

INSPECTION REPORT

CASTLEFORT PRIMARY SCHOOL

Walsall Wood, Walsall.

LEA area: Walsall

Unique reference number: 104204

Headteacher: Mr G. Arblaster

Reporting inspector: Mr David Carrington
15414

Dates of inspection: 17th – 20th January 2000

Inspection number: 191301
Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Junior and infant

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 4 - 11

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Castlefort Road
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Walsall
West Midlands

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr A Williams

Date of previous inspection: 27th – 30th January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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Mr David Carrington	Registered inspector	Mathematics	What sort of school it is
		Geography	The school's results and pupils' achievements
			How well pupils are taught
Mrs Joanne Illingworth	Lay inspector	Equal opportunities	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well the school cares for its pupils
			How well the school works in partnership with parents
Mr Rod Bristow	Team inspector	Information technology	
		Religious education	
		History	
		Special educational needs	
Mrs Julie Moore	Team inspector	Art	
		Areas of learning for children in the foundation stage	
Mr Trevor Neat	Team inspector	Science	How well the school is led and managed
		Design and technology	
		Physical education	
Mrs Megan Spark	Team inspector	English	How good the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils are
		Music	
		English as an additional language	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Castlefort Junior and Infant School is a community primary school located 4 miles to the north east of Walsall town centre. 101 boys and 93 girls attend the school and there are another 32 part time pupils in the nursery. All but a few pupils are white, very few speak English as an additional language and the proportion with special educational needs is below average. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is a little above average for a school of this size. The attainment of pupils when they start school is well below average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Castlefort Primary School provides a satisfactory level of education for its pupils and it has a number of strengths. However, there is one main weakness that has continued to challenge the school in recent years. This is how well the pupils do in their work by the age of eleven. For much of their time in school, the pupils get a good deal but this is spoiled by the weaknesses in teaching that stand out after the middle of Key Stage 2. Governors and staff know this situation exists and they are determined to fix what is wrong. At present, the ways to do this are not certain because they do not have clear enough information to work from. There is much evidence to show that the school has its strengths and successes, but these have yet to be harnessed effectively to bring standards at the age of eleven that reflect the best that is achieved in earlier years. Parents and taxpayers are getting satisfactory value for the money the school spends. Successful attention to the issues highlighted in this report will bring better return for that money.

What the school does well

- The nursery gives the children a very good start to their education.
- The quality of teaching is good in Key Stage 1. This means that learning is made interesting and pupils build skills and knowledge at a good rate.
- Pupils are keen to come to school, they behave well and they enjoy very good relationships with other pupils and the staff.
- Pupils' personal, moral and social development are good

What could be improved

- Standards in English (particularly writing), mathematics and science are well below average.
- The quality of teaching tails off in Key Stage 2. This makes learning much more ordinary and standards fall because of this.
- The school does not have a complete system of checking that standards, teaching and the curriculum are the best they should be. Additionally, not everyone is involved in making these checks and so there is imperfect knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- The identification of skills and knowledge to be learned in planning is not sharp enough and target setting, sharing and evaluation is not consistent in lessons.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in January 1997. At that time it was judged that standards were in need of some improvement and the quality of education had strengths. The four key issues required the school to:

- make improvement to the way teachers encouraged pupils to research and investigate for themselves,
- give subject coordinators more management responsibilities, including checking the quality of the curriculum, teaching and standards,
- make sure that staff and time are used efficiently, and
- promote pupils' spiritual development more.

