

INSPECTION REPORT

**ST. MARY'S VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED
CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOL**

Ware

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117409

Headteacher: Mrs Elizabeth Neville

Reporting inspector: Mrs Judith Charlesworth
21501

Dates of inspection: 12th – 14th March 2001

Inspection number: 190856

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Junior School
School category:	Voluntary Controlled
Age range of pupils:	7 to 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Heath Drive Ware Hertfordshire
Postcode:	SG12 ORL
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Canon Hugh Wilcox
Date of previous inspection:	October 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
21501	Judith Charlesworth	Registered inspector	Science Geography Special educational needs English as an additional language Equal opportunities	Characteristics of the school Standards of pupils' achievements Teaching Leadership and management
14066	Mary Malin	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development How well the school cares for pupils Partnership with parents
22931	Cheryl Hardy	Team inspector	Religious education Art History	The curriculum and learning opportunities
25778	Andrew Hicks	Team inspector	Mathematics Information communication technology Music	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Mary's is a Voluntary Controlled Church of England Junior School, catering for children from seven to eleven years old. Almost all pupils transfer from the infant school which is next to St. Mary's, and attainment on entry is generally above average. There are currently 236 pupils, which is about average, with two classes per year group making eight classes in all. The pupils come mainly from advantaged backgrounds, in comparison to both national averages and the locality, and well below average numbers are eligible for free school meals. The vast majority are from white English backgrounds, with just over four per cent from other ethnic groups, including other white groups. Three of these pupils have English as an additional language, but are not at the early stages of learning to communicate in English. Above average numbers of pupils (one quarter) have been identified as having special educational needs. Twenty three of these are given extra support by outside professionals, but none has a statement of their special educational needs. The school is currently responsible for training a teacher under the Graduate Registered Teacher Scheme.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective school. The leadership, management and teaching are all good and pupils achieve well in several subjects. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching in Year 6 is good and much is very good. Pupils learn well and make rapid progress as a result.
- Standards in English throughout the school are good, and some aspects such as poetry are very good. Pupils achieve well in the national tests for English at the age of eleven.
- At eleven, more pupils than average reach the levels expected of thirteen year olds in the national tests in English, mathematics and science.
- Standards attained in art and design, geography, physical education, design and technology and singing are above expectations for pupils' age throughout the school.
- Pupils' attitudes to school, their behaviour and their personal development are all good. The quality of their relationships is very good.
- Provision for pupils' personal development is good, and effectively threaded throughout the school's work.
- Financial management is very good and money is used well to benefit the pupils.
- The school analyses data and information very well to help decide how best to support pupils' learning.

What could be improved

- When compared to results in English, the numbers of pupils attaining at least average levels for their age in mathematics and science are lower than might be expected. Standards achieved in some strands of information and communication technology are too low.
- Relationships between the school and a small minority of parents have become strained.
- In most subjects other than English, mathematics and science, through-school assessment systems are not in place, and assessment is not consistently used in all classes to track pupils' progress and inform planning.
- In some classes, work is not always set to match pupils' needs in everyday lessons.
- The volume of paper work generated by the senior staff is too great, very time-consuming for them to produce, and is not always the best way to communicate information effectively.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement since the last inspection in October 1996 has been satisfactory. Standards attained in English, mathematics and science remain similar overall, although the rate of improvement is slowing down. The proportion of good and better teaching has increased but the amount of unsatisfactory teaching remains about the same. In some classes, tasks are still not properly matched to pupils' abilities, and investigations and problem solving are still not sufficiently well promoted. These aspects were key issues for improvement in the last inspection. There have been good new curriculum initiatives, such as French for the older pupils. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development remains similar. The school still cares for its pupils very well. In some classes, assessment is not consistently used in most of the foundation subjects, but target setting has been introduced and is motivating pupils. Overall, there has been a deterioration in parents' views of the school, but the majority of parents remain happy with the school's work. Leadership and management practices have developed well, and there is a positive focus on self-evaluation and improvement.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	All schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
English	A	A	B	B
mathematics	C	B	C	C
science	A	A	C	C

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Between 1996 and 1999, the school's results in the national tests show some improvement, although the national trend shows greater improvement. The year 2000 national test results for 11 year olds show a drop in all three subjects, particularly in mathematics. This was due to a greater number of pupils with special educational needs in the group than usual. The overall school results were affected, and the school did not reach the target set for attainment in mathematics. However, the higher attaining pupils continued to do well and above average numbers achieved Level 5 (which is expected for 13 year olds) in all three subjects. Targets set for pupils reaching at least average levels for their age in English and mathematics in 2001 are more ambitious, particularly in mathematics. Inspection findings show that the standards of work are above average in English, design and technology, art and design, geography, physical education and singing. Standards are at expected levels for mathematics, science, religious education and history. Standards in information and communication technology are below expectations overall, although some aspects are at and above expected levels. There was insufficient evidence to make an overall judgement about music.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	These are good. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and talk enthusiastically about the school. They take great pride in the presentation of their work. Pupils enjoy challenges and approach problem-solving sensibly. Occasionally, weak teaching causes noise levels to rise, and pupils stop concentrating and start to fidget.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils' behaviour is good and often very good, both in class and around the school. This helps them concentrate, learn well and get on well with one another.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils' personal development is good overall. As they mature, they develop caring and responsible attitudes and carry out their jobs with pride. However, they do not always have enough opportunity for showing initiative and planning and carrying out activities themselves.
Attendance	This is good. Attendance is above average and pupils enjoy coming to school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is good overall. Ninety-two per cent of lessons observed were satisfactory or better, and 22 per cent of lessons were very good. Eight per cent of lessons were unsatisfactory. These were spread across all year groups, except for Year 6 where teaching is particularly good. Pupils make rapid progress in this year. The teaching of English and literacy is good throughout the school and, as a result, pupils learn and achieve well. Teaching and learning in mathematics and numeracy is satisfactory. Insufficient lessons were observed to judge the quality of teaching in information and communication technology, geography, art, music and physical education. Overall, teaching was good in personal, social and health education, religious education and design and technology. It was satisfactory in science and history. Strengths in teaching which contribute particularly well to pupils' learning are: teachers' subject knowledge in most areas; their teaching of literacy skills; their class management which creates a good atmosphere for learning, and their use of time and resources to support learning. Weaknesses in some teaching include: the lack of planning for different ability groups which limits the learning of those with special educational needs; a mismatch between the planning and the lesson in practice which leads to a lack of clear focus, and a teaching style which does not promote independent learning

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	This is good. Planning shows that religious education and all subjects of the new, revised National Curriculum are fully covered. A good programme of personal, social and health education has been established, and French is taught to the older pupils. Day and residential journeys, and good links with local schools, enrich the curriculum and pupils' personal development. A satisfactory range of clubs is put on, but younger pupils have fewer opportunities to take part. There are no study support arrangements.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	This is satisfactory. Special arrangements, such as the use of support staff and special lessons are good. Individual education plans identifying what each pupil should learn to do next are well written and effectively reviewed. However, in some classes, tasks are not always set which match their abilities and that they fully understand. This does not give them the same opportunity for learning and making progress as their peers.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school makes good formal provision for pupils' personal, social and health education although opportunities for developing self-initiated ideas and activities, and independent learning skills, are more limited. Provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory, while that for moral and social development is good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Procedures for child protection and ensuring pupils' welfare are very good. Procedures for monitoring and promoting their personal development are good, and those for their academic progress are satisfactory. Progress in English and mathematics is exceptionally well tracked, and information used well to provide extra support and set targets. Achievement in other subjects is not well monitored by all staff, and the use of assessment to guide curriculum planning is unsatisfactory overall in these subjects.

Whilst the majority of parents are satisfied, a small but significant minority of parents are dissatisfied with many aspects of the school, and relationships between this group and the school have recently become strained. Because of this, the partnership with parents is currently unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, the impact of parents' involvement on the work of the school, their contribution to their children's learning and the quality of information provided for them, particularly about pupils' progress, are all good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	This is good. The leadership group works successfully to manage the school and keep it moving forwards, despite the difficult patch it has gone through recently. Communication between members of the leadership group is effective. The rest of the staff are always kept fully informed of, and involved in, developments. However, the volume of paper work generated by the senior staff is very time-consuming, and is not always the best way to communicate information effectively.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	This is done well. Most governors are efficient and effective, and clearly understand and fulfil their responsibilities. They work well along the lines of acknowledged good practice.
The school's evaluation of its performance	This is very good. The school analyses performance data with a critical eye and uses the information very well to support improvements in teaching and learning.
The strategic use of resources	This is very good. All extra money and grants are appropriately used to support improvements, and the results evaluated. The school development plan includes suitable priorities for development, and strategic financial planning ensures they are properly funded. The managers compare school data with that of similar schools, and consult parents and others appropriately to inform their planning. They apply the principles of best value successfully.

Staff are well qualified for teaching the curriculum, and support staff make a valuable contribution to children's learning. The accommodation of the school is good and includes specialist rooms, suitable playgrounds and a separate dining room. Learning resources are good overall.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff have high expectations of their children • Behaviour is good • Their children become mature and responsible • Their children like school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range of clubs and activities outside lessons • Relationships with parents • Information about their children's progress • Homework and its system • The leadership and management of the school

Inspectors agree with parents positive views of the school. Whilst they agree that there is, or has been, some foundation to parents' concerns, the inspectors' view is that most have been blown out of proportion and many have already been addressed.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The previous inspection found that eleven year old pupils achieved well above average in the national tests for English and mathematics, and above average in science. Between 1996 and 1999, the school's results in the national tests show a slight upward trend, indicating some improvement, although the national trend shows greater improvement. The school's year 2000 national test results show a drop in all three subjects, particularly in mathematics. Pupils achieved above the national average in English, and average results in mathematics and science. The school's results in all three subjects are only minimally above the national results for that year. Results were the same when compared to those of pupils in similar schools. The main reason for this is that the year 2000 group of eleven year olds taking the national tests had more pupils with special educational needs in it than usual. These pupils had been identified when they first entered the school. Overall, they made good progress in English, and satisfactory progress in mathematics and science in their four years at St. Mary's. Nevertheless, their lower test results affected the overall school results and the target set for attainment in mathematics was not reached. However, above average numbers achieved Level 5 (which is expected for 13 year olds) in all three subjects, in comparison to the national average, which confirms that the more able pupils continued to do as well as in previous years. All statistics apply equally to both boys and girls, showing that both are well catered for.

