

INSPECTION REPORT

The Alderton Junior School

Loughton

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 114861

Headteacher: Judith Lunn

Reporting inspector: Terry Browne
1503

Dates of inspection: 6 - 9 June 2000

Inspection number: 190791

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Junior
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	7 - 11
Gender of pupils:	mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Stephen Murray
Date of previous inspection:	4 November 1996

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			How well are pupils taught?
Selwyn Ward	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Elizabeth Coley	Team inspector	Mathematics	How well does the school care for its pupils?
		Music	
Stuart Hayter	Team inspector	Science	
		Art	
		Design and technology	
Jim Howard	Team inspector	Geography	
		History	
		Physical education	
Stephen Parker	Team inspector	English	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
		Equal opportunities	
John Viner	Team inspector	Religious Education	How well is the school led and managed?
		Special educational needs	English as an additional language

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

How good the school is

This is an effective school, providing satisfactory value for money. Pupils overall achieve satisfactory standards in all subjects. The headteacher provides strong leadership and is well supported by governors and staff. This has led to significant improvements in the school since the last inspection. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory, within a happy and secure environment for pupils' learning.

What the school does well

- Standards achieved and the quality of education have improved significantly since the last inspection.
- Pupils behave well and there are good relationships throughout the school.
- Pupils have many opportunities to take responsibility and these contribute to very good social development.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good.
- The strong leadership of the headteacher and the teamwork of the staff support on-going improvement.

What could be improved

- The 9 per cent of teaching that is less than satisfactory.
- The achievement of the more-able pupils throughout the school.
- The standards of pupils' writing, including its use across subjects.
- The breadth and use of pupils' information technology skills, especially across other subjects, building on the effective teaching provided in the computer suite.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

How the school has improved since its last inspection

The school was last inspected in November 1996. Since then the test results indicate that standards have improved significantly from well below to in line with the national average. The school responded well to the last report by addressing the health and safety issues, improving curriculum planning and assessment, and developing the roles of co-ordinators. The provision for information technology has been substantially improved through the creation of a computer suite, although the breadth and use of information technology need further development. The school has maintained the strengths identified at the last inspection. These include the pupils' positive attitudes and their good response to the supportive ethos. The school is in a strong position to continue to improve.

Standards

The table shows the standards achieved by 11 year olds based on average point scores in national tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
English	E	D	C	D
mathematics	E	D	C	D
science	E	E	D	D

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

The results over the last four years overall have shown a rising trend, at a rate above the national trend. The overall 1999 results were in line with the national averages when compared with all schools and just below average compared with similar schools, as defined by the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. When taking account of pupils' prior attainment, the progress made by pupils was just below both local authority and national averages. Standards in the work seen during the inspection in mathematics and science were in line with those expected for the pupils' ages. Whilst overall standards in English were in line with those expected, standards of writing need to be improved. In information technology many pupils were confident and had good skills in the aspects of the work covered, although they did not use computers well enough across the curriculum. Standards in religious education and in all other subjects were generally in line with those expected for pupils' ages. There were examples of good art work. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, but the more-able pupils do not achieve high enough standards, especially in English and science. However, in mathematics the more-able pupils achieve well.

For the year 2000, the school's targets are for 50 per cent of Year 6 pupils to achieve level 4 or above in English, and 40 per cent to achieve level 4 or above in mathematics. Although lower than previous years these targets are suitably challenging, given the prior attainment of this particular year group.

Pupils' attitudes and values

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils enjoy coming to school. Most pupils are keen to learn and are attentive in lessons.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Pupils behave well in most lessons and around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Pupils relate very well to each other and they are polite and helpful. Older pupils willingly take on a range of responsibilities.
Attendance	Attendance is broadly in line with the national average, as is unauthorised absence.

Teaching and learning

Teaching of pupils:	aged 7-11 years
Lessons seen overall	Satisfactory

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.

In 91 per cent of lessons observed teaching was satisfactory or better. In 13 per cent of lessons it was very good; in 34 per cent it was good and in 44 per cent it was satisfactory; it was less than satisfactory in 9 per cent of lessons.

The overall teaching of mathematics and literacy is satisfactory, including the teaching of number skills, reading and of speaking and listening. However, the teaching of writing is less effective, with insufficient extended writing or attention to writing skills across subjects. The teaching of religious education seen was good and pupils' work reflects good teaching of art. Teachers work well together to produce detailed planning. Teachers' expectations are satisfactory in some subjects such as mathematics, but need to be raised to challenge the more-able pupils in most other subjects. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported. Teachers record a useful range of assessment data, but the day-to-day marking of pupils' work needs to be improved. Although unsatisfactory in a few lessons, classroom management is good in most lessons. Pupils' positive attitudes help them to learn effectively, especially when the work is well-matched to their needs.

Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. The full range of subjects is taught within a generally balanced curriculum, although there are currently no swimming lessons. Visits and visitors enhance the curriculum, for example in history, geography and religious education. The school offers a good range of extra-curricular activity. Sport is popular and enhances the physical education provision.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. There are good systems in place to provide for these pupils' needs. Pupils are supported well by the teacher assistants.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Overall good. The caring relationships, the role models of adults and the school assemblies promote good moral values. Provision for social development is very good. Pupils are trusted, they are given responsibilities and they get on well together. The school makes sound provision for spiritual development and for pupils to appreciate cultural traditions.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. The school monitors and supports pupils' personal development well. Assessment procedures are sound, although the information could be used more to support teaching, especially of more-able pupils.

How well the school is led and managed

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides strong leadership. Other staff carry out responsibilities delegated to them effectively. The whole staff work well as a team and this contributes to the school's positive ethos. Day-to-day organisation is good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities; they know the school's strengths and weaknesses and take action to support improvements.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There are good systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of education. The headteacher has established a routine of lesson observation, scrutiny of books and teachers' plans, providing a good foundation for further improvement.
The strategic use of resources	The overall provision of staffing, accommodation and learning resources is sound. Financial management and strategic use of resources are sound. The school applies the principles of best value well, especially through a local consortium of schools, to make efficient use of its funding and resources.

Parents' and carers' views of the school

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school and make good progress • Behaviour in the school is good • The teaching is good • The children are expected to work hard and achieve their best • The school is well led and managed • The staff are approachable • Their children are helped to become mature and responsible 	<p>A small number of parents felt that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children do not get the right amount of work to do at home • The school does not work closely enough with parents • There is not an interesting range of activities outside lessons

The inspection supports many of the views of parents. The school works well in partnership with parents and the community. Parents receive clear information from the school and are confident to talk to staff. Although some parents commented they were less than satisfied with the annual pupil reports, these are satisfactory with some good features. The inspectors judged that the school offers a good range of extra-curricular activity, but agree with parents who feel there are inconsistencies in the amount of homework set.

PART B: COMMENTARY

How high are standards?