Three years later, the school has made satisfactory progress overall. Teaching quality has improved greatly and pupils are given better opportunities to research and investigate. Coordinators have more management duties and ways of checking the work of the school have been refined, though this process is far from complete. Staff and time are used well on the whole, and better attention is paid to spiritual development.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with				<i>Key</i>
	all schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
English	E	E	E	D	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
mathematics	C	E*	E	E	
science	D	E*	E	D	

Pupils make good progress with their work in the first few years of school and standards are close to the national average by the end of Key Stage 1. In Key Stage 2, there is a sound start but this falters as the pupils grow older and by the age of eleven standards are well below the national average in English, mathematics and science. In comparison with similar schools, standards are below average overall by the end of Key Stage 2. Since the last inspection, standards have remained at low levels at the age of eleven. The overall rate of improvement in school has just about kept pace with the national trend but there has been great variation between years. In 1999 the school's targets for attainment were achieved, but very few pupils gained level 5. Standards in music are good and they are at the expected level in the other subjects, including information technology and religious education at the end of both key stages. Younger pupils make good strides with their learning overall, but the older ones do not. This is the prime issue facing the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils enjoy coming to school and they work cheerfully and productively.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. There is a little unsatisfactory behaviour, but most pupils are well behaved and the school is an orderly place.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. The school takes these things very seriously and staff work hard to make sure that pupils are well prepared for life, work and play in and out of school.
Attendance	Satisfactory. The absence rate is close to that found nationally.

This whole area is one of the school's great strengths. The all round development of pupils is well handled and the many successes are evident in polite, considerate pupils who treat each other very well and who grow to be mature and responsible workers.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years	aged 7-11 years
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Good	Satisfactory

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

The teaching of English and mathematics, is satisfactory overall and there are more strengths than weaknesses. Basic skills of reading and arithmetic are taught soundly, however writing requires improvement. Pupils are taught properly for most of their time in school but there are times when this is not the case, especially after the middle of Key Stage 2. When this happens, learning is slowed, lessons are not as interesting and less work is completed in the time available. In most classes, teachers are skilled at managing their pupils and they put all forms of resources to good use. They have appropriate subject knowledge and the system of lesson planning works satisfactorily. The level of expectation of what the pupils can do is often too low, and this also lowers standards. Teaching does not vary much for different groups of pupils and those with special educational needs or English as an additional language are taught as well as the others. Overall, inspectors judged that teaching was satisfactory or better in 95 percent of the 65 lessons observed. In 5 percent teaching was unsatisfactory, but it was very good or better in 20 percent. This pattern shows the school has good practice to build on in its bid to boost standards.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The pupils learn from a curriculum that includes all that it should and which is planned to ensure that the work is developed systematically.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Teachers and support staff work in good partnership to make sure that these pupils learn at the appropriate rate.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. There are very few pupils with English as an additional language, but the school supports them soundly.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Pupils' moral and social education is well fostered and they have good knowledge of their own cultural background. Spiritual development and the knowledge and understanding of the richness of other cultures are satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Pupils are looked after well, they are safe, happy and enjoy school. Staff know them well and most set good examples for them.

The school works soundly with parents. In many instances it puts in a lot of effort to draw parents into the learning of their children, though the level of interest shown is not always as good as it might be. The curriculum gives good opportunities for learning about all subjects, and the National Curriculum is included in full. The ways in which staff assess the attainment of pupils are good, though the use of the information arising from assessment is not used as well as it might be.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and	Satisfactory. In some instances, leadership and management is good because it

management by the headteacher and other key staff	results in good teaching in many classes and appropriate standards. But there are gaps in this picture, and although much effort has been put into lifting standards, this has not been as effective as is required.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactory. Governors are committed to the success of the school. They know that standards should be better and are beginning to build the necessary information to help them support the staff in this challenging task.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Unsatisfactory. This is because school managers do not have all the necessary information to judge whether teaching is effective enough or standards high enough. Measures to help make improvements have not yet had the desired impact.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Money is put to sound use and spending is carefully controlled. The support staff bring many good qualities to the school and there is much good teaching. At present, this does not stack up to form the best use of all resources because there are gaps in teaching quality that the system of checking has missed.

There are many strengths of management, but the chief weakness is the way in which the school gathers information about the effectiveness of its work. Senior managers cannot always identify what is working well and what needs improvement. Because of this, standards have remained stubbornly low. There is good intention to move ahead on this, but the overall impact of all the hard work is lessened because it is not always clear what is the best move to make. On the other hand, governors and managers have some good procedures to make sure they get best value for the money spent on staff, resources and other important things. There are also enough teachers and support staff, ample space in school and enough books, material and equipment to ensure the pupils are well provided for.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children enjoy coming to school. • The teaching is good. • Pupils work hard to achieve their best. • Their children are becoming more mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range of activities outside lessons. • The information they receive about how well their child is doing. • The amount and range of homework.