2. The current Year 6 does not have as many pupils identified with special educational needs, and targets set for pupils reaching at least average levels for their age in the 2001 tests are more ambitious, particularly in mathematics. The school is aware of the fact that pupils do less well in mathematics and science than in English, and is working hard to correct this. Their own extensive data analysis has identified that pupils make uneven progress in different year groups and different classes. This is being addressed as a priority.

3. Overall, pupils with special educational needs achieve better in the classes where work is set that is properly matched to their needs. The few pupils with English as an additional language are well supported and achieve standards in line with their abilities.

4. During the inspection, standards throughout the school were good in all aspects of **English**. By the age of 11, pupils listen attentively and answer challenging questions. Most speak confidently in all situations, including in whole-school assemblies. Pupils use appropriate language, for example, alliteration and synonyms. Bi-lingual pupils make a full contribution in class, and younger pupils respond well to question and answer sessions. Standards in reading are very good. By 11, the most able pupils read and understand long, complex books. They can find information by using indexes and dictionaries and by scanning text. Standards of writing are good and sometimes very good. By the age of 11, almost all pupils write independently for a range of purposes. More able pupils apply writing rules well, such as grouping ideas into paragraphs, and some particularly good writing was seen in Year 6. Poetry writing is a strength of the school. Handwriting is good overall, and pupils take great pride in their work.

5. In **mathematics**, current Year 6 pupils are on target to meet average national performance levels by the end of the year. Most pupils in Year 6 calculate accurately with whole numbers and decimals although lower attaining pupils often make simple mistakes. Pupils understand the principles of the metric system for measurement and can calculate in decimals. Most pupils understand how decimals, percentages and fractions are related.

They calculate areas and perimeters and measure and draw angles of various sizes. Most pupils know the properties of shapes such as a rhombus, and describe them using appropriate mathematical vocabulary. Pupils read and construct various types of graph, and calculate statistics such as the mean and average of small sets of data.

6. Pupils' problems solving and investigational skills are less well developed than other strands of mathematics. "Mental" skills are good, except for a few pupils who do not reliably recall basic facts such as multiplication tables. Pupils make satisfactory use of their number skills in other subjects, such as using co-ordinates in geography map work.

7. In **science**, pupils gather a wide range of scientific knowledge as they move through the school. By this stage in Year 6, pupils know much about the features of living things and a healthy lifestyle. They understand that different materials have different properties, and that they can be used for different purposes. They understand the difference between solids, liquids and gases, and why some changes are reversible whereas others are not. Pupils understand the basic principles of dissolving and filtering, and of electricity, magnetism and gravity. However, in some classes, pupils have difficulty in applying these facts to investigations, which holds them back. In particular, these pupils often do not apply the principles of fair testing to their investigations, although they can tell you what a fair test means. Pupils are also concerned about being wrong, or deviating from their original plan, which sometimes causes them to waste time needlessly instead of starting again. Pupils understand how to make predictions, suggest hypotheses and draw conclusions.

8. All pupils, including those with special needs, achieve well in **art and design** and standards are above those expected for their age throughout the school. Pupils use a variety of media, including pastels, pencil, textiles, silk painting and clay. Displays show a high level of skill in both designing and making. Pupils are confident in their use of strong colour combinations and in figurative work. Standards in clay work are high and supported well by the new craft room and kiln. Pupils' skills in working in mixed media have been enhanced by working with a local artist.

9. Pupils achieve well in **design and technology** and standards are above those expected for their age in designing, planning, making, and evaluating by the time they reach Year 6. Pupils build up their skills systematically as they move through the school and as they mature, use their knowledge of the different characteristics of various materials to design and then modify their work.

10. Standards in **geography** are above expectations for pupils' age throughout the school. By Year 6, pupils understand about the effects of different climatic conditions on life-styles, and know how and why physical features such as valleys and mountains are formed. Pupils are competent in the use of atlases and maps, and are beginning to develop good enquiry skills, using both class-based sources of information, and through practical field work. They understand how humanity can affect the environment, and the problems brought about by pollution.

11. Pupils achieve at levels expected for their age in **history**. Their factual knowledge is satisfactory - for example they can describe the main events and key people within a particular period of history. However, little evidence was found to show their understanding of why societies change. Pupils understand how the past is interpreted by what has been left behind, but not enough realise that historical interpretation is dependent upon the viewpoint of the interpreter.

12. Overall, pupils' standards in **information and communication technology (ICT)** are below expectations throughout the school although work on word processing and desktop

publishing in the *communicating information* strand of the curriculum is well up to, and often exceeds, the standard expected. By Year 6, pupils make good use of clipart, editing and layout features, such as the use of text frames and columns, to enliven their work. Work in the other strands is limited. Pupils use CD-ROMS and the internet to find out more about their topics, and they use databases and spreadsheets in Years 5 and 6 to store information and to draw graphs. Older pupils have begun to use automatic sensors in science experiments. However, pupils have yet to start searching, sorting and reformulating the data to take their fact-finding further.

13. There was insufficient evidence to judge standards in **music** overall, although standards in singing are above national expectations in each year group, and pupils make good progress throughout the school. Pupils sing confidently, in tune, and with a good dynamic and expressive range. Pupils sing well at performances, and at other times, such as in assembly. Pupils who learn instruments with visiting teachers make good progress and perform confidently.

14. By this stage of Year 6, pupils' standards in those activities observed in **physical education** are above expectations for their age. In dance, pupils in Year 4 move appropriately to music and work well in co-operation with a partner. By Year 6 they work to a high standard and express their feelings in a mature way through their physical movements. Pupils in Year 5 play rugby with enjoyment. A small number show very good skills in dodging and scoring tries. Pupils achieve well in swimming. Most swim more than 25 metres, and are developing their preferred swimming stroke. Pupils throughout the school have a growing awareness of healthy living, keeping themselves safe and the effects of exercise on their bodies.

15. Pupils' achievements are satisfactory in **religious education**. They have levels of knowledge and understanding expected of their age, and understand the importance that people of different faiths place in their beliefs. As they mature, pupils begin to consider the symbolism of religion, and the similarities between aspects of different faiths.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

16. Inspection findings show that the high standards identified in the previous inspection have been maintained. Pupils enjoy coming to school; this is confirmed by the great majority of parents who returned the inspection questionnaire. The school is successful in encouraging pupils to have positive attitudes to learning, to value and respect each other and to behave well at all times. Pupils take great pride in the attractive presentation of their work and writing; diagrams and drawings are all carefully done – although sometimes at the expense of speed. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the school and the staff. Members of the school council stated "This is a great school. We like it here and teachers make lessons fun."

17. Pupils are given a range of responsibilities within the school and a few have the opportunity of helping in the neighbouring infant school. For example, some Year 5 pupils help infants with their reading and lunches. This helps pupils to develop a sense of caring and responsibility. Year 6 pupils set out playground games. Several classes help to set out and put away physical education equipment, and pupils organise the equipment needed for assemblies and keep the daily record of assembly topics. This contributes to their developing sense of belonging to a community. Pupils enjoy the responsibility and carry out their jobs with pride. However, opportunities for self-initiated responsibility, such as planning and carrying out activities themselves, are more limited.

18. Pupils' behaviour is good and often very good, both in class and around the school. This has a very positive effect on their learning and personal development as they are generally calm and concentrate well. The inspection team did not witness any bad behaviour during the inspection, although occasional weak teaching sometimes causes noise levels to rise, and pupils stop concentrating and start to fidget.

19. Pupils understand the school rules, which are displayed in every class, and they have a clear sense of right and wrong. They are confident and show care and concern for each other's feelings and help each other in lessons. Pupils of all ages handle learning resources with care, for example when using books and computers. Pupils are proud of their school and keep it tidy and free of litter. However, whilst opportunities are given for pupils to take responsibility in whole school matters, opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning, organisation and mistakes in lessons are variable. In the best lessons, pupils move freely between their desks, the book corner and the computer to further research their topic. At other times pupils are over-directed and do not have the opportunity to do research or solve problems for themselves. For example, on one occasion a teacher set up a very simple experiment without involving the pupils at all, and on another occasion, when pupils did not have their equipment ready, the teacher got it out for them.

20. Relationships between staff and pupils are generally very good. Pupils approach staff with confidence, and staff respond warmly and thoughtfully. There are very good relationships between girls and boys and between pupils of different ages, abilities and ethnic groups, all of which contribute to the positive atmosphere of the school. Pupils relate well to each other in school. Playtimes were observed to be happy times with no evidence of bullying or oppressive behaviour, although this was a concern of a few parents. Particular subjects such as religious education and history, and the school's emphasis on encouraging pupils to listen carefully to one another, help them to consider the values and beliefs of others which contributes well to their overall personal development.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

21. Current inspection findings show a broadly similar picture of the quality of teaching to that reported after the last inspection, although there have been some improvements. The standard of teaching has risen overall, but the amount of unsatisfactory teaching remains about the same.

22. Until recently, the school experienced a long period of relative stability. During this time pupils were well taught, learned well, made good progress and achieved increasingly good results in the national tests over the years. However, during the past year or so, staffing has gone through a period of instability. This has been of concern to parents, and has affected the continuity of some pupils' learning and their overall progress. The school's own data analysis shows inconsistent rates of progress in each class and in different year groups, other than in Year 6 where pupils make rapid progress in both classes. Inspection findings confirm this; the teaching in both classes in this year group was good, and much was very good.

23. At the time of the inspection, strong teaching was seen in each of the other year groups, but in one rather than both classes. In English and mathematics, one third of lessons observed were very good. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Unsatisfactory lessons were spread across several subjects, and relate more to individual teachers' weaknesses than to the subject itself. However, some previously identified weaknesses in teaching in science and mathematics still remain in some classes. In these, there is still insufficient investigation, enquiry and problem solving that is generated by the pupils themselves, and lack of suitable planning in some classes means that tasks are not

always matched to pupils' abilities. This limits the progress of the lower attaining pupils in these classes.