The school's results and achievements

1. The school's 1999 Key Stage 2 test results in English and mathematics were close to the national averages for all schools. Results in science, based on pupils' average points, were below the national average, although the proportion reaching the expected level was in line with the national average. Over the last three years there has been a significant improvement in the results for all three core subjects, from performance that was well below the national average in 1996. The rate of improvement has been above the national trend. Although overall there is little current difference in the performance of boys and girls, the greater improvement over recent years has been made in the performance of girls. When compared with similar schools, based on the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, the 1999 results were just below average in each of English, mathematics and science.
2. Both national and local authority data suggest that the progress made by the 1999 Year 6 pupils was just below that which should be expected from the end of Key Stage 1 to the end of Key Stage 2. Data also indicates that overall in mathematics the more-able pupils achieve well. However, in English and science the more-able pupils make less progress over time than similar pupils nationally. This was reflected in the English and science lessons seen and improving the achievement of the more-able pupils is already part of the School Development Plan. Overall though, in over nine out of ten lessons, pupils' learning was at least satisfactory, and in about half of these it was good. Pupils made better progress in Year 6 lessons where the teaching was more consistently good.
3. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall. When provided with the good support that is available they make very good progress in lessons, making clear learning gains against the targets set for them. Pupils with English as an additional language also make good progress because teachers take care to monitor their performance and ensure they learn specialist subject vocabulary. Their reading records are checked regularly and the school can rapidly target appropriate support.
4. In English, the attainment of current Year 6 pupils is average in speaking, listening and reading, but below average in writing, with few pupils reaching the higher level. The attainment of boys is generally lower than that of girls, particularly in writing. Pupils listen carefully and become confident in speaking to a range of audiences. They make satisfactory progress in reading. Pupils show a developing enthusiasm for books, particularly fiction, though older more-able pupils sometimes choose books that do not challenge them. The oldest pupils have well-developed research skills, and use information books confidently for work in other subjects. Throughout the school, pupils learn to write for an increasingly wide range of purposes, and this is an improvement since the last inspection. Although the standard of handwriting is generally good, there are fewer pieces of extended writing in each year than generally found, and pupils do not consistently develop skills in other major kinds of writing. The more-able pupils are not consistently given tasks that develop higher-level skills.
5. Attainment in mathematics is broadly in line with that expected nationally, and satisfactory in relation to pupils' prior attainment. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in mathematics. The more-able pupils are familiar with the mathematical language of angles, they can calculate with decimals and use information to solve problems, checking that their results are sensible. The setting arrangements for mathematics lessons support the learning of pupils at different levels of attainment. Most pupils gain a sound knowledge of multiplication tables, shape work, fractions and percentages. They make satisfactory use of their data handling skills in other subjects but make little use of computer skills in their mathematics.
6. In science, the Year 6 pupils talk confidently about their understanding of the subject and are secure in their knowledge of physical processes, life processes and materials. They are less confident in their ability to design and carry out valid investigations. They understand the importance of making tests fair

and can identify the variables they are controlling, recording their observations and measurements using tables and line graphs. Weak writing skills inhibit pupils' ability to record explanations clearly and in sufficient depth and there is an over-reliance on copying factual information. The more-able pupils are not sufficiently challenged, for example as all pupils usually carry out similar activities.

7. Standards in information technology are in line with those expected nationally in those aspects of the National Curriculum that pupils are taught. Pupils make confident use of computers to communicate information, for example in skills with word-processing and handling data. Pupils are familiar with spreadsheets but they generally have fewer skills with the internet or the use of e-mail, although some have experience of these from home. In other areas such as using databases or computerised control, pupils' skills continue to be less well developed, as at the last inspection.

8. Pupils make satisfactory progress in religious education and by the age of eleven attainment is broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Pupils learn about four major religions and hear stories drawn from a wide range of faiths, although sometimes this leads to some confusion. However, a strength of religious education is that pupils learn from religion as well as about religion, so they know how to relate aspects of belief to their personal lives.

9. The standard of work in other subjects is broadly in line with that expected for pupils' ages. There are some examples of high quality work in art, for example in portraits showing careful observational skills and in pupils' work based on their study of famous artists. In design technology pupils design and make buggies and use tools confidently to construct in wood, plastic and card. Pupils' evaluation skills are less well developed. Through geography, pupils know about their locality and learn about countries around the world. They also learn the skills to be able to use maps, globes and reference books. In history pupils develop a good factual knowledge of the periods of history that they study, but work on local history is weaker. From the observations of music lessons, hymn practice, and extra-curricular activities, standards in music are satisfactory. Standards in games and in athletic activities are in line with those expected for pupils' ages, and lessons are characterised by some vigorous physical activity.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

10. Pupils enjoy school. Many are well motivated and interested in their classroom activities and this makes a positive contribution to their learning. In most lessons, pupils listen and concentrate well and work hard until their tasks are completed. In most classes, pupils understand and follow orderly classroom routines, although where such routines have not been reinforced effectively, pupils can be more slow to settle. Pupils with special educational needs behave very well in most classes but in a few lessons the distracting behaviour of some of these pupils hindered the learning of others. However, overall behaviour in class and around the school is good. There have been no exclusions.

11. Relationships among the children are good and most pupils are polite and show respect for the adults in the school. There was no evidence seen of any bullying or oppressive behaviour, and pupils report that where incidents occur they are dealt with effectively by the headteacher and deputy. Pupils work constructively together in pairs and small groups. They are mutually supportive and show consideration and respect for one another. Pupils respond very well to the trust placed in them in taking on a range of responsibilities throughout the school, including service as class monitors and, for older pupils, as monitors taking on whole-school tasks. Children from every class are elected by their classmates to serve as representatives on the school council.

12. Attendance is satisfactory, being in line with that of similar schools. Most pupils arrive at school on time, and this is an improvement since the last inspection.

13. In their responses to the questionnaire, parents describe behaviour as good, and indicate that they believe that the school helps their children to be more mature and responsible. Parents say their children like coming to school. Inspectors' findings confirm these positive views.

How well are pupils taught?

14. The overall quality of the teaching observed was satisfactory. In 91 per cent of lessons observed teaching was satisfactory or better. In 13 per cent of lessons it was very good; in 34 per cent it was good and in 44 per cent it was satisfactory; it was less than satisfactory in 9 per cent of lessons. The overall teaching of English and mathematics seen was satisfactory, and the teaching of religious education seen was good.

15. Teachers work well together to plan lessons effectively. Detailed planning for literacy and numeracy sets out objectives for what pupils are to learn and how these will be achieved. In many lessons, teachers wrote learning objectives on the board, which gave a useful focus to pupils' learning, especially when revisited at the end of a lesson to check what pupils had learned. Teachers make some useful links in their lessons, for example where pupils were given historical background to help their painting in the style of Tudor artists. Although the teaching in the computer suite was all at least satisfactory, the content was not planned sufficiently to build on what some pupils could already do.