In most respects, the inspection team agrees with the positive views of the parents. Inspectors judge that the amount of homework and the range of activities outside lessons are both satisfactory. The quality of information given to parents could be better than it is.

OTHER INFORMATION

The governing body is responsible for drawing up an action plan within 40 days of receiving the inspection report, showing how the school will tackle the improvements needed. This action plan will be circulated to all parents at the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. The pattern of attainment follows a shallow capital *N* pattern. There are periods in school when standards come close to the best found in other schools, but equally, there are other times when they fall quickly and bear very unfavourable comparison with over 95 percent of all schools. At the end of school, standards recover somewhat, but the final stroke of the *N* is incomplete when pupils leave school.
2. The situation has not always been like this. In January 1997, the previous inspection judged that standards were average at the age of seven and eleven and that pupils made the expected improvement in their work as they moved through the school. On the whole, the 1996 and 1997 National Curriculum tests showed the same trends, though there was already a decline in English at the end of Key Stage 2 in 1997.
3. Results in 1998 came as a shock to the school. Whilst standards held up in Key Stage 1, those at the end of Key Stage 2 could not have been much worse. Standards were amongst the lowest 5 percent in the land. Measures were taken immediately to reverse this trend and in 1999 Key Stage 2 standards rose. They were still low, but not at the base level of the year before. The improvement is better represented by the comparison with similar schools. In 1999 standards at Key Stage 2 rated below the average for similar schools in English and science, rather than much below average. Standards in Key Stage 1 held their own with similar schools in 1999. Indeed, they were much better than average in mathematics and above average in reading. Writing was the weakest subject on this count, though standards in this matched the average of similar schools. Whatever the analysis, it is plain that standards are too low by the end of Year 6. The school agrees, it identified the trend quickly, but has had mixed success in putting things right.
4. Present indications, from the careful examination of pupils' past and current work, indicates that standards at the end of the current Year 6 are likely to remain at a low level. On the available evidence, attainment by the end of school year 2000-2001 is also likely to be low for the present Year 5.
5. The school has revised its agreed targets for attainment at the end of the present Year 6. If these are achieved, the position will be stronger. However, it is working with targets that are too low for Year 5 and 4. The effect of these low targets is to impose a ceiling to attainment. Teachers' expectation levels are depressed by these targets. Pupils *live down*, rather than *up* to them.
6. A key factor in the pattern of attainment is management's collection, evaluation and presentation of data and other information about standards and teaching. This is unsatisfactory because it has insufficient impact. Much effort is given to collecting and interpreting data. The focus is on the identification of problems, rather than on the representation of trends, strengths and opportunities. There is an improved system in place to check standards and the quality of teaching, but not enough emphasis is given to the responsibility of *all* members of staff for the standards achieved, or on involving everyone in direct monitoring against clearly stated criteria. Everyone is focused on standards, but the impact of all the effort is watered down because of inconsistencies and lack of rigour.

7. Standards in other subjects and for the under fives are detailed later in this report¹. Briefly, standards are at the expected level in all subjects at the end of both key stages. There is an exception to this. Standards in music are good and they are strengths of the school. The under fives make good strides with their work and so their levels of attainment rise quickly from very low when they start school to rather below average by the age of five. Management does not have to look far for what is working well.
8. Pupils with special educational needs achieve standards appropriate for their age and ability. Individual education plans set targets which are achievable and reviewed at least annually. Pupils are well behaved and clearly enjoy opportunities to succeed in smaller, focused groups when they are given opportunities to be more responsible for their learning. They are eager to report their achievements to the whole class.
9. It is inspectors' judgement that pupils get a satisfactory deal in school. Attainment flags in late Key Stage 2 but earlier, it is on a steep upward path. Expectation and monitoring are the shortcomings that impact most. The school is determined to do better by the pupils. The key issues for the inspection indicate its priorities.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