24. In the most effective lessons, teachers create a suitable subject ethos, have high expectations of the pupils to work things out for themselves and manage the class well – both in terms of behaviour management, and management of the activities. For example in English, teachers use creative description and vocabulary themselves to model suitable responses from the pupils. In mathematics, teachers bring together a range of mathematical approaches, concepts and facts such as fractions and, decimals, grams, and kilograms and different ways of expressing such equivalents, into the question/answer/discussion session. This illustrates the connections between mathematical concepts to the pupils who begin to see them for themselves as the sessions progress.

25. In science, two good examples of setting the subject context were observed, and show clearly how pupils learn and progress as they move through the school. In a Year 3 class, the teacher was introducing the concept of magnetism to the class. As pupils discussed their ideas the teacher reinforced subject-specific words such as *attraction*, and led the pupils to putting forward their own hypotheses, saying “Now we’re thinking science,” “The results aren’t important, WHY it happened is” and “This is how great science is done!” In a lesson in Year 6, where pupils needed to apply their knowledge of electrical circuits to solve problems, they were given complete freedom to choose the resources they needed to suit their preferred methodology. This meant they had to analyse the problem, consider alternative approaches to solving it, and then find the appropriate resources. Their work was sophisticated and, for many, above expectations for their age. As a result of this subject-based approach to teaching, pupils learn to frame their own thoughts and ideas in the right way for that subject which prepares them well for learning more. In the best lessons, behaviour management is not an issue as the rapid pace and exciting content and resources are highly motivating to the pupils who concentrate very well, strive to work as hard as they can, and enjoy themselves as they do so.

26. In unsatisfactory lessons, teachers do not reinforce subject-specific vocabulary, and do not give pupils suitable opportunity for improving their investigative skills. For example, in another science lesson, the teacher asked pupils to consider the properties of various pebbles, but did not move the pupils on from giving adjectives which were not necessarily related to the pebbles' properties, which was the point of the lesson. In the same lesson, the teacher set up an extremely simple investigation without any involvement of the pupils. Many pupils did not know why this was being done, and had no opportunity of thinking through an investigation for themselves. This limited the development of their independent learning skills, their understanding of the topic, and of investigations in general.

27. In the unsatisfactory and less effective lessons, there was often a mis-match between what was planned and what happened in practice which resulted in teachers sometimes “losing their way” as the lesson lost its focus. In these cases, planning did not generally include work set for the different ability groups in the classes, and all pupils were expected to do the same thing. Whilst the more able pupils were often able to extend their work themselves, and so made good progress, the lower attaining pupils, in particular, often struggled with their work which limited their learning. At other times, work was set at different levels for different groups of pupils in the class which apparently matched their needs. In practice, though, there were often problems with this. At times, pupils did not understand what they were reading – for example what being “twinned” or what “a third” meant. This resulted in them becoming stuck, which did not give them the same opportunity for learning and making progress as their peers. In contrast, several lessons with work set at different levels were observed. Sometimes pupils had to do the same task, but work on different work sheets using resources of different complexity. On other occasions, the tasks set were

different, although all related to the same topic. Whenever teaching was less effective, pupils tended to lose concentration and start to become noisy and fidgety. These teachers tended to continue with the lesson rather than requiring the pupils to pay full attention. As a result, pupils did not learn as much as they could have done.

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

28. The last inspection identified that the school provided a broadly based curriculum which fully met the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum. Since that time the school has reviewed and rewritten its schemes of work for all subjects to incorporate developments in the revised National Curriculum. The curriculum in Mathematics and English now takes account of both the National Literacy and National Numeracy strategies, and teaching has been adapted in line with recommendations. This is having a particularly positive effect in developing pupils' literacy skills although the Numeracy Strategy is not as well established as yet. The scheme of work for religious education has been modified in the light of the recently revised locally agreed syllabus. A good programme of personal, social and health education has been introduced. The breadth, balance and relevance of the school's curriculum are now good.

29. Curriculum policy statements are in place for all subjects. A recent curriculum profile document provides easy-to-use overviews of what will be taught in each subject to help teachers plan their lessons. These are based on government-produced schemes of work that are refined to match the school's own needs. This ensures all that statutory requirements are covered, but that lessons are relevant to pupils' needs and interests. Standard formats for long, medium and short term planning have been devised and implemented and in most cases, planning is clearly based on what pupils are expected to learn. In a few cases, too many learning objectives are chosen so that teachers can not cover them all in the lesson, and at other times, there is insufficient detail – particularly in planning suitable tasks for the different ability groups within the class.

30. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. Special arrangements made for them are good. Support staff are used well to give extra help to these pupils, and the individual education plans identifying what each pupil should learn to do next, and how this should be achieved, are well written and effectively reviewed. The Additional Literacy Support and Springboard Mathematics schemes are used well to improve lower attaining pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy. However, in the everyday classes, these pupils are not always properly catered for. At times, tasks are not set which match their abilities – or indeed those of other groups of pupils in the class such as the higher attainers. This was a weakness noted in the previous inspection. In these cases, the pupils with special educational needs struggle with their work and how to organise themselves.

31. The curriculum is well balanced. A recent review of the school's time allocations for each subject has ensured satisfactory coverage for the whole curriculum whilst prioritising the need to raise standards further in numeracy and literacy. Older pupils have the opportunity of learning French. Good use is made of classroom assistants' time in some subjects, for example to support small groups of pupils using the computer and to support pupils with special needs following Additional Literacy Support courses. Some parents expressed concern about both the regularity and content of the homework given. Inspection findings are that all pupils have homework diaries which are completed on a Monday morning and indicate what subject will be given on which day. This helps pupils to be prepared for what is to come, and keeps parents informed about what their children should be doing. Homework is generally set to complement class work and reinforce pupils' learning.

32. Educational trips are used well to bring the curriculum to life as, for example, in history when Year 3 pupils visited the Celtic Centre as part of their study of the Celts. The curriculum is also enriched by visitors to the school who work directly with pupils. For example, a local sculptor recently worked with Year 5 pupils to produce a large-scale piece of thought-provoking art work entitled "the Walk of Life" which is on display in the hall.

33. The school provides an adequate range of extra curricular activities to support the wider personal development of the pupils. These include netball, recorder, French and scrabble clubs. However, there is no homework or study support club, and there are more opportunities for older pupils to attend clubs than younger ones. This, and the limited range offered, are of concern to some parents.

34. The school has developed very strong links with other schools and with outside agencies. Subject leaders from the school and the adjacent infant school work together to develop their curriculum areas. Year 6 pupils have visited the nursery and both headteachers meet regularly and work closely together. Co-operation with the local secondary school is sufficiently strong that pupils and staff regularly visit to use the ICT facilities. Many pupils also attend lottery-funded after-school clubs held at the secondary school. Collaboration between the head and other headteachers from Ware is also well developed. Links have been established with outside agencies including local initial teacher training institutions, Powergen, which initiated a weather-watch project, and Glaxo. The school actively participates in Ware events, for example a litter poster competition and arts workshop, which helps affirm the school's place in the local community.

35. The standard of provision for pupils' personal development has been maintained since the last inspection. The provision for their personal, social and health education is good. A good programme of lessons and "Circle Time" addresses issues such as healthy eating, feelings, emotions and aspects of citizenship and local government for pupils throughout the school. The school has a clear sex education policy, although staff and governors have agreed not to provide formal sex education at present in Year 6. A governors' working group has been established to consider future policy and practice in sex education, which is an appropriate development.

36. Pupils discuss their own class rules, which form a sound basis for responsible social behaviour. The school council provides good opportunities for pupils to discuss concerns relating to the whole school community and school productions promote increasing self-confidence as pupils learn to perform together. Residential field trips to the Isle of Wight provide good opportunities for pupils to learn to live together in a socially mature way. Pupils are given planned opportunities for developing their independent learning skills and taking responsibility, but more spontaneous opportunities are not sufficiently encouraged.

37. Assemblies provide satisfactory opportunities for pupils to reflect on issues such as the meaning of "Commonwealth Day" and their own place in a wider world. At other times, especially in the programme of personal, social and health education, pupils address issues such as racism and the value of family life. However, opportunities to extend pupils' spiritual awareness such as appreciating the beauty of the natural world through science or art are less well developed.

38. The good relationships seen throughout the school are a reflection of the high moral and social standards set by staff. There is a strong ethos of respect, courtesy and consideration throughout the school. Pupils respect the school rules, which they help to shape. They know what is expected of them and clearly understand right from wrong. The school council provides pupils with the opportunity to develop personal responsibility and to play a part in whole school life. Pupils assist in day to day activities around the school, such

as taking messages, helping to organise assemblies and setting out and collecting in playground equipment at lunchtime. Sporting events and musical productions promote pupils' sense of teamwork and responsibility to others.

39. The school makes satisfactory provision for pupils' cultural development. For instance, studies of the works of William Shakespeare, of life in Tudor times, and contemporary music provide satisfactory opportunities for pupils to explore their own cultural heritage. Religious education develops pupils' understanding of the major world faiths effectively. Wall displays of international news such as the recent Indian earthquake raise pupils' awareness of life around the world, but this is not developed as much as it could be in the taught curriculum.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

40. The good standards of care identified in the last inspection have been maintained. Arrangements and procedures for child protection are very good. The headteacher is the named responsible person and staff are aware of the procedures to follow in the event of any concerns. Procedures for promoting the health, safety and well-being of pupils are good. Fire drills take place every term and the building can be evacuated and registers called in less than three minutes. External contractors regularly test fire and electrical equipment. Good procedures are in place for recording accidents and incidents and several staff, including mid-day supervisors, are trained in emergency first aid procedures,. The school's welfare officer liaises with parents if children have minor accidents such as a bump, and she will telephone parents to reassure them that their child is happy if there have been tears before school for any reason. Pupils are helped to develop a good understanding of the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle through science, physical education and personal, social and health education.

41. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are good. There is a behaviour policy which is consistently applied. This emphasises positive reinforcement as the preferred means of improving behaviour, rather than punishment, and pupils are rewarded for improving behaviour. Pupils are aware of what is expected of them and they know that sanctions will be applied if needed. The school uses exclusion as a last resort, but will do so if necessary. There are effective procedures for dealing with harassment and bullying, although instances of these are infrequent. Pupils say they appreciate "Circle Time" where they can talk about anything that is troubling them. The majority of parents who completed the questionnaire agreed that behaviour was good, although a few feel that staff are not sufficiently aware of "mental" bullying, and that behaviour is not always well-dealt with. However, no incidents of bad behaviour, harassment or bullying were seen during the week of inspection, so inspection findings can not comment on these concerns.

42. Procedures for monitoring attendance are satisfactory. There are strong links with the educational welfare officer who visits the school every half term to check on attendance. However, there are some inconsistencies in the completion of registers which makes the tight monitoring of attendance difficult.

43. There have been some improvements in assessment since the last inspection, but these are not yet widespread enough. Pupils' personal development is monitored well through the general ethos of the school, and through individual target setting by both staff and pupils. Individual education plans written by staff for pupils with special educational needs often have behavioural targets included, and pupils' own targets often include statements like "I must not call out in class." Both types of target are regularly reviewed, and whenever pupils have been successful they are rewarded and the head teacher writes a positive comment on their target card. This does much to develop pupils' self-esteem and reinforce the staff/pupil

relationships. Some parents feel that the school sacrifices pupils' personal development in favour of academic progress, and that the transition from the infant school is not carefully handled which upsets a few pupils. The inspection found no evidence to support the first concern, however, the school is aware that more could be done to support pupils in their first few weeks at St. Mary's.

44. Procedures for monitoring pupils' academic progress are satisfactory overall. Pupils' progress in English and mathematics is exceptionally carefully mapped through end-of-year testing, and the information is used very well to target extra support for individuals, such as including them in "Springboard 5" mathematics classes and Additional Literacy Strategy booster classes. This information is also used well to establish individual pupils' likely results in the Year 6 national tests, and so to inform the overall school targets for English and mathematics. However, assessment of pupils' attainment and progress within the school year is more limited in these subjects, and very much more limited in all other curriculum subjects. In most subjects other than English, mathematics and science, pupils' work is not assessed systematically as they move through the school, and assessment is dependent upon the teacher. This means that some assessment carried out is subjective and overall is not sufficiently standardised to give a reliable picture of pupils' attainment and progress. Although well-used in some classes, in others information gained from assessment is not sufficiently used to help teachers plan future lessons, or to decide how to tackle the topic better in the next academic year.

45. Marking is generally helpful to pupils. At its best, marking gives praise for good work and additional comments are often posed as questions to help the pupils take the work further for themselves. At times, particularly if pupils have special educational needs, marking comments will, appropriately, be more direct and give instructions or fill in important facts that have been missed out.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

46. The majority of parents are happy with the work of the school. However, some responses to the parents' questionnaire, and views expressed at the parents' meeting, in letters and by individual parents indicate that a small but significant number of parents are unhappy with aspects of the school. In particular, this minority are concerned about relationships and communication with the headteacher and staff, homework, and extra-curricular activities. A smaller number of parents are also concerned about the quality of teaching and their children's progress, and the leadership and management of the school. This represents a considerable shift in opinion since the last inspection when questionnaires revealed few concerns.

47. Inspection findings are that although there is, or has been, some foundation to all the parents' concerns, most of these have been blown out of proportion and the strong voice of the dissatisfied minority has overpowered that of the satisfied majority. Nevertheless, pupils could make more progress in some subjects, to match their success in others such as English and geography. A suitable homework system is now established, with clear information for both pupils and parents. Teaching is now good, although there has certainly been some instability in staffing in the recent past. Parents were unclear about the reasons for this which they found unsettling. The written information provided to parents about their children's progress is good. Some systems, such as target setting, are relatively new and some parents have not yet been clearly informed about them; however, the school is open to further enquiries from parents about these and any other matters, but few take up the opportunity. Relationships and communication between the school and a small group of parents, in particular, have become difficult. The school is well led and managed, but the "personal touch" is losing hold which some parents are beginning to feel and resent. There is

an adequate range of activities outside lessons, however, these are not equally accessible to all year groups.

48. The school acknowledges that relationships with a small minority of parents have become strained. This has had an effect on the morale of both staff and parents and is beginning to affect an increasingly wide group. Inspection findings are that most of the dissatisfactions are based on parents' and staff's differing viewpoints of the same situation. For example, staff are no longer freely accessible to parents before school since several unpleasant incidents in the classroom although parents can always telephone for an appointment. The school considers it operates an "open door" policy and many parents still come to see staff informally at the end of the day. Some parents regret the loss of the spontaneous "two minutes" in the mornings, and in particular are upset that this information was given to them in a formal letter which "tarred them with the same brush" as the disruptive parents. On the other hand, staff now feel less anxious about being faced with abusive parents without preparation, and feel that the pupils are better protected from "scenes" that they should not witness. They feel more able to prepare for the day's work in this knowledge, and can commence registration on time. Nevertheless, this breakdown in communication with this small group of parents is detrimental to the work of the school and must be addressed.

49. Other aspects of the school's partnership with parents are good. The quality of information for parents has been maintained since the last inspection. The prospectus and the governors' annual report provide very clear and useful information. Few parents attend the governors' annual meeting for parents, and governors receive very few complaints, although they are easily accessible, and the headteacher will see parents on request. Home/school books allow parents and teachers to liaise about pupils and their work, although some parents say that these are not regularly completed by the school. Many letters are sent to parents informing them of what is or about to be happening.

50. Written information provided to parents on their children's progress is good. Reports clearly state what pupils know, understand and can do. Parents' evenings during autumn and spring terms enable parents to look at pupils' work in the classroom and have a private appointment with the class teacher. Some parents feel this is too short, particularly if a child is experiencing difficulties, however, further meetings are often arranged as a result. Some also feel that they are not informed soon enough if their child is experiencing problems. During the summer term two evenings are set aside for parents, one to discuss reports, and the second to tour the school with an opportunity to meet the next year's teacher. This is extended to parents of children moving from the infant school, who are given the opportunity of touring the school in small groups and discussing its work with the headteacher over coffee. This is a very positive introduction to the school for these parents.

51. There is a very active Friends committee, which organises functions and fund raising for the school. Parents play an active role in many of the school's activities, such as the "walking buses" and accompanying pupils on outings, for example to the Dome, which indicates the strong commitment of many.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

52. In the last inspection, the leadership and management of the school were judged to be good, and, overall, this standard has been maintained. The headteacher and deputy head teacher have both been in post for over ten years, and together have laid down a wide range of effective systems, policies and practices for leadership and management. Recently, these have appropriately incorporated practices to support self-evaluation and improvement, which

have become major foci for the school. The appointment of a new senior teacher has further strengthened the leadership group,

53. Members of the leadership group firmly believe that the work of the school as a whole is the responsibility of each individual member of staff, and they strive to keep everyone fully informed and involved in all developments. Weekly senior staff meetings are held and the outcomes of discussions, data analysis and monitoring are shared with the other teaching staff at their weekly meetings. These are often supplemented by written documents. All meetings have an agenda, minutes and the opportunity for staff to make their own contribution. Whilst this degree of organisation is very efficient, and the information provided for staff extensive, it is very time consuming to produce and is not always necessarily the best way of communicating information. Similarly, several parents expressed their concern that a formal letter sent by the governing body to all parents, which had to be signed and returned, was not an appropriate method for communicating a particularly sensitive issue relating to a few parents.

54. The effectiveness of the subject leaders is variable in helping to raise pupils' achievements. Most subject leaders have had time in which to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning in their subjects. This has been most successful in English, mathematics and science where pupils' work has been closely scrutinised to identify areas for improvement. For example, in both mathematics and science the need for more work on using and applying mathematical/scientific skills was identified as a result. The lack of a standardised assessment system in other subjects has contributed to the variability of the subject leaders' effectiveness as judgements about the standards of pupils' work are very subjective. The role of special educational needs co-ordinator has recently been taken over by two teachers and they are working very well together to review and improve systems and practices. For example, they have already appropriately identified the need to monitor how well individual education plans are used to support planning for individuals in everyday classes.

55. The senior staff and governors are clear that they are working to move the school forwards and improve standards. These intentions are embodied in the school's aims and vision statement, and, in more specific terms, in the school development plan. This document sets suitable priorities and targets for development, and progress towards them is regularly monitored. Senior staff monitor standards of teaching and learning carefully in order to achieve the school's aims for raising standards. They follow this up with individual interviews with staff, and a programme of support if necessary, although these efforts have not yet been fully effective in raising the standard of teaching throughout the school. This approach will be continued with the full implementation of the government's new scheme for performance management, to come into full effect immediately after the inspection. The results of careful analysis of pupils' performance in various tests in English and mathematics are well used to target extra support for these pupils, for example by setting up special classes for literacy and numeracy. These are proving to be effective in raising these pupils' levels of attainment and are likely to result in the school meeting its targets for achievement in the national tests in 2001.

56. The governors fulfil their statutory duties well and are very aware of the school's strengths, weaknesses and problems, for example in relation to the national test results and staff recruitment. However, many of the school's policies are undated, and do not have a review date set against them. Governors are suitably involved in the strategic management of the school, but rely heavily on the headteacher to keep them fully informed. Much of this information is provided in written form which is time-consuming to prepare.

57. The financial management of the school is very good. Strategic financial management is sharp and appropriately focused on improvement and development. These are brought together in the school development plan, and supported by the careful use of funds. All extra monies and grants received by the school are also well used to this end, and the effectiveness of the expenditure is now being evaluated. The decision to buy in the services of an accountant to maintain the system and keep the managers fully informed has been wise, and the financial situation of the school is always completely up to date. This helps inform reviews of progress towards targets for development and improvement, and further planning. The managers pride themselves on applying the principles of best value and have worked hard to compare themselves with others, helped by information provided by the Local Authority. They consult the parents annually, and seek competitive prices for any large expenditure.

