and schemes of work have been prepared. These schemes help to ensure that pupils build securely on previous learning. Pupils are assessed well in the various aspects of their musical achievements. The school employs a music therapist who works with individual pupils selected on the basis of specific problems and needs. The music co-ordinator and pupil's class teacher receive feedback after therapy sessions. This represents an improvement in liaison since the last inspection. However, at present, reliable means of evaluating the effectiveness of the therapy have not been developed. All pupils enjoy musical experiences that are additional to the regular lessons. These include mini-festivals in which they are involved with pupils from other schools, and workshops provided by visiting musicians, for example a composer, a jazz band and a steel band.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

141 Pupils are making good progress in physical education and achieve well in relation to their ability. This is because in the main they are well taught, they enjoy the subject and they are given the opportunity to learn over a good range of activities. For some pupils, those with the least mobility, at all key stages, the physical education programme is almost totally influenced and guided by programmes developed by physiotherapists and involves pupils in trying to exercise muscles and joints, usually with the considerable support of staff. At all key stages, the achievements of pupils relate more to the degree of their physical disability than to their age.

142 At Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils move and stretch in simple floor exercises and explore movement at different levels, reaching, bending and crawling to music. They use very little apparatus and are not developing sequences of activities to a significant degree but are able to change direction when they are running in and out of skittles. In games, pupils are developing simple skills as they roll a ball towards one another, mostly with reasonable accuracy. In swimming, pupils look at ease in the water, many are supported 1:1 by staff but they have the confidence to put their faces in the water. They also discover that kicking their legs helps propel them through the water and a small minority swim independently, one for a full length of the pool (10m). At Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils are building well on the skills they have learned. They show more confidence and independence of movement and in games, in particular, they are developing good skills which are enabling them to join in with games of football, basketball and cricket with success. There is less progress in gymnastics where the lack of a qualified teacher is restricting the progress and resulting in pupils using very little apparatus.

143 Most pupils clearly enjoy their physical education lessons, they make a real effort to please and exercise to the fullest of their ability. Exceptions occur when individuals, sometimes as a result of uninspired teaching, but more often by pupils who just do not like exercise and do not commit themselves sufficiently. These exceptions occur almost exclusively at Key Stage 3 as pupils become more self-conscious. In games, there is a huge generosity of spirit; pupils co-operate well, try their hardest and do not moan when things are not going well for them. In swimming there is a lot of joy in the water and pupils behave impeccably in the public swimming pool and on the journey to and from it.

144 Teaching is usually good. The best teaching is happening in two different circumstances. In one

it is the result of teachers, with very little expertise, following very well planned lessons with a good range of activities and clear targets; in the other it is the result of exceptional coaching skills which are compensating for inexperience in teaching. In the former instance, because the lessons are well planned the teacher is able to focus totally on ensuring that pupils are being given a lot of guidance and encouragement and ensuring that they make the maximum effort throughout lessons which proceed at a pace which keeps pupils interested and motivated. In the latter instance the very good coaching skills of an individual ensure that these pupils involved are acquiring good skills and an understanding that is enabling them to enter, and in cricket win, competitions. This has a huge motivating effect on pupils. But in one lesson where teaching was unsatisfactory, pupils were not challenged or encouraged to exercise or participate as hard as they might in team games so that they lost interest and made insufficient effort which led to unsatisfactory progress in the lesson.

145 There has been a weakness in the way that the subject is co-ordinated. This has been recognised by the school and a co-ordinator has recently been appointed. In the past, whilst individuals, and class groups, have been making good progress there has been a lack of planning to ensure that as pupils grow older they are always building upon the skills and knowledge that they have previously learned and this has stopped progress being even better. The problem is added to by the fact that whilst individual teachers are monitoring standards, no-one builds up an overview of the subject to identify common strengths and weaknesses and to tackle them in mid and long term planning. At the time of the last inspection physical education provision was good and it still is. Progress is being hindered by limited resources, particularly with regard to gymnastics apparatus.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

146 Since the last inspection, the school has made very good improvement in the planning and teaching of religious education.

147 In Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils make good progress and have a good knowledge of different religious beliefs and their festivals. Pupils are aware that different religions are represented through different books and their knowledge about Christianity and Bible stories is good, for example, Year 3 and 4 pupils are aware of the tale of Joseph and his coat. They can describe some of the symbols and the special events and celebrations of different religions. Year 10 pupils examined artefacts that are significant to the Sikh faith. Pupils are introduced to the similarities and differences of a variety of world religions; for example Key Stage 4 pupils compared the Sikh and Christian religions. They make good progress thinking about ideas such as responsibility, tolerance and friendship as elements of religious stories. Throughout the school, pupils learn well about key concepts such as love, justice, respect and forgiveness and are encouraged to practice such values in their own lives. In Key Stages 1 and 2 the use of 'candle time' at the end of every day is particularly effective in providing opportunities and time for pupils to reflect and enjoy quiet.

148 The quality of teaching is good and ranges from very good to unsatisfactory. Where teaching is very good tasks are well planned for the different abilities of pupils and support staff are effectively deployed to ensure that all pupils are learning at their full potential. This very good teaching makes very effective use of skilful questioning to probe pupils' understanding and help them to take part fully in the different activities. As a result, the pupils behave very well, have very positive attitudes towards their work and participate willingly in all aspects of the lessons. They are enthusiastic in undertaking the tasks that are set, concentrate for sustained periods of time and achieve what is expected of them. Teaching is unsatisfactory when challenging behaviour is inappropriately managed and the lesson is disrupted and becomes fragmented. This leads to deteriorating relationships between pupils and staff and a tense atmosphere. Consequently, pupils do not concentrate well, tasks are not completed and time is wasted. Teachers use resources well and a good number of religious artefacts add interest and flavour to the teaching.

149 Since the last inspection, the recently appointed curriculum co-ordinator has very successfully reviewed the religious education policy and the school is now working from the new Kent Agreed Syllabus. There are very detailed schemes of work to provide guidance for teachers about the skills and knowledge to be taught in each year. This ensures that pupils are provided with activities in sequence that builds upon their previous learning. The leadership and management of the subject are very good and there are good procedures for the effective monitoring and support of teaching. There are good procedures for the assessment and recording of pupils' progress. Teachers' evaluations and assessments of individual learning targets are very thorough and enable future targets to be set to provide further challenges for the pupils.