10. In 1997, the previous inspection report identified that pupils were polite and friendly, well behaved and that they had appropriate responsibilities and could work independently for the expected time spans. It is clear that these strengths have been maintained and in some cases, improved.
11. Attitudes and behaviour are good and have a positive impact on standards of attainment. The findings of the inspection support the view of parents that their children become much more mature and responsible during their time in school. The quality of relationships is very good. This, together with the progress that pupils make in their personal development, is a strength of the school.
12. Pupils of all ages like coming to school. When teaching is stimulating, they show interest in their lessons and enjoyment in their work. They are keen to take part in extra curricular activities, such as the homework club and school band, and want to be fully involved in the life of the school. They have a strong sense of loyalty to Castlefort and value the opportunities that it gives them. They particularly appreciate the chance to go on school trips and residential visits. Pupils' enthusiasm for school varies according to their age. Interest and eagerness to learn are greatest in the early years and at Key Stage 1. By the end of Key Stage 2 a few pupils have begun to lose interest in school and show signs of disaffection.
13. Standards of behaviour are good, both in and outside the classroom. Although there were some exclusions in 1998/99, there have been none to date in the current school year. Pupils are well behaved when coming into school, and when playing in the grounds at break and lunch time. There is very little boisterous or unduly noisy behaviour. Acts of bullying and aggressive behaviour are rare. When they do occur they are dealt with quickly and effectively, and do not persist. Some older boys indulge in challenging behaviour in class, particularly when the pace of lessons is slow. However, most pupils behave well, allowing teaching and learning to take place without interruption. They are friendly, helpful and polite to adults. They show respect for property, handling the school's equipment with care and keeping the site tidy.

¹ See pages 26-40

14. Pupils uphold the school's code of conduct and follow classroom rules well. They understand the need for consideration for other people, which is emphasised by the code and the good example of adults. They show considerable respect for the feelings of others. For example they listen politely to one another in class, praise each other's achievements and do not laugh if someone gives the wrong answer to a question. The quality of relationships within the school is very good. Pupils trust their teachers and look to them for help and advice. They cooperate well with each other in lessons. Relations between pupils are also very good outside the classroom. There is no evidence of sexism, racism or any other kind of abrasive relationship between individuals or groups. Even the youngest children feel secure in school, and have no concerns about bullying or intimidation by older pupils.
15. The school gives pupils significant responsibilities for day-to-day routines, to which they respond very positively. Year 6 pupils have the opportunity to be "animal monitors" and house captains. Both posts require pupils to be conscientious and reliable, and to use their initiative. House captains, for example, have responsibility for organising competitions and collecting house points. Pupils are happy to volunteer to take on these roles. Those who are chosen to be monitors or house captains carry out their duties in a mature and responsible manner.
16. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory and have improved since the last inspection. The school's overall rate of attendance is slightly below the national average, but all year groups exceed the 90 percent benchmark and the incidence of unauthorised absence is low. Pupils arrive on time for school in the mornings and quickly get ready for their lessons, which begin very promptly.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

17. In 1997, teaching was satisfactory, though 14 percent of lessons observed were of unsatisfactory teaching quality and just 3 percent were very good. During the current inspection, sixty-five lessons or part lessons were seen and of these, 5 percent were unsatisfactory. The remaining lessons were all of satisfactory or better teaching, with 20 percent judged to show very good teaching. These statistics² indicate the significant improvement made to teaching over the last three years.
18. If a pupil's career at Castlefort Primary School could be condensed into two weeks a distinct pattern would emerge. During the first week, the pupil would start school and settle in on Monday, be very well taught on Tuesday and make very good strides with learning. On Wednesday, teaching would be good, it would dip a little on Thursday and rise to be good again on Friday. The pattern of learning would follow these trends and the pupil would make good progress. At the start of the second week, on Monday and Tuesday, teaching would be good, learning would tend to follow suite and improvement in skills and knowledge would keep pace. However, Wednesday would see a sudden drop in teaching, and learning quality and in patterns of attainment. The good pattern set so far would be arrested. On Thursday, things would get better, but not enough to regain all the things lost. Come Friday, the pupil would leave school, ready for secondary school, but her or his personal best will not have been met in everything.
19. This unevenness in teaching through the school has a crucial impact on standards. When pupils start school, they have well below average levels of attainment. Teaching for the under fives is very good so standards improve and this is continued into Key Stage 1 where teaching is good overall. This results in end of key stage standards in the National Curriculum tests that