58. Many of the longer-standing staff leave the school for promotion, and, more recently, other staff have left for various personal reasons. The school is experiencing great difficulty in recruiting replacements. These factors have contributed to the recent staffing problems. Nevertheless, staff are well qualified for teaching the breadth of the curriculum, and there are adequate numbers for the pupils on roll. The support for new staff is good, and new teachers are given time away from their classes to become familiar with the school's policies and practices, and to see strong teachers at work. The school has successfully supported an unqualified teacher to become qualified through the appropriate scheme, and is currently successfully providing training for a teacher under the Graduate Registered Teacher Scheme.

59. The accommodation of the school is good. The premises are well maintained and include a specialist music room and a small craft room where the kiln is situated. The classrooms are spacious and the hall is a good size. There is a separate dining room which ensures that activities which need the hall space never need to be interrupted. The large grass playing field allows games and athletics to take place when it is not too wet. The school has a swimming pool, which is well used in the warmer weeks of the summer term.

60. Learning resources are good overall in range, quality and quantity. The school has focused improvement on developing resources for English. There is a separate non-fiction library, although this was not seen in use during the inspection, and fiction books are also centralised elsewhere, together with some resources for reading schemes. Each classroom has a supply of books to provide easy reference for pupils. All classes have at least one computer connected to the internet which they use to access additional information for their topics. There is no information technology suite.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

61. In order to develop the school further, and improve the weaknesses identified in the inspection, the governing body, headteacher and school staff should:

- (1) a. raise the standards attained in mathematics and science to be comparable with those attained in English by:
 - *improving teaching where needed
 - *increasing the emphasis on using and applying mathematics, and scientific enquiry
 - allowing pupils the freedom to experiment, investigate and learn from their own mistakes;
(paragraphs: 2, 7, 23, 26, 55, 73, 76, 82, 83, 85, 87, 88)
- b. raise the standards attained in ICT by:
 - *developing staff competence and expertise in all aspects of the subject
 - *ensuring all strands of the scheme of work are given suitable emphasis;
(paragraphs 12, 84, 108, 110, 112)
- (2) re-establish good working relationships with all parents by actively working to address the their concerns;
(paragraph: 48)
- (3) ensure that written management information is kept to a necessary minimum, and is the most appropriate form of communicating what is intended;
(paragraphs 48, 53, 56)
- (4) develop through-school assessment systems for subjects other than English, mathematics and science which can be used consistently to track pupils' attainment and progress and inform planning;
(paragraphs: 44, 54, 94, 99, 104, 107, 113, 128)
- (5) *make sure that all teachers prepare suitable work for pupils that matches their varying needs, and that can be fully understood by them;
(paragraphs: 3, 23, 27, 29, 30, 88)

*** indicates that the school has already identified this as an area for development**

The following less important issues should also be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- encourage pupils to initiate and take responsibility themselves
(paragraphs: 17,19,36)
- develop the support and induction arrangements for pupils entering the school
(paragraph 43)
- develop the role of the subject leaders so all are effective in raising standards in their subjects
(paragraphs: 79, 88, 99, 104, 107)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	51
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	33

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	22	38	32	8	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	Y3 – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	236
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Y3– Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	61

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3

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

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	3.5
National comparative data	5.1

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	0.4

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
	2000	36	25	61

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	30	25	30
	Girls	23	19	23
	Total	53	44	53
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	87 (85)	72 (81)	87 (91)
	National	75 (70)	72 (69)	85 (78)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	28	25	28
	Girls	24	20	23
	Total	52	45	51
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	85 (87)	74 (83)	84 (87)
	National	70 (68)	72 (69)	80 (75)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	1
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	230
Any other minority ethnic group	0

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	2	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)	8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	29.5
Average class size	29.5

Education support staff: Y3 - Y6

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	119

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
	£
Total income	453 085
Total expenditure	443 965
Expenditure per pupil	1 842
Balance brought forward from previous year	10 772
Balance carried forward to next year	19 891

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	236
Number of questionnaires returned	70

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	51	7	6	0
My child is making good progress in school.	34	44	14	4	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	20	64	7	3	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21	54	17	3	4
The teaching is good.	24	56	13	4	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	21	56	19	4	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	34	41	14	9	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	44	51	3	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	13	50	20	11	6
The school is well led and managed.	27	46	14	6	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	23	64	7	4	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	11	33	34	11	10

Other issues raised by parents

In addition to the above, a number of parents expressed their concerns about the turnover of staff; the inconsistency in different teachers' methods, approaches and personalities; the nature of communication from and with the school; support for pupils with special educational needs; and how the difference in ethos between the infant and junior schools is handled.

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

ENGLISH

61. The national tests for 11 year olds in the year 2000 show that the pupils are performing both above the national average, and above those in similar schools. However, whilst the results over the last four years are consistently high, standards in the school dropped slightly in last year's results due to increased numbers of pupils with special educational needs in the year group.

62. During the inspection, standards throughout the school were good in all aspects of English. Pupils' current performance suggests they above the national average. This is due to good teaching and the pupil's own motivation.

63. In speaking and listening, by the age of 11, pupils listen attentively in both whole-class and group work. They are alert and offer answers to often challenging questions. They make good connections with what they have previously learned; for example, in a Year 5 literacy lesson pupils described the emotions the poet intended to evoke in the piece of poetry they were studying. Pupils speak confidently, and this is promoted by many opportunities given to them to address others, for example to give their ideas in class and in whole school assemblies. On Commonwealth day, the school council made a small presentation to the rest of the school about what children all over the world, regardless of where they live, need in order to survive and thrive. This was thoughtful and well-presented by pupils of all ages. Younger pupils respond well to question and answer sessions, such as about material they are reading. In Year 6, pupils express their views well and with confidence. For example, in design and technology, pupils clearly identified and talked to the class about how they would like to improve their work. Bi-lingual pupils make a full contribution in class, particularly when supported by classroom assistants.

64. Standards in reading are very good. By age 11, more able pupils can read and understand long, complex stories and information books. They understand and can explain the difference between aspects of language, such as synonyms and alliteration. They use indexes and dictionaries freely and correctly. Pupils read with good expression and can scan text to find supporting evidence for assertions they make.

65. Standards of writing are good and sometimes very good. By the age of eleven, almost all pupils write independently for a range of purposes such as letters, poetry, newspaper articles and accounts in other subjects such as history. More able pupils apply writing rules well, such as grouping ideas into paragraphs and using literary conventions, when, for example, writing play scripts. In Year 6 some particularly good writing was seen connected with the pupils' visit to the Globe Theatre in London. Poems about storms inspired by Shakespeare's *The Tempest* are also of a particularly high standard. Younger pupils, too, show a good standard of work in their re-writing of well-known nursery rhymes in modern-day language. Poetry writing is a strength of the school. Every class has the opportunity to read, write and learn about different forms of poetry. Handwriting seen in pupils' books and in lessons is good overall, and pupils take great pride in the meticulous presentation of their work.

66. Teaching is always at least satisfactory and two thirds observed was good and very good. Pupils' achievement in English is clearly enhanced by good teaching. Lessons are well-planned with clear learning objectives, which are well explained to the pupils. This helps them to understand the purpose of the lesson and what they should be doing. Pupils with special educational needs are well-supported by questioning and work directed carefully at

their particular level. In general, teachers plan tasks to match pupils' needs which helps to ensure that they understand what they are doing and reading, and can succeed. Most teachers demonstrate a high level of skill in questioning, checking understanding and helping pupils verbalise complex ideas. This motivates the pupils and helps them develop their own skills. Pupils enjoy themselves, are keen to learn, concentrate well and are well behaved, and so make good progress. Characteristics of less effective lessons include: the lack of tight behaviour management, which allows pupils to chatter to each other and lose concentration; groups remaining unsupported for too long, which prevents them getting help when they get stuck; and a generally less pacy and motivating approach. Teaching is supported by a good range of resources, including big books and white boards for whole-class work.

67. The use and development of literacy in other subjects is generally good. Teachers are careful to use subject-specialist words in their lessons to help widen pupils' vocabulary and develop their ability to communicate in the subject effectively. Planning is appropriately based on the National Literacy Strategy and pupils are given the opportunity to do extended writing, and writing in different forms, in other subjects, such as historical accounts and the write-up of science investigations. Research from books, CD-ROMs and the internet allow pupils to extend their knowledge, and word processing is used well to enhance the presentation of some of their work.

68. The school gives high priority to the teaching of English. There is a good English policy, and scheme of work, which are well written and very detailed in content. Teachers' assessment and record keeping in English is extensive. Marking is consistent and effective, highlighting where pupils can improve their work. Whilst there is currently no permanent leader for this subject, the head teacher and deputy head teacher co-ordinate the subject very well together. They monitor teaching and learning and feed back their findings to staff members and evaluate work in a way that enables other teachers to judge standards in their classes. This helps teachers to plan for improvements.

MATHEMATICS

69. Pupils' standards in mathematics are in line with national averages at the end of Year 6, and are similar to those reported at the last inspection. Results in the annual national Year 6 tests have shown some variation in recent years, typically improving in one year, but declining in the following year. The overall trend is one of slow improvement. However, results are rising more slowly than national figures overall. In 2000, the results were in line with all schools nationally, and matched those in schools with a similar intake at Year 3. Current Year 6 pupils are on target to meet average national performance levels by the end of the year.

70. By the end of Year 6, most pupils calculate accurately with whole numbers and decimals. However, the work of lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs is inconsistent. At times, they work accurately, but at other times they make mistakes, for instance when carrying out the final addition as part of a multiplication sum. Pupils understand the principles of the metric system for measurement, and apply decimal calculating skills appropriately. For example, in work on area and perimeter, they add lengths and express measurements in different equivalent forms such as 3.52 metres and 352 centimetres. Most pupils understand how decimals and percentages are related, and many know also how they relate to fractions. However, a small minority does not understand this link, and mistakenly write 0.42 as $\frac{1}{42}$, for example. Pupils make satisfactory use of their number skills in other subjects. For instance, they use coordinates and ratio in geography map work, and they measure materials and weigh ingredients accurately in design and technology lessons.

71. In work on shape and space, pupils calculate areas and perimeters of shapes based on rectangles. Many use protractors accurately to measure and draw angles of all sizes, although a few pupils' work is untidy which reduces their accuracy. Pupils know the properties of shapes such as a rhombus and a trapezium, which they describe using appropriate mathematical vocabulary such as "parallel" and "perpendicular".