16. Teachers' expectations are sound in most lessons, but need to be raised to challenge the more-able pupils in many lessons. Setting for mathematics enabled teachers to teach at appropriate high, middle or lower levels. For example in the top sets, vocabulary and ideas were demanding for the pupils. However, in English lessons, although pupils are grouped by ability, they are often all given the same tasks. The more-able pupils are insufficiently challenged or given guidance needed to improve. In particular, expectations need to be much higher for pupils to proof-read their work. Some unsatisfactory teaching of science had slow pace with routine tasks that did not extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. Literacy skills, especially writing, are practised across the curriculum, although teaching pays insufficient attention to its quality.

17. The overall quality of teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good, both in classes and in small groups. Teachers make sure that the work matches the needs of these pupils and work effectively with the teaching assistants who support their learning. When teaching assistants work in classes they help pupils with special educational needs to make good progress in the lesson and, when they take individuals or small groups for additional support outside the classroom, they do so effectively to increase pupils' opportunities.

18. Homework contributes to pupils' learning, although there are inconsistencies in the amount set, as noted by some parents. For example in mathematics, homework is set on a regular basis and often consolidates previous learning, but is inconsistent and sometimes too superficial or easy. Pupils themselves also commented on the variations in the content of homework, although the routine is well established, which is a positive feature on which the school can build.

19. Teachers record a sound range of assessment data but the day-to-day marking of pupils' work is generally weak. English work is marked to give encouragement, but not to identify major weaknesses that pupils need to work on more carefully. Feedback to pupils on work in science is variable, at its best it raises key questions with pupils, but too often it is missing. As yet there is little assessment or recording of achievement in IT, which is a weakness in this subject.

20. Classroom management was good in most lessons seen, although unsatisfactory in a few lessons. Positive teacher-pupil relations characterised most lessons, where established routines helped in the effective use of time and resources. For example in lessons in the computer suite, pupils are used to the library arrangements, to teacher-instruction about new skills and to individual practice. In a few lessons in other subjects, however, routines were not established, pace was slow and pupils became restless.

How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?

21. The school offers a broad and generally balanced curriculum that meets the needs of its pupils effectively. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught, together with religious education, which follows the locally agreed syllabus. Since the last inspection, long-term planning in most subjects has been strengthened by the adoption of official curriculum guidelines and recommendations. This has addressed the weakness noted as a key issue in the last report. The total weekly teaching time is less than that recommended, but the school is about to usefully change the times within the school day.

22. The national strategies for literacy and numeracy have been adopted. Planning is now securely based on their published frameworks, though more needs to be done to ensure that the literacy hour is taught more consistently through the school. For mathematics, pupils are placed in sets according to their prior attainment, and standards are rising. Changes in the curriculum have been well managed in face of the new initiatives, so that all subjects are still allocated sufficient time. Learning is supported through links between subjects; for instance, numeracy skills are developed in geography and history. Research tasks in several subjects develop pupils' higher level reading skills, though writing opportunities need to be more clearly co-ordinated through the curriculum. Provision for information technology has improved, though all elements of the subject are still not taught in full, which was a weakness noted in the last inspection. More use needs to be made of information technology skills in other subjects. Swimming is not presently taught as part of physical education because there is no local pool available.

23. Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is satisfactory. There is no single scheme of work, but relevant aspects are taught in other subjects, notably science. Key elements are taught separately to older pupils and have the approval of the governing body and parents. The teaching of sex education is supplemented by a video programme and a talk by a local nurse. A police liaison officer provides a full programme covering many aspects of personal, social and health education, including drugs awareness.

24. The school makes effective arrangements to ensure that all pupils have equal access to the curriculum. Support in class is well planned so that all pupils take full part in the main activities. Pupils with special educational needs are provided with good quality individual education plans, with specific targets to guide their development in language and mathematics. Their targets are regularly reviewed so that they remain appropriate, and these pupils make good progress as a result. However, the curriculum is not modified sufficiently to meet the needs of the more-able pupils in each class. Tasks are generally appropriate for pupils of average ability and below, and the effects over time are most noticeable in the low numbers of pupils achieving the higher levels in each year. The more-able pupils are not given enough challenge through the school, either by means of specifically-designed tasks, or high expectations for the quality and quantity of work, or through effective use of open-ended tasks.

25. The curriculum is extended effectively through a good range of after-school activities, in which many pupils take part. There are two choirs and instrumental groups, several sports clubs, and clubs for science and computing. The school choirs perform for parents and the public, including local senior citizens. An adventure club, a craft club and a chess club extend the range of activities further. Out-of-school visits are of high quality, and such experiences stimulate interest and raise attainment in the subjects concerned. The local community is used well to support fieldwork in geography and history.

26. The school has good relations with feeder and receiving schools, ensuring that new pupils settle in quickly and that leavers are well prepared for the next stage in their learning. Staff benefit from meeting colleagues in a network of other schools for professional development.

27. Provision for pupils' personal development is good overall. Their spiritual development is sound, as at the last inspection. Pupils are encouraged, for instance in art, English, music and science, to appreciate the beauty of the world and their place in it. In their learning, they reflect on their own experiences and explore questions of meaning and purpose. Teachers value pupils' ideas during

informal interactions, while some lessons more formally develop their knowledge and insight into other values and beliefs. The school meets the requirements to hold a daily act of worship, involving pupils in prayers and hymns.

28. Provision for pupils' moral development is good. Concern for the physical and emotional well-being of others is evident in all aspects of school life. Through caring relationships with pupils, all adults promote values of honesty, fairness, and truthfulness. Talks in assemblies strongly assert moral principles through stories and anecdotes, and pupils are actively involved and receptive throughout. Teachers give a clear lead in showing consistent care and concern for all pupils, and in encouraging reflection on the consequences of their actions. In the majority of lessons, teachers control behaviour through positive encouragement, stressing principles of fairness and self-respect.

29. Provision for pupils' social development is very good. Pupils respond well to consistent encouragement to cooperate in their learning, and there is a harmonious working atmosphere in most lessons. All pupils take turns in helping with routine classroom tasks. Opportunities for greater responsibility increase through the school, with older pupils helping to look after younger ones in the playground, and supervising corridors and stairways between lessons. A few are selected for high responsibility as house captains or sports captains. Many pupils take part in sports competitions, thereby learning team spirit and fair play. The School Council involves some pupils in significant decision-making on school issues, representing their peers in each class. Pupils develop wider understanding of citizenship through charitable fund-raising and hearing of the experiences of visiting adults. School assemblies are used well as a platform to celebrate pupils' achievements in their moral, social and academic development.

30. Provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. Most subjects make a sound contribution to the study of British and other cultures. Religious education makes a strong contribution to pupils' understanding of other faiths, with well-planned visits to places of worship. The school's work with pupils with English as an additional language makes a positive contribution to raising the cultural awareness of all pupils through the books and artefacts that are used to support them.