² See also the first and second tables on page 23

are broadly similar to the national average. In Key Stage 2, teaching is satisfactory overall, but there is a distinct “N” shaped profile and standards fall. For this reason, teaching is the second key issue of the inspection.

20. Teaching follows a similar trend in all eleven subjects, especially in English and mathematics. The teaching of basic skills is satisfactory, with good practice for the under fives and in Key Stage 1. This enables pupils to build skills, knowledge and understanding at a good rate to the age of seven. Beyond that age, unsatisfactory progress is made in learning overall, particularly in writing, because of the noticeable variation in teaching quality. There is one exception to this trend. The teaching of reading is at least satisfactory across the school and pupils develop into competent readers who attain the expected skills and knowledge by the time they leave the school.
21. At the root of the variation in teaching lie teachers’ expectation levels. In many lessons, teachers show good expectation of work and behaviour and pupils respond by working hard and learning well. In such lessons, the work is stimulating and pupils are keen to succeed. There are times, however, when expectation is low, the lessons become uninspiring and pupils lose heart and the rate of productivity lags. The outcome is low standards. The school’s strategies for monitoring do not flag this weakness clearly enough.
22. On the other hand, there are a number of strengths of teaching that ensure good learning and acute progress. Teachers manage their pupils well from the nursery to Year 6. Control and discipline are good. Teachers are firm but fair and positive in maintaining order and they quickly regain the attention of pupils with wavering attention. The one or two very challenging pupils (often boys) in Key Stage 2 are well managed, though their rate of learning is affected by their distraction.
23. In the majority of lessons, teachers use resources well. Time, for example, is used efficiently. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. Lessons start promptly, run their full course and the pace of teaching is brisk. This stimulates pupils to give good effort on the whole and the work rate is correspondingly good. Pupils are able to concentrate for good spans, and since the last inspection, the school has improved the opportunities for pupils to work independently. They know how to find information for themselves, learn to solve problems satisfactorily and accept responsibility well. Learning resources are put to good use in helping pupils represent ideas in concrete and practical forms and as a means of providing information.
24. The support staff are one of the main strengths of the school. The nursery is staffed by qualified nursery nurses, there is no qualified teacher working in the class, but the quality of teaching is amongst the best to be found in the school, and, indeed, in schools anywhere. Much of the work in information technology is organised and taught by two other members of the support staff. They do this well.
25. Teaching for pupils with special educational needs is good both in the classroom and when withdrawn by support assistants. Planned activities, that have clear learning objectives matched to their individual needs, encourage pupils to respond positively to the challenges set for them and their self-esteem is good. Support staff reinforce the acquisition and consolidation of skills in literacy, numeracy and information technology well, enabling the pupils to be more independent when involved in whole class activities. Progress is good throughout the school. This is evident when groups of pupils at the beginning of Key Stage 2 receive additional assistance to raise standards during the literacy hour. Homework is targeted to their needs appropriately.

26. Teachers' ongoing assessment is satisfactory. Where this is at its most successful, teachers use questioning, observation, and the emerging work as a means to identify how well pupils are working and achieving. The conclusions to the best literacy and numeracy lessons show that teachers summarise the lessons well and they also evaluate the result of the work effectively. This gives them information with which to plan the next lesson more effectively. In weaker lessons, the art of identifying the strengths and difficulties in learning is not as good. Here, teachers tend to plough on, regardless of the progress or otherwise in learning and the pupils are left behind to cope as best they can.
27. The process of setting targets for the pupils in lessons, sharing them and later, discussing whether they have been achieved is in