72. In a lesson on the interpretation of graphs, nearly all pupils explained the shape of the temperature graph for a melting block of ice, relating their work to what they had learned in science about the melting process. In other data-handling activities, pupils calculate statistics such as the mean and range of small sets of data.

73. Although satisfactory overall, pupils' problem solving and investigational skills are less well developed than other strands of the subject. They have improved since the last inspection, mainly due to the introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy, which places an increased focus on the mental and oral aspects of this work. Mental skills are good, except for a few pupils who do not reliably recall basic facts such as multiplication tables. Most pupils successfully use a "problem solving" template to answer questions that conform to particular types. However, pupils' skills in exploring open-ended tasks are less well established. For example, in a *Magic Square* investigation (arrange the digits 0 to 9 in a 3 by 3 square so that all rows, columns and diagonals add up to the same total), pupils find solutions and consider effects such as adding 2 to each number. However, they do not show how they tackled their work by writing down and explaining what they did, nor do they extend their work or develop rules.

74. The quality of teaching and pupils' learning is satisfactory overall. Nearly half of the lessons seen were good or very good, but one unsatisfactory lesson was observed. In the most successful lessons work is demanding. It is well matched to the different abilities within the class, lesson pace is brisk and teachers engage pupils in effective discussions supported by perceptive questions. For example, in a Year 3 lesson on multiplication and division, well-structured questions gave pupils the confidence to respond positively and to express their answers using correct mathematical language. Consequently, they developed their problem solving skills well, especially in deriving division facts from what they know about multiplication. In a Year 6 lesson when pupils had to interpret the patterns on a range of graphs, such as how and why the temperature varies at different times of day, they responded very well to the challenge and made very good progress in understanding and using graphs. They showed good understanding of reading scales, close attention to detail and good oral skills to explain what they found.

75. Teachers have good relationships with their pupils. Consequently, pupils are relaxed and they take a positive interest in their work. Most teachers have effective strategies for controlling behaviour and maintaining attention. However, in one lesson, pupils were noticeably restless and inattentive when the teacher was explaining work. This led to minor interruptions that affected the overall pace of the lesson and reduced the progress that pupils might otherwise have made.

76. The quality of lesson planning is inconsistent. Where planning is good, lessons are well structured and follow the framework set out in the National Numeracy Strategy. Teachers set clear learning objectives that show what pupils are to learn. They are shared with the class, so that pupils know what they are trying to achieve. However, in some lessons, objectives refer to what pupils have to do - for example to complete particular questions from the text - rather than what they are to learn. Consequently, pupils are less clear about the intended outcome of the lesson as they simply focus on getting through the specified tasks. Unsatisfactory planning was a significant factor in the unsatisfactory lesson

seen. In this case, there was very little detail of what pupils were to learn, and little indication of how the lesson was to be organised. In addition, the teacher took much too long to explain what pupils had to do, which restricted the time available to do it. As a result of these factors, work lacked sufficient challenge, pupils were restless, and they simply did not complete sufficient work to develop their understanding of the topic being taught.

77. Where they are available, classroom assistants provide effective support for pupils with special educational needs. They provide close personal support to help pupils concentrate on their work and to complete the tasks set. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in lessons and over the longer term.

78. The National Numeracy Strategy is fully established. The framework helps teachers to set work that develops pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding systematically as they progress through the school. Standardised tests are administered each year to enable teachers to assess pupils' mathematical attainment and progress and to help set up additional teaching groups such as the Year 5 *Springboard* class and the Year 6 *Booster* groups. These classes provide additional support for particular groups of pupils. They are especially beneficial for lower attaining pupils, although the higher attaining group taught in last year's "Booster" time attained high standards in the national tests. Assessment procedures are satisfactory overall, although more use could be made of in-year assessment, and the use of this information to set targets for individual pupils.

79. The management of the subject is satisfactory. The subject leader is well aware of the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' performance, and in teaching, as not all teachers are fully confident in implementing the National Numeracy Strategy. She recognises the need for more in-year assessment. However, these findings have not yet translated into effective action for improvement. The school has a good range of high quality learning resources to support all aspects of mathematics teaching. Teachers make some use of ICT in lessons, for example through "speed tables" practice for small groups of pupils. However, insufficient use is made of computers to develop pupils' skills in mathematical modelling, problem solving and handling data, for instance through the use of spreadsheets.

SCIENCE

80. Overall, pupils' standards are in line with national averages at this stage of Year 6, and are similar to those reported at the last inspection. Results in the annual national Year 6 tests show a trend of slow improvement, with a peak in 1999 and a drop in 2000. However, results are rising more slowly than the national trend.

81. By this stage in Year 6, pupils have gathered a wide range of scientific knowledge and facts which they have built up and reinforced as they move through the school. Most pupils know what animals need in order to live, the major organs in the body and the main characteristics of vertebrates and invertebrates. They understand the principles of healthy eating and lifestyles, which are reinforced through lessons in personal, social and health education. They know how animals and plants reproduce and how seeds are dispersed. Pupils understand that different materials have different properties, and that, consequently, they can be used for different purposes, such as insulation and to conduct electricity. They understand the difference between solids, liquids and gases, and how some changes are reversible, such as water to ice, whereas others are not, such as cooking ingredients. Pupils know the principles of the water cycle, evaporation, dissolving, filtering and the separation of substances, and they understand the principles of electricity, magnetism and gravity. In all these areas, pupils develop a good scientific vocabulary which they use freely in their discussions. For example, in Year 6, a high attaining group of pupils had a very technical discussion about the virtues of parallel and series circuits to solve their problems. Pupils

with special educational needs also have a good understanding of basic facts, but are less skilled in using them to solve problems and draw conclusions from their work.

82. Despite this undoubted knowledge, the aspect of science that pupils are less sure of is the application of these facts in an investigative context. This prevents more pupils reaching higher levels than expected for their age. In particular, pupils do not apply the principles of fair testing to their investigations, although they can tell you what a fair test means. In Year 5, pupils had to test various materials to see whether sound passed through them. In a mixed ability group, not one pupil thought to standardise any aspect of the investigation, for example to use the same length of material, or use the same sound to test the conductivity, or even to make sure that the sound could not be heard through the uncovered ear. In Year 6, pupils were given the very challenging task of testing for a break in a set of six paired wires, although which wire was paired with which was hidden from them. Even these pupils, who were clearly very able, did not structure their investigation to test one variable at a time. This suggests that the philosophy of fair testing is not sufficiently embedded in their thinking.

83. A further problem with pupils' success in the investigative aspect of science is their insecurity about being wrong, or deviating from their original plan. In a Year 6 investigation into making working "traffic lights", pupils knew that the batteries they were using were too powerful and kept blowing the light bulbs. However, they felt that they were not allowed to change any components once they had chosen them, and that they had to persevere and make the lights work. Similarly, in another Year 6 class, pupils worked very independently on their original plan, creating circuits, stripping wires and adding in other components, but when they became stuck, they did not consider a "rethink" in case they had gone down the wrong route.

84. Throughout the school, pupils' science books show careful well-presented work. A good mixture of free writing and worksheets is used, illustrated with neat drawings, diagrams and graphs of various kinds. These become more elaborate as pupils grow older. Pupils understand how to make predictions, suggest hypotheses and draw conclusions. Their investigations and topics are written up with care and in an appropriate form for the subject. ICT is used at times, mostly in word processing form, but more could be made of this to develop pupils' ICT skills and enhance their science work.

85. At times, teaching fails to support pupils' investigative skills adequately. In a Year 3 class' introductory lesson on rocks and soils, the teacher introduced a very simple investigation relating to soil in the middle of work on rocks, and set this up without any involvement of the pupils. This did not reinforce any aspect of investigation for the pupils, and denied them the experience they need to learn how to set up an investigation for themselves. In Year 5, investigations into sound did not include sufficient structure and reminders for pupils to make sure the test was fair. Furthermore, the task was not adapted to meet the differing abilities of the pupils. Consequently, the progress of the lower attainers was limited as these pupils could not organise themselves sufficiently well to set up the investigation properly.

86. Overall, teaching in science was satisfactory, although it was good in Year 6. One unsatisfactory lesson was observed. The best lessons were characterised by a very clear purpose, and high quality discussions where the teacher used questions and answers to remind pupils of what they already knew, what they were going to learn next, and what they might need to do in the future. Teachers have high expectations of the pupils to set up investigations themselves, and to work collaboratively with one another to solve their problems. These good teachers also reinforced pupils' scientific ethos – stressing that the results were less important than the reasons why things happened. The teachers were not

afraid of some “structured chaos” in their rooms as pupils moved around freely, talking and arguing about how to solve the problems, and comparing their work with others. In each case, the pupils were silenced quickly and easily when the teacher wanted.

87. In less effective and unsatisfactory lessons, the teachers were more constrained and less creative about their teaching. Pupils became restless because of this, and non-productive chatter bubbled up and distracted their concentration. This was not always easy to silence. Planning in these lessons was often very brief and did not identify clear learning objectives. Consequently, teachers were less focused in their explanations and sometimes lost the pupils’ attention and understanding.

88. The management of the subject is satisfactory. The subject leader has spent some time monitoring pupils’ work to identify how it should improve, and fed this back to staff, but teaching in these weaker area is not yet sufficiently improved. The curriculum has recently been revised to match the requirements of the new National Curriculum. However, the move to new commercial material to support the scheme of work has been slower than anticipated, and it is only fully in place and resourced for Years 3 and 4 which creates additional pressures on Year 5 and 6 staff. In some classes there is insufficient in-year assessment to support curriculum planning and planning for individuals although in others this is good. Analysis of work for pupils of differing attainment in each year group revealed very little difference in the work set for them. The main difference between the work of the higher and lower attainers is that the lower attaining pupils write considerably less, are more untidy and sometimes do not complete their work. Overall, this indicates that in some classes work is not planned to meet the needs of the differing groups, which holds back the progress of the less able.

ART AND DESIGN

89. Pupils’ attainment is above that expected for their age, maintaining the good levels of achievement reported in the previous inspection. All pupils, including those with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well. Pupils use a variety of media to very good effect including pastels, pencil, textiles, silk painting and clay.