How well does the school care for its pupils?

31. The friendly environment within the school supports pupils' learning. All staff, including those newly appointed, know the children well and show concern for their welfare. Pupils are supervised well during breaks and at lunchtimes. A comprehensive health and safety policy is in place and the arrangements for administering first aid are satisfactory. The site manager and the head teacher make regular inspections to check that the site is free from hazards. The school is kept clean and tidy and is well maintained. Good procedures are in place for child protection, the head teacher being the designated person responsible for the arrangements, and all staff are aware of the clear guidance contained in the school's policy. External agencies, including the educational welfare service, give valuable support to the school.

32. Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils are positively encouraged to be responsible for their own behaviour, and several different rewards for good behaviour and attendance are awarded, which show that these are valued. These include for example 'Star of the week' awards, individual attendance certificates and the class punctuality cup. The system of house-points is well developed and used extensively to motivate pupils. These procedures are highly regarded by both parents and pupils. Systems for monitoring attendance are satisfactory overall, although some of the registers are not properly maintained, and there are a few cases of unexplained absence. A small but significant proportion of school time is lost due to family holidays.

33. The school has effective systems for the identification of pupils with special educational needs and for determining strategies to support them. Individual education plans are carefully written and regularly reviewed. They are shared with parents. Care is taken to ensure that the support provided by the school meets the needs of the pupil. Pupils who are supported for special educational needs make good

progress so that, towards the end of the key stage, some are removed from the special educational needs register and some receive a lower level of support than they required on entry to the school. Assessment and record keeping for pupils with statements is of good quality. There are sound systems to ensure that annual reviews take place at the appropriate times. Parents are informed and consulted.

34. A range of assessment tests is used to monitor pupils' progress throughout the school. Pupils are also tested regularly in mental mathematics and spelling, and an unaided piece of writing is assessed each term. These results are analysed to track pupils' progress, and this analysis is used to set future targets. In English, mathematics and science, ongoing teacher assessments help to inform planning. Assessment information is well used to target help for lower-attaining pupils. Better use could be made of assessment information to identify the needs of the more-able pupils in order to provide them with challenging work. However, the overall procedures in this area have improved since the last inspection.

How well does the school work in partnership with parents?

35. Alderton Junior provides good information to parents about the school and about how well their children are doing. There are regular newsletters home, teachers are available for parents to speak to after school and home-school diaries and files help to facilitate good two-way communication. Although some parents express criticism of reports, which draw on standard phrases, these are generally detailed and informative, providing clear information on what the child can do in each subject and offering some targets for improvement.

36. An active parents' association organises a range of social and fundraising events, and parents are encouraged by the school to help support their children's learning, for example, through assisting with reading and homework. Parents have been offered guidance on how they can help and they are kept informed through year group newsletters which outline what work classes will be doing in the term ahead.

37. The responses of parents to the questionnaire show considerable satisfaction with the work the school is doing. Inspectors' judgements confirm parents' positive views on children's enthusiasm for school, their behaviour, the approachability of the school and the help the school gives children in becoming mature and responsible.

How well is the school led and managed?

38. The headteacher provides strong leadership. She has established a very good team ethos so that staff share a commitment to improvement, while her effective day-to-day management ensures the smooth running of the school. The school's clearly stated aim is to provide high quality education for all and this value is communicated to all the staff, governors, parents and pupils and is reflected in school developments.

39. The headteacher is well supported by the senior management team who are effective in performing such tasks as are delegated to them. There is, however, a lack of clarity about the constitution and roles of the senior management team. Subject co-ordinators provide advice on subject priorities and are allocated a budget by the headteacher. Although the headteacher encourages staff to identify resources needed, this approach is not fully effective. For example, there are current shortages of information technology and music equipment, although substantial funds are left unspent from previous years.

40. Since the last inspection much has been done to improve strategic planning. The school's development plan is prepared by the headteacher following joint discussions by staff and governors. It sets out the priorities that they have identified to ensure clear direction for the work of the school. The plan is supported by well-developed systems for self-evaluation. These include a rigorous programme of monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. However, there remain inconsistencies in teaching between some classes in the same year group. Staff generally have a limited knowledge of how standards compare with those in other schools, and think that some work is better than it is. However,

the school is in a strong position further to develop its aim to become a self-evaluating school. It identifies priorities and targets, takes action as appropriate and evaluates the impact.

41. Governors satisfactorily fulfil their statutory responsibilities. The governing body has much trust in the headteacher and, since the last inspection, now plays an active role in the school's strategic leadership. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses, and rigorously apply the principles of best value to their decisions. Governors are committed to raising standards and, to this end, they suggest initiatives, fund them and follow them through to assure results. Governors regularly visit the school and contribute to the school's monitoring of standards.

42. The governing body effectively monitors the school's provision for children with special needs through the designated governor. The co-ordinator for special educational needs provides sound leadership, but the management of the teacher assistants is shared with other staff, depending on the particular role of the assistant. This may be less effective than having a single line manager.

43. The experience and qualifications of the teaching staff are appropriate. New teachers are strongly supported and feel a sense of corporate teamwork that is conducive to their development. There are well-established systems for appraisal and professional development. Teachers' targets are integral to the school development plan and so have a positive impact. There are well-developed preparations for the introduction of performance management, although this does not yet include a role for the middle managers.

44. The overall accommodation is good. The buildings are well maintained, clean, spacious, bright and airy, allowing display of work in an attractive manner. The library extension is an asset, although it would benefit from further investment in books, and the new computer suite makes very good use of central space. Classroom computers are much under-used but the school recognises the need to address this issue and has plans for improving the computer equipment in classrooms. The grounds are spacious, well maintained and are used well. Learning resources are satisfactory in most subjects. In religious education resources are good. Music resources are barely adequate, as at the time of the last inspection. The creation of a computer suite has been a significant recent improvement, yet there remains a shortfall in other equipment to support the full range of information technology.

45. Overall financial management is satisfactory, with governors suitably involved in budget planning and monitoring. For some years the school has had a large reserve of unspent funds, higher than that usually recommended, but has been cautious to spend money wisely and has found additional government grants needing to be used on already targeted resources. The school benefits considerably from its membership of a consortium of schools, and in sharing financial expertise. This also enables the principles of best value to be applied, for example in terms of achieving value for money in purchasing and comparing expenditure with other schools. Day-to-day school organisation is good, with clear procedures for the smooth running of the school, supported by efficient office staff. Good use is made of staffing, accommodation and resources in general.

What should the school do to improve further?

46. In order to improve further the quality of education and pupils' achievements, the school should, as is mostly already identified in the school development plan:

- improve the quality of teaching where there are weaknesses through:
 - classroom management that incorporates effective routines and good use of time
 - the setting of work that is well matched to pupils' needs
 - continued monitoring of the quality of teaching and sharing of the good practice that exists

paragraphs 14 - 20

- raise the achievement of the more-able pupils throughout the school through:
 - specifically challenging tasks and guidance for improvement
 - raised expectations in the quality and quantity of work
 - careful monitoring of the progress made by these pupils and provision of support if needed

paragraphs 16, 24, 34

- improve standards in writing, including its use across the curriculum, through:
 - precise instruction to help pupils improve the quality of their writing
 - careful use of the board for spellings and punctuation
 - increased opportunities for extended writing across the school
 - attention to the quality of pupils' writing in all subjects

paragraphs 51, 53

- improve the breadth and use of pupils' information technology skills through:
 - coverage of all areas of the subject including, for example, monitoring and control work
 - improved plans and incorporation of information technology activity in other subject teaching
 - introducing manageable assessment and recording of achievement in information technology
 - continuing to improve the range of equipment.

paragraphs 79 -82

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

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| - improved day-to-day marking of pupils' work | <i>paragraph 19</i> |
| - consistent provision of appropriate amounts of homework | <i>paragraph 18</i> |
| - improved resources for music | <i>paragraph 84</i> |
| - further investment in good quality books for the school library | <i>paragraph 44</i> |
| - continued attention to the provision of swimming | <i>paragraphs 22, 86</i> |
| - further development of the role of subject co-ordinator. | <i>paragraph 39</i> |

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

64

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

18

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	13	34	44	9	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	324
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	59

Special educational needs

Y3 – Y6

Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	70

English as an additional language

No of pupils

Number of pupils with English as an additional language	15
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Pupil mobility in the last school year

No of pupils

Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	6.0
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	0.5

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	46	38	84

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	28	31	35
	Girls	31	26	32
	Total	59	57	67
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	69	67	79
	National	70	69	78

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	22	24	22
	Girls	30	24	28
	Total	52	48	50
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	61	58	60
	National	68	69	75

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	2
Indian	5
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	304
Any other minority ethnic group	6

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: Y3 – Y6**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	14.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	22.8
Average class size	27

Education support staff: Y3 – Y6

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	164

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers**Questionnaire return rate****Financial information**

Financial year	99-00
	£
Total income	621,410
Total expenditure	603,458
Expenditure per pupil	1,818
Balance brought forward from previous year	77,907
Balance carried forward to next year	95,832

Number of questionnaires sent out

324

Number of questionnaires returned

189

Percentage of responses in each category

My child likes school.

My child is making good progress in school.

Behaviour in the school is good.

My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.

The teaching is good.

I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.

I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.

The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.

The school works closely with parents.

The school is well led and managed.

The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.

The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	53	43	4	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	41	54	4	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	58	4	2	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	52	14	5	1
The teaching is good.	38	57	4	1	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	33	51	13	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	54	38	5	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	56	43	1	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	28	52	16	3	2
The school is well led and managed.	39	54	4	2	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	41	50	5	2	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	37	42	17	2	3

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

English

48. In the 1999 end of Key Stage 2 tests, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level or above was close to the national average, though the number reaching the higher level was below average. The overall results were below those of schools whose pupils are from similar backgrounds. Pupils' performance has been well below the national average overall since 1996, but standards improved between 1997 and 1999 at a rate better than found nationally. The attainment of boys is generally lower than that of girls, particularly in writing. Inspection evidence indicates that the attainment of pupils presently in Year 6 is average in speaking, listening and reading, but below average in writing, with few pupils reaching the higher level.

49. Pupils generally listen carefully to stories and instruction, though some pupils, particularly in Year 4, are not attentive enough and need frequent control from teachers. Pupils across the school become confident in speaking for a variety of purposes to a range of audiences, including whole-school assemblies and performances for parents. All take a full part in structured class discussions to explain their views, and collaborate successfully with others in group work. They use formal language and technical terms appropriately. Some pupils speak quietly and give brief answers, but teachers generally prompt such pupils to explain their meaning in full. Occasionally pupils do not speak standard English, and spoken dialect forms, such as "we done that yesterday", intrude as grammatical errors also in their writing.

50. Pupils make satisfactory progress in reading all kinds of texts, and this is a good improvement since the last inspection. The less proficient readers are given the additional instruction in letter-sound relationships so they can work out words they do not know. By age eleven, most pupils can read longer texts silently and with good concentration. Most are fluent and accurate in reading aloud, and some do so with dramatic expression. They are able to name favourite authors and explain their preferences with enthusiasm. Across the school pupils show a developing enthusiasm for books, particularly fiction, though older pupils sometimes choose books that do not challenge them. The oldest pupils have well-developed research skills, and use information books confidently in other subjects.

51. Throughout the school, pupils learn to write for an increasingly wide range of purposes and audiences, and this range is an improvement since the last inspection. Letters by Year 6 in response to proposals for a new supermarket are good examples of writing for a real audience and purpose. Pupils' arguments are well structured, with a good grasp of techniques of persuasion. The standard of handwriting and presentation is good. In other years, there are good examples of other short forms of writing, including poetry and book reviews. However, there are fewer pieces of extended writing in each year than generally found. Some of the Year 4 space stories are imaginative and use speech well for dramatic effect, and Year 6 use detailed description to set the scene, but pupils do not consistently develop skills in this or other major kinds of writing through the school. Many worksheet exercises are unrelated to free-writing tasks that follow. Although pupils learn spelling patterns for homework and are taught to use dictionaries, most do not apply these skills with enough rigour in free-writing tasks to reach the standards expected by age eleven. Writing in other subjects, such as science, is similarly brief and not proof-read carefully enough, though better standards are evident in some work, such as the Year 5 history projects.

52. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because their individual education plans identify specific targets for improvement. Teachers plan lessons and organise their classrooms so that these pupils have appropriate work and adequate support whilst taking a full part in class activity.

53. Teaching is satisfactory overall with about one third of lessons judged good or better. In general, teachers work hard to resource their lessons. Study texts are well chosen to interest pupils and illustrate key features of language. In the best lessons, teachers explain these features clearly, making sure

through probing questions, examples and repetition that all pupils have understood and will remember. Where there were weaknesses, these included for example a lack of precise instruction in language features, such as ways of creating atmosphere in a story. As a result of vague or inadequate instruction, pupils did not have enough information to improve the quality of their writing in the tasks that followed. Teachers generally make good use of the board for instructions on tasks, but this could be better in demonstrating language features such as spelling and punctuation. Many teachers read aloud well, helping pupils to understand and raising their interest in books. However, there are weaknesses in the language models that some teachers offer in their own speech and writing. Though not widespread, instances were noted of repeated use of spoken dialect forms that are considered incorrect in standard English. Writing on the board also needs to be more carefully completed.

54. Most lessons are well managed. Pupils understand the routines of the literacy hour, so they settle to tasks quickly and work well independently. All classes are divided into groups according to level of attainment, making good use of assessment information. In some lessons, teachers spend too much time supervising the work of all groups rather than directly teaching one group. Tasks set for lower-attaining pupils are generally well designed to take account of their abilities, and, in addition, teaching assistants give them useful help as they work. However, pupils at other levels are often given the same task without appropriate expectations for each group. As a result, not all, particularly the more-able pupils, are sufficiently challenged or given the specific guidance they need to improve. A similar criticism was made in the last inspection and not enough improvement has been made.

55. There is generally a harmonious atmosphere in lessons, though more specific targets for pace and timing are needed to ensure higher completion rates for extended writing. Expectations need to be much higher for pupils to proof-read their work. The final whole-class review is usually used effectively to reinforce learning and develop speaking skills. In marking, teachers give encouragement well, but do not always identify major weaknesses that pupils need to work on more carefully. Insufficient time is set aside for pupils to do corrections and consolidate learning. However, teachers use displays and class anthologies well to encourage pupils to take pride in their work.

56. Management of the subject has secured several good improvements since the last inspection. Teachers have been trained to teach the National Literacy Strategy, and their planning is now based on the published framework. Further monitoring is needed to ensure that all give full weight to key elements of the literacy hour, particularly to the direct teaching of language targets and to setting tasks that match the different levels of attainment in each class. Significant progress has been made in analysing test results to identify priorities. As a result, good improvements have been made in provision for reading, particularly in resources and strategies to meet the needs of lower-attaining pupils and reluctant readers. The range of audiences and purposes for reading has also been improved. The need to raise attainment in writing has been identified, as a priority, and all classes have time each week for extended writing. The school intends to link opportunities for extended writing in other subjects to the English scheme of work. Assessment information needs to be better used to monitor pupils' progress in writing and guide the tasks they are given. Opportunities for drama remain limited, as noted in the last inspection. Good use is made of visits, visitors and special occasions, such as Book Week, to extend the curriculum and increase pupils' enjoyment.

Mathematics

57. Since the last inspection, standards in mathematics have risen. Results in the 1999 end of Key Stage 2 tests were close to the national average, and slightly below average compared with similar schools. A strength is that the performance of the more-able pupils was slightly above average in comparison with pupils in similar schools. Current inspection findings indicate that attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is broadly in line with that expected nationally. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their prior attainment. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress throughout the school.

58. By the end of the key stage, the more-able pupils are familiar with the mathematical language of angles and they can draw, estimate and measure angles accurately. They can use decimals to two decimal places, and use information to solve problems, checking that their results are sensible. They were able to use several different strategies to work out the answers to two digit multiplication tables. Most pupils have a sound knowledge of multiplication tables, rotational and line symmetry, fractions and percentages. Pupils make satisfactory use of their data handling skills in other subjects, for example when plotting the growth of the population of Essex towns in Victorian times in history. But they have insufficient opportunities to develop and apply their computer skills in their study of mathematics. Overall however, the quality of pupils' learning is satisfactory.

59. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers plan their daily mathematics lesson well, taking full account of the requirements of the National Numeracy Strategy, thus ensuring that pupils' mathematical skills are developed appropriately. Clear learning objectives are given for both the initial mental and oral session and for the main part of the lesson. Plenary sessions at the end of each lesson effectively check on whether those learning objectives have been achieved. For example in a Year 3 lesson, quick fire questions were aimed at those pupils who were not totally sure that they had really understood how to add up simple bills and find the correct change. The teachers use questioning well to encourage the pupils to explain how they arrived at their answers so that others in the class can check their own methods and strategies. Good mathematical vocabulary is encouraged, for example when older pupils correctly used the terms vertex and vertices. In a Year 4 lesson, the challenge was to explore number patterns, and give reasons explaining how they were constructed. This was approached confidently by the pupils. Year 6 pupils were familiar with the term quotient and were able to divide whole numbers to two decimal places and then round their answers up or down. This resulted from good teaching. In a minority of lessons, the pace was a little slow, with teacher explanations taking too long and resulting in restlessness among pupils, and not all the pupils being involved in responding to mental work. Homework is set on a regular basis. Whilst it consolidates previous learning in class, it is often not challenging or making a positive contribution to the pupils' standards.

60. Staff collaborate well as a team across year groups. Good use is made of the mathematics resources in many lessons. Sound procedures are in place for assessing pupils' attainment and progress and this informs future planning. However, day-to-day marking is not as helpful as it should be. Very few constructive comments or methods to support further progress are given, some of the work remains unmarked and little account of literacy is taken for example in correcting mis-spelt words. However, useful whole-school staff training has recently been given on the standard of written methods in numeracy, and an information evening and booklet for parents is being planned.

Science

61. Pupils' attainment in science is broadly in line with standards expected nationally. Results in the end of the key stage tests have risen considerably since the last inspection, although the proportion of children reaching the higher level remains below that achieved nationally. By the age of 11 pupils are able to talk confidently about their understanding of the subject and are secure in their knowledge of physical processes, life processes and materials. They are less confident in their ability to design and carry out valid investigations that answer open questions. Year 6 pupils understand the importance of making tests fair and can identify the variables they are controlling and record their observations and measurements using tables and graphs. They understand the difference between weight and mass and can identify the effect of forces on moving objects. They can account for differences in temperature on the earth's surface and explain how organisms are classified and what makes them distinct. Poor writing skills inhibit pupils' ability to record explanations clearly and in sufficient depth. There is an over reliance on copying factual information which does not give teachers an opportunity to assess pupils' understanding in the subject.

62. Since the last inspection, the systems for monitoring pupils' progress have improved. However, the more-able pupils are insufficiently challenged and teachers' planning rarely identifies opportunities to extend these pupils. In most lessons observed during the inspection, all pupils carried out similar activities and more-able pupils were not given an opportunity to extend their thinking. Better use has been made of the school grounds to support the teaching of science and these opportunities are clearly identified in the scheme of work.

63. The quality of the teaching seen varied from good to unsatisfactory but was satisfactory overall. Teaching is effective where pupils are challenged to produce work of a good standard. For example, Year 3 pupils were encouraged to extend their thinking about how materials allow light to pass through them by considering how different plastic objects allow different levels of light to pass through them. Good teaching made use of secure subject knowledge and incorporated effective classroom management. Where lessons began with a teacher's skilful review of previous learning, pupils were able to build on this. Teaching was unsatisfactory when the pace of the lesson was slow and pupils were asked to carry out routine tasks that did not extend their knowledge or understanding. The scheme of work and joint planning across all year groups supports progression throughout the key stage. Teachers' marking and feedback to pupils varies in quality. Where it is good, it raises key questions with pupils about their learning, but it is too often missing or not followed up. Insufficient use is made of information technology to support the science curriculum.

64. The subject co-ordinator makes good use of data extracted from the results of national tests to identify weaker aspects of pupils' knowledge and understanding and support teachers in raising standards in these areas. The co-ordinator monitors planning and standards of work, but this could be further developed to include the monitoring of the teaching of science.

Other subjects

65. Standards in **art** are in line with those expected for pupils' ages, with some examples of high quality work. By Year 6, pupils are familiar with a good range of media including charcoal, pastels, watercolours and clay. They produce work in the style of a range of artists and are aware of the importance of their contribution to the history of art. Year 4 pupils produced work in the style of Georgia O'Keefe showing a clear understanding of the characteristics of her work. Pupils explore line and tone using pencil and charcoal and work with collage, mosaic, still life and printing. Some good portraits by Year 3 pupils in the style of the illustrator Quentin Blake show careful observation skills.

66. Standards are similar to those found during the last inspection, and there is evidence of three-dimensional work, with the kiln being used to produce a range of ceramics. A scheme of work identifies the specific techniques, skill, knowledge and understanding covered across the key stage and this has had a positive effect on pupils' progress.

67. Evidence suggests the quality of teaching art is good. Pupils learn skills and techniques following a clear scheme of work, although they are not always encouraged to experiment with media for themselves. Teachers create an atmosphere of careful, focused observation and concentration in art lessons. This has a positive effect on learning and the quality of work produced by pupils. Pupils are encouraged to be self-critical and reflect on their work in order to improve further. Where specialist teaching is organised, as in Year 5, this has a positive impact on standards. Good links are often made between art and other subjects. Year 4 pupils made Greek pots and decorated them using contemporary patterns and designs. Art also makes a good contribution to pupils' cultural development. In a Year 3 lesson, the teacher used portraits of Native American Indians to explore tone and shading. This generated some good discussion amongst pupils about North American history.

68. The school makes good use of a wide variety of resources that include an extensive range of posters and prints of the work of many artists. Pupils also visit galleries and this contributes to their learning. Effective links have been established with a local secondary school and the joint development of a scheme of work and the sharing of resources has raised the profile of the subject throughout the school.

69. From the evidence of **design technology**, standards are in line with those expected for pupils' ages. Year 5 pupils design and make buggies and use tools confidently to construct in wood, plastic and card. The use of textiles is under-developed across the school. Although they have satisfactory planning skills, pupils are not regularly encouraged to evaluate their designs. They are given too few opportunities to produce a range of possible solutions to a design problem and make reasoned choices from these.

70. Since the last inspection, pupils' making skills have improved but their evaluation skills remain weak. A scheme of work is now in place and there is evidence of satisfactory provision for the subject across all year groups. There is now a satisfactory range of tools and equipment including resources for food technology.

71. The small amount of teaching observed during the inspection was mostly good. Teachers plan lessons carefully and are familiar with the requirements of the National Curriculum. There is a strong emphasis on safety and this is evident in lessons. In one lesson, pupils tasted biscuits and created profiles in preparation for designing packaging and baking biscuits. Prior to this, all parents were contacted to find out about pupils' food allergies. Pupils behave well and relationships are good, enabling them to discuss their work and make satisfactory progress with practical activities. Pupils are not given sufficient constructive feedback about their work and consequently work of a high standard is scarce. Aspects of the subject are integrated well with other subjects including science, history and art. In one lesson, where Year 3 pupils designed and made Roman broaches using pasta and card, the teacher skilfully linked the task to Roman costumes and pattern and symmetry in mathematics. Good links are made with art through a combined scheme of work. Year 5 pupils designed and made candle-holders using clay, developing their skills in both subjects. Teaching was most effective when pupils were encouraged to focus on 'fitness for purpose' and to match products to their designs.

72. Resources are well organised and are audited regularly to ensure that pupils have an appropriate range of tools and materials at hand. The co-ordinator usefully monitors provision by checking teachers' plans and by assembling a subject portfolio.

73. Standards in **geography** are in line with those expected for pupils' ages. Despite less time being available to teach the subject, standards have been maintained since the last inspection. Pupils study the geography of their locality and learn about countries around the world. In addition they learn the skills to be able to use maps, globes and reference books to further their knowledge. The annual residential visit gives an opportunity to observe and study a contrasting locality first-hand.

74. Pupils learn the fundamentals of map making and are introduced to symbols representing particular landmarks and features. They make simple maps and are able to describe what they are doing using appropriate geographic vocabulary. As they move through the school, pupils build on and develop their

skills and knowledge. They are able to pinpoint features on a map by specifying co-ordinates, and most know the common symbols to be found on an Ordnance Survey map. Older pupils can explain how the continents came into being, and know basic facts, such as why the west of Britain is wetter than the east. Pupils make satisfactory progress in geography through the school.

75. Evidence suggest that the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Pupils gain a firm foundation of knowledge, and have been taught the skills necessary to develop their knowledge further. Lessons are planned to be relevant to pupils' everyday lives. The building of a new local secondary school was used as a focus to encourage pupils to consider the effects on the environment and how these would affect the lives of local people. Literacy skills are promoted through activities such as producing questionnaires to sample local opinion on this issue. Numeracy skills are developed through use of charts to compare land usage in Loughton and a contrasting locality. Discussion with pupils showed they enjoy geography. In almost all lessons seen pupils worked with enthusiasm and concentration. They co-operated well in groups and made effective use of the available resources.

76. Standards in **history** are in line with those expected for pupils' ages. Pupils develop a good sense of the passage of time. They can distinguish between events that took place in the recent past and those that happened long ago. They are beginning to develop an understanding of why people in the past acted as they did. They use books and pictures to discover more about people and events in the past, and older pupils can successfully distinguish between historical fact and legend. They can relate stories that they have heard, for example about Henry VIII, and they understand that the world in which he lived was very different from their own. Pupils develop a good factual knowledge of the periods of history that they study. However, work on local history is less strong.

77. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, and sometimes good. All teachers have adequate knowledge of the subject and all lessons contain some good factual teaching. Questioning is used effectively to probe and deepen pupils' understanding and the best lessons are characterised by a lively pace and good use of a range of resources. Pupils respond well. They listen carefully to the teacher's introduction and concentrate when engaged on written tasks. They co-operate well together when required to do so.

78. Since the last inspection the school has developed a scheme of work that offers pupils a broad grounding in history and develops their knowledge systematically through the school. Teachers plan so that learning in one subject supports learning in another. A Year 5 lesson, for example, involved pupils studying the detail on portraits of Elizabeth I and trying to reproduce it in their own art. Discussion in the earlier part of this lesson effectively taught pupils how to use contemporary portraits to make informed deductions about the subject of the portrait. Numeracy is reinforced through history. Year 6 pupils produced graphs illustrating the growth of population in Essex towns in the nineteenth century as part of their study of the Victorians. The school makes good use of visits and special events to deepen pupils' understanding. Younger pupils enjoyed a 'Greek Day' earlier this year and older pupils visited the 'Ragged School' at Whitechapel, as part of their study of the Victorians.

79. Standards in **information technology** are in line with those expected nationally, in those aspects of the National Curriculum that pupils cover. Since the last inspection, the school has made considerable progress in establishing a computer centre and developing staff expertise. Pupils make confident use of computers to communicate information. For example, older pupils skilfully handled text, changing its font and inserting it into tables that they had constructed. Discussion with pupils and displays of work suggest they are familiar with combining text with graphics, including some pictures from the internet or a digital camera. Pupils are familiar with spreadsheets and how, for example, these can be programmed for money calculations. Apart from those having experience from home, pupils generally have less opportunity to use the internet or e-mail. In other areas of the subject pupils' skills are also less well developed, as at the last inspection. For example, pupils have not learnt how to handle information in a database, and their experience of computerised control by sequencing instructions is limited, for example to simple LOGO work.

80. The timetabled use of the computer suite is effective in supporting pupils' learning, and offers potential for further development. A good feature is the growing independence of pupils to access and run programs and to print or save their own work. In the lessons seen pupils made progress because teachers explained new skills clearly and pupils could practice these individually. However, some tasks were insufficiently challenging for some of the pupils, who for example had the ability to explore and learn a wider range of formatting skills. In all the lessons seen pupils behaved well and concentrated on their work. They used the equipment sensibly and collaborated well.

81. All the teaching seen in the computer suite was satisfactory or better. Lessons were well planned and managed, with clear objectives recorded for the class. Teachers had the knowledge and skills to provide effective explanations and individual help. For example, pupils had clear instructions about using menus to draw a table, change row and column sizes, and to enter text. This reflected the training and support of the co-ordinator and the keen approach of staff. As yet there is little assessment or recording of pupils' achievement.

82. A main weakness in the provision is the under-use of computers in the classrooms and across the curriculum. Although they are mostly old and do not have CD-Rom, the classroom computers were used on very few occasions during the inspection. Some rooms had displays indicating computer use, such as word-processed poems or instructions for making buggies, but pupils generally apply information technology very little in other subjects. Teachers use a published scheme, but planning and assessment across the school is not yet ensuring clear progression in pupils' learning. Resources have been significantly improved in terms of the computer suite, but the school has not yet been able to provide enough internet access or equipment necessary for work on monitoring and control, for example. However, there have been worthwhile improvements since the last inspection, and these are a good basis for further development, led by an enthusiastic and expert co-ordinator.

83. From the observations of a few **music** lessons, hymn practice, and extra-curricular activities, standards are in line with those expected for pupils' ages. Year 6 pupils had the opportunity of composing sound effects and an ostinato based on the stimulus of a story and translating this into a graphic score. From discussions with staff and the scheme of work, other classroom activities normally include singing, listening and appraising the music of famous composers, composing and performing from standard notation and studying world music such as African and Indian music. However, resources are currently unsatisfactory for effective teaching of the music curriculum. There is limited provision of tuned percussion instruments and keyboards, or for the use of information technology. The school has little recorded evidence of individual or group compositions and performances.

84. About one quarter of pupils take part in extra-curricular activities such as choir, recorder club and instrumental lessons. The choir maintains links with the local community, for example in hosting a tea party for old people. Pupils have opportunity to perform music and dance, for example in a pantomime or the summer concert. Several visits are arranged to concerts and theatres, such as to The Lion King and Cats, and professional musicians come into school at regular intervals, for example a South American pan-pipe band. These activities make a good contribution to the pupils' music experience and their cultural and social development.

85. **Physical education** (PE) standards in games and in athletic activities are in line with those expected for pupils' ages. Gymnastics and dance could not be observed during the inspection. The school is currently unable to offer swimming as the local pool is closed. Despite their efforts the school has been unable to find a suitable alternative location. The lessons observed focused on the development and refining of skills. For example, pupils learn the importance of a correct grip when playing 'bat and ball' games and correct 'take-off' technique when practising high jump. Pupils make satisfactory progress in physical education and benefit from small group activities that allow individuals ample opportunity to develop their skills. The school places emphasis on fitness and lessons are characterised by vigorous physical activity.

86. In the lessons observed the teaching was satisfactory overall, and sometimes good. The best lessons had a brisk and lively pace, which constantly challenged pupils to improve their performance. More effective use of demonstration would help to illustrate important features and help pupils to develop the skills of evaluation. However, pupils worked enthusiastically and with obvious enjoyment. They worked well together in groups, readily taking turns and encouraging each other. Teachers gave due attention to safety issues, particularly in moving equipment and the safe use of available space. All lessons observed included appropriate 'warming-up' and 'cooling down' activities.

87. A strength at Alderton is the opportunity for pupils to play sport against other schools. The enthusiasm of the teaching staff in supporting and helping with these additional activities greatly benefits the pupils and helps to raise the profile of the school within the local community.

88. In **religious education** pupils of all abilities make satisfactory progress and, at the end of the key stage, standards are broadly in line with the expectations of the locally Agreed Syllabus.

89. Pupils learn about four major religions and hear stories drawn from a wide range of faiths with the result that some pupils become confused. This was especially noticeable in a Year 4 class when replies to a question concerning the Hindu faith referred to Jewish, Moslem and Christian traditions and, in work seen in a Year 6 class, where a piece of work about the Jewish festival of shavuot contained details of the Christian feast of Pentecost. However, by the age of eleven, pupils generally have a good understanding the key features of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Islam. They can re-tell stories from each of the faiths and the more-able pupils understand complicated concepts such as justice and fairness. These pupils can consider specific examples and apply the understanding to life in general, such as the Year 4 pupil who remarked that "most unfairness is when people don't get their own way." A strength of religious education in the school is that pupils learn from religion as well as about religion so that they know how to relate aspects of belief to their personal lives.

90. Overall the quality of teaching in the lessons seen was good, although it varied from very good to unsatisfactory. At its best, lessons were presented in a lively and stimulating way so that pupils' attention was maintained and they behaved well. Where it was weakest teaching was pedestrian and pupils' behaviour deteriorated. Planning is clear so that pupils make good progress. Well-structured lessons, such as those seen in Year 5 on the Five Pillars of Islam, the life of Mohamed, and in Year 6 on Judaism, lead to very good learning. In some classes, the great sensitivity of the teacher and very good relationships contributed to pupils' good progress.

91. All teachers create opportunities for increasing pupils' vocabulary and to develop the wider skills of literacy, especially writing, although too little attention is paid to the quality of this work, and teachers' marking does not assist development. This reduces its impact. In many classes religious education work is written up in the back of books for other subjects and this devalues it.

92. Religious education is enriched by a number of interesting and relevant visits to local centres of faith and from members of local faith communities, including those who attend the acts of collective worship. Subject leadership is effective with good support for those who require it. The co-ordinator, who ensures that teachers plan for religious education, has prepared the scheme of work used by the school. This provides a good foundation for the local authority's programme of study that will soon replace it. The co-ordinator is responsible for the organisation and deployment of the school's increasing and useful stock of resources and artefacts.