90. Wall and classroom displays clearly demonstrate a high level of skill in both design and making. Year 6 pupils show very good understanding of how to make use of strong colour combinations and interesting figurative work, for example when they made silk paintings to accompany poems about birds, fish and jelly fish. Pupils show that they can use ICT creatively, as when Year 4 pupils explored geometric and abstract images using a computer art package.

91. The recently purchased kiln has been used to produce some very pleasing clay work and is a good investment in the development of pupils’ skills. Year 4 pupils have made metallic painted clay plaques with attractive primitive patterns of indentations. Year 6 have modelled and biscuit fired clay figures in various lifelike poses which are displayed to very good effect in their classroom.

92. Although the last inspection judged provision in art to be at least satisfactory, the development of this subject has been identified as a priority in the school’s development plan. Good progress has been made so that the range and quality of resources and materials have improved significantly. Teachers’ confidence and skills in working in a range of different media have also been a focus for improvement since the last inspection. Pupils’ opportunities for learning have been further enhanced by working with a local artist. Year 5 pupils worked with a visiting sculptor to create a giant frieze entitled *A walk for life* combining collage, paint, print and clay work.

93. Due to timetabling arrangements, too few lessons were observed to judge the overall quality of teaching. However, the quality of pupils' work and the progress they make throughout the school indicate that it is likely to be good. In the few lessons observed, teaching was at least satisfactory. Activities were planned at an appropriate level and pupils' behaviour and attitudes were consistently good.

94. The subject leader is experienced and clearly focused on improving both standards and provision in art. She provides strong leadership and very good strategic management of the subject. The curriculum has been selectively revised in the light of the recent government-produced scheme of work so that pupils build up their skills from year to year. Teachers' skills and confidence have also been extended by training sessions on painting and using clay, and by developing the display of work around the school. These are now very good. These developments have been monitored by the subject leader through evaluation of teachers' planning and pupils' work. Lessons have been observed to ensure that the new scheme of work is effectively implemented. Overall, however, assessment is underdeveloped and has been identified as a priority for improvement.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

95. At this stage in the year, most pupils in Year 6 are working at above the level expected for their age. At the last inspection no lessons were observed; however, attainment was judged to be in line with national expectations based on an evaluation of work available. This shows pupils have made good progress in this subject since the last inspection.

96. Pupils achieve well. Throughout the school, tasks focus on designing, planning, making, and evaluating, and by Year 6 most pupils have built up good skills in all these areas. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well, although they are most skilled at the making strand of the subject. For example, pupils were set the task of building a moving army tank. After their first attempt, they discussed and clarified their developing ideas on the basis of experience, and through discussion with their friends and staff. As a result, the pupils re-designed their tank, and incorporated modifications based on their knowledge of the different characteristics of various materials, and how these might be used to greater advantage in a second version. During the same lesson another group of pupils worked on creative designs in batik. Pupils translated their designs onto the material, and were totally absorbed in the task. They refined and modified their designs as they went along, when they saw the effect of sequins and beads on the overall appearance of their work

97. Work displayed around the school is of a high standard. Pupils in Year 3 produced tie and dye and wool tapestry work of a good standard for their age, and those in Year 4 experimented with patterns and glazes in their clay work. These skills are built upon as pupils mature. Pupils in Year 5 designed and made good quality carnival masks. Some attractive and carefully constructed Tudor-style houses, made from balsa wood and card, are on display in the entrance hall and link in with Year 5 history work. Pupils in Year 6 made good clay models of active figures and interesting models of cats, made out of newspaper, wire and plaster. These were made after the class went behind the scenes at the London show of CATS, which shows good cross-curricular links.

98. Teaching is good. Staff have the resources immediately available, and allow pupils to make their own choices and decisions which supports their independent learning skills. Questioning is used skilfully to draw out pupils' knowledge, and to encourage them to apply this to their current task. Good emphasis is given to consideration of the properties of the materials they are using, and the methods to be used rather than what the finished article will look like. Suggestions and support are given, but creative ideas are not. These are,

appropriately, left up to the pupils. When relevant, teachers give good demonstrations to develop pupils' understanding. For example, an effective explanation of how a cam works led pupils to understand that it turns a circular movement into an up-and-down one. Pupils show obvious enjoyment of the activities. They listen to the views of others on how to refine their work and explain themselves clearly.

99. The subject leader has only just taken over the role, and is developing ideas for the development of the subject. The curriculum is appropriately based on the revised National Curriculum, and government-produced guidance is used as an additional source of support and ideas. Assessment is very limited, and is not standardised across the school. Resources for the subject are good..

GEOGRAPHY

100. Only one lesson was observed, but evidence of work and informal discussions with pupils indicate that standards in geography are above expectations for pupils' age throughout the school. This shows an improvement since the last inspection.

101. By Year 6, pupils understand that different countries experience different climates, and, to some extent, why this is. They can account for how and why various physical features such as valleys and mountains are formed, and why such features and different climates affect crop growth and the way people live. Pupils are competent in the use of atlases and maps, and appreciate that maps of different scales are useful for different purposes. They have clear ideas about how humanity can damage the environment, and show strong feelings about the effects of pollution. Pupils are beginning to develop good enquiry skills and, with prompting, can give reasons why settlements first developed in given localities. They use various sources of information such as books and the internet to find out more about their topic, and enjoy practical field work where they learn about investigation first hand.

102. This good standard of work is evident throughout the school. Pupils in Year 3 clearly understand the "rules" of plans, maps and keys, and can both read and create simple maps for themselves. They know that different countries have different climates – necessitating different clothes - and can identify countries such as England, and North Africa on a world map. In Year 4, pupils can interpret and compare different maps, such as recent and "old" maps of Ware, giving reasons for changes in the housing patterns. They can extend this to comparing their own lives with those of children living in a Pakistani village. In most books, pupils' work was completed with care and obvious pride. Some of those in Years 5 and 6 were really exceptional. Pupils use block and line graphs, and tables, to record and illustrate various phenomena such as temperature which links well with work in science and mathematics.

103. Too few lessons were observed to make a judgement about teaching, but the standard of pupils' work indicates it is likely to be at least good. Good features of the teaching observed include work set that matched the needs of different ability groups in the class. For example, in Year 3 the whole class was working on the use of maps, but the tasks set were of varying difficulty which meant that all pupils were fully involved and succeeding. This approach allowed pupils with special educational needs to achieve well, which motivated them and boosted their self-esteem. Good relationships and a relaxed atmosphere prevailed in the lessons observed. This encouraged pupils to discuss their work and ideas with one another, and to bring in their own experiences which helped them enjoy these lessons very much.

104. The curriculum has been revised to meet the requirements of the new National Curriculum. Field trips, which build up each year to a residential journey to the Isle of Wight in Year 6 are very well used to provide the contexts for geographical enquiry, and to link the work with other practical subjects. Subject leadership is satisfactory. The subject leader monitors teachers' planning and pupils' work, but as yet has not translated the findings into a plan for improvement. Assessment of the pupils' work is not used sufficiently to help with planning and secure pupils' progress as they move through the school.

HISTORY

105. Pupils achieve at levels expected for their age which maintains the position noted at the last inspection. Their knowledge of historical facts is sound. Pupils can describe the main events and key people within a particular period of history. For example, younger pupils can talk about how people lived in Roman times and similarly, those in Year 5 can describe life in Tudor times. However, little evidence was found to show their understanding of reasons for the rise and fall of a society, for example in their study of the Egyptians, or why scientific advances cause societies to change. This was a weakness noted in the previous inspection. Pupils understand how the past is interpreted by what has been left behind, and those in Year 3 enjoyed "being archaeologists" and learning from Roman-style artefacts. However, by Year 6, not enough pupils realise that historical interpretation is dependent upon the viewpoint of the interpreter. Pupils throughout the school are becoming skilled at using different sources to find out information. For example, in a Year 4 class pupils used books, photographs and the internet to find out about their topic.

106. Teaching was satisfactory overall, although few lessons were observed. In these lessons, planning was detailed and related well to the classroom activity. Good resources were used well so that all pupils could participate on equal terms with one another and remain interested. For example, pupils in Year 3 showed a sustained interest in their archaeologists' role. In a Year 4 class, the teacher had prepared four different sets of worksheets and resources on the locality of Ware, to meet the needs of the different ability groups in the class. All pupils were very positive and approached their task with enthusiasm. The highest attainers read their passages avidly, and drew out the answers to the questions they were asked. If they came across a word they did not understand, such as "Franciscan," they asked its meaning or looked it up in the dictionary. These pupils also sought more information independently, using the library and internet. The lower attainers needed help with their task, mainly because they did not understand what some of the words meant, such as "twinned," and were not able to move on from this sticking point.

107. The curriculum has improved since the last inspection. The school has used government-produced guidelines as the basis for its own schemes of work, which ensures that the requirements are fully covered. The curriculum is significantly enriched by trips to local museums and historic sites, and by the appropriate use of artefacts and replicas. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The subject leader is enthusiastic and shares her love of history with both staff and pupils. She monitors the teachers' planning and marking and has recently undertaken an evaluation of pupils' work. Marking is regularly undertaken but methods are inconsistent across the year groups. Assessment of the pupils' work is not used sufficiently to support future planning. Consequently, the systematic build up of pupils' skills in chronological understanding and enquiry are not secured as they move through the school .

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

108. Overall, pupils' standards in ICT are below expectations throughout the school. They have declined since the last inspection, where they were reported as being in line with

national expectations. Pupils have made good recent progress in the "communicating information" strand through work on word processing and desktop publishing. This work is well up to the standard expected, and sometimes exceeds it. However, at present, pupils do insufficient work in other strands of the subject to have reached an appropriate level.

109. The decline in standards is attributable to the gradual ageing and breakdown of old equipment, which has only very recently been replaced. Consequently, teachers and pupils have had insufficient access to ICT equipment to support their work. The school was well aware of the deteriorating situation, and implemented an extensive development plan to remedy the deficiencies. Significant improvements have already been made, and the programme has a further two years to run before completion. Hardware upgrading is largely complete. The school now has sufficient new, high quality computers, software and other equipment to support all aspects of ICT teaching as a subject in its own right. The school also has some specialist software to support other subjects such as English, mathematics and science, but there is not sufficient support, at present, for the whole curriculum.

110. Teachers have begun an extensive training programme. This has focused so far on improving basic skills in word processing, and in developing their understanding of its use across the curriculum. Training has been successful. Teachers are making increasing use of computers in their own professional work, and in their teaching. However, no ICT lessons were seen during the inspection and it is not possible to judge the quality of teaching in the subject.

111. Work displays in all years are of a high standard. Introductory Year 3 work centres on re-wording nursery rhymes. Pupils have secure editing and layout skills, such as using different letter styles and colours. They add pictures from "clipart" libraries to enhance their work, and print out the result. In design and technology, pupils investigate different styles and layouts for calendars, again exploring the effects of adding different pictures and borders to their work. "Mardi Gras" and "Easter" posters in Year 4 are well designed and carefully set out. Year 5 and Year 6 pupils use word processors to support a variety of studies in English. *The Ballad of Bishop Hatto* poems, with additional material written by pupils, and newspaper reports based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, with headlines such as "No Trace of Prospero and Baby Daughter" are good. Pupils make good use of editing and layout features, such as the use of text frames and columns, to enhance their work. This work is well up to the standard expected for their age in this strand of ICT, and is a good use of word processing to support the development of literacy skills.

112. There is some evidence of work in other strands, but this is not sufficiently widespread or developed. For example, pupils use CD-ROMS and the internet to find reference material, but they do little with it other than print it out. Pupils use databases and spreadsheets in Years 5 and 6 to store information and to draw graphs, for instance when investigating what magazines children read. However, pupils have yet to be taught how to search and sort the data, for example to investigate issues such as differences between boys and girls. Older pupils have begun to use automatic sensors in science experiments, such as in investigations into what happens when water freezes and ice melts.

113. The recent improvements owe much to the enthusiasm and skill of the coordinator. She has developed the scheme of work to ensure that it meets National Curriculum requirements, and recognises that assessment of pupils' work to inform curriculum planning, and planning for individuals, is an important next step. The school is now well placed to make up the ground it has lost since the last inspection.

MUSIC

114. Pupils' standards in singing are above national expectations in each Year, and pupils make good progress throughout the school. However there is insufficient evidence available to judge standards in other aspects of the subject, and it is therefore not possible to judge standards overall, nor the progress pupils make.

115. Singing is good. All pupils take part in an annual musical production, each year group performing a different piece. Video recordings of the Christmas 2000 and Year 6 Summer 2000 performances were seen. Throughout the school, pupils sing confidently, in tune and with a good dynamic and expressive range. They cope very well with syncopated rhythms. All performances are well rehearsed and highly polished. Productions make good use of the school stage and theatre lighting, which add to the sense of occasion. Pupils sing well at other times, for example in assembly and in choir practices. The Year 3 and 4 choir was observed in rehearsal. They made good progress in learning a new song from *Jonah Man Jazz*. They quickly learned the melody and sang expressively. The quality of performance improved very quickly in the short time available.

116. About one quarter of all pupils have instrumental lessons from visiting teachers. They make good progress and perform confidently. For example, a clarinet trio performed a range of short pieces during an assembly. They played well together and produced a good tone. The standard was above what is expected for pupils of this age.

117. Two lessons were seen during the inspection. In one the quality of teaching was good, but in the other it was unsatisfactory. There is insufficient evidence to judge the quality of teaching overall, but it is clearly good when preparing musical productions because pupils reach high standards. In the good lesson, the teacher's musical knowledge and expertise was evident throughout. The discussion on musical structure, based on a fugue by JS Bach, was interesting and placed high demands on the pupils. They responded very well to the difficult task that they were set. They listened very well to the recording and correctly identified the point at which each strand of the fugue was re-introduced. The lesson proceeded briskly to other tasks based on performance and composition. The choice of a "Rap" provided a good contrast to the earlier work, which helped retain pupils' interest. Pupils worked hard to compose their own accompaniment to the "Rap". However, only a few were able to perform confidently at the end of the lesson because they needed more rehearsal time than was available to reach a polished performance.

118. The other, class recorder, lesson was unsatisfactory because of three main factors. The lesson pace was too slow. It took too long to distribute the recorders and get started. This was exacerbated by a lack of firm control. There were many interruptions throughout the lesson while the teacher restored the behaviour and attention she required. Once started, the teacher gave insufficient musical direction to the class, with the result that the performance was unrhythmical and pupils did not perform together. The lesson overall was not successful. Pupils made insufficient progress in the short time available.

119. The music curriculum meets National Curriculum requirements. It is based on a commercial scheme that provides good support for non-specialist teachers when planning lessons. It includes a satisfactory assessment system that records pupil's progress. The coordinator is knowledgeable and enthusiastic and works hard to promote high standards. Pupils have good opportunities for music-making beyond the classroom. For example, the choirs regularly take part in local festivals. The annual productions provide good opportunities for all pupils to perform in public, and make a good contribution to pupils' personal development. The school has sufficient resources to support class teaching, but the range of

recorded music is too narrow and includes insufficient music from around the world to support pupils' understanding of life in other cultures.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

120. By this stage of Year 6, pupils' standards in those activities observed in physical education are above expectations for their age. This maintains the standards identified in the last inspection, but pupils now learn about, and take part in, a greater number of activities. In certain areas of the curriculum, such as rugby, standards have risen since the last inspection. Due to wet weather, no outdoor games lessons were seen. However the curriculum includes a wide range of activities, put on at various times of the year. These include football, netball, cricket, swimming, rugby, dance and gymnastics.

121. Only three lessons were observed. In dance, pupils in Year 6 worked to a very high standard. They showed good understanding of how to move to the music, worked well together and expressed their feelings in a mature way through their physical movements. In a Year 5 rugby session, which had to take place inside, pupils worked hard to refine their skills. They moved well around the hall making good use of the available space. Most threw and caught rugby balls well. A small number of pupils showed very good skills in dodging and scoring tries. Pupils showed satisfactory skills in a dance lesson in Year 4. They moved appropriately to the music, and worked well in co-operation with a partner. Discussions with staff indicate that by Year 6 pupils have achieved well in swimming. Most can swim considerably more than 25 metres and are developing their preferred swimming stroke. They are aware of the basics of water safety. Evidence from other lesson observations and pupils' work, including science and personal, social and health education, show that pupils have an increasing awareness of healthy living and the effects of exercise on their bodies.

122. The teaching observed ranged from good to unsatisfactory. In the good lesson the teacher had very good subject knowledge which he shared with the pupils by encouraging them to be expressive and to think about their emotions when planning their dance movements. In the unsatisfactory lesson, pupils were unclear about the aims of the lesson as they had not been explained to them, and they were also unclear about the teacher's expectations of them. The pace of the lesson was slow as pupils were expected to sit and listen too much, and lost interest as a result. Noise levels frequently rose, and the lesson was consequently interrupted several times by the teacher's efforts to bring the pupils' attention back. This was never fully achieved, and pupils did not learn enough or make enough progress during the lesson.

123. There are good opportunities for pupils to become involved in extra-curricular activities. For example, there are clubs in netball and football. Pupils take part in tournaments and in matches against other schools, which they often win. The school swimming pool gives pupils extra opportunities for swimming when the weather is better.

124. The subject is led well by an enthusiastic and well organised co-coordinator. Training for other members of staff has been arranged in both rugby and dance to increase their confidence. The curriculum is broad and meets the requirements of the new National Curriculum, although assessment is scant. There are good links with the Saracens rugby club which enhance pupils' interest in sport and overall personal development. Pupils have visited the Saracens ground and have taken part in many cross-curricular activities connected with Rugby.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

125. In the previous inspection, pupils made satisfactory progress in religious education and their attainment was judged to be satisfactory by the end of Year 6. These standards have been maintained. Pupils have appropriate knowledge and understanding of religion and of the importance that people of different faiths place in their beliefs. In Year 3, pupils understand the key ideas of Lent and can describe their own experiences in relation to features of the story of Palm Sunday. Older pupils have an understanding of the importance of symbols in different religions; for example Year 5 pupils can identify and interpret particular symbols and their meanings in the context of a Jewish Seder meal. These pupils were able to answer confidently when asked about the events from which Passover is derived.

126. There have been some improvements in the curriculum since the last inspection. The scheme of work has been revised to reflect the new locally agreed syllabus. Multi-faith aspects of religious education have been strengthened so that the pupils are offered opportunities to learn about Christianity and the other principal religions represented in Hertfordshire. ICT is beginning to play a part in the teaching of religious education; for example when Year 4 pupils use the internet to find the names of Jesus' disciples. Curriculum opportunities are enriched by outside visitors – for example Year 3 pupils met some Hindu visitors, and a visiting speaker provided the opportunity for Year 5 pupils to participate in a Jewish Seder meal.

127. Teaching is at least satisfactory and generally good. One lesson observed in Year 5 was very good due to very good organisation and use of resources to enhance pupils' learning. Most lessons are well-structured and time and resources are used to good effect which maintains pupils' interest. Classroom assistants are used effectively to support pupils' learning, particularly those who need support to carry out tasks or to keep concentrating. Planning is detailed and usually matches classroom activities and teachers' medium-term plans. Generally, learning objectives are identified in planning and are shared with pupils so that they know what to expect and what is expected of them. However, plans do not always include different tasks to match the abilities of different groups of pupils, but rely instead on variations in pace to provide a match to ability. This leads to slower lessons which lose the interest of some pupils. Generally, subject-specific vocabulary is taught well so that words like "messiah" and "procession" are discussed and explained by the teacher. Pupils are encouraged to relate what they are learning to their own experiences and share these with each other. As a result, pupils' learning is enriched by the good relationships and relaxed atmosphere that are a feature of these lessons.

128. The subject leader is experienced and provides effective leadership, particularly in terms of planning and providing resources for the subject. Monitoring of teaching and learning includes an evaluation of pupils' work, lesson observations and discussions with pupils. However, assessment in the subject is underdeveloped. Although teachers do assess pupils' work regularly, practice is not consistent across the school because it is not standardised, and information is not used to inform future teaching and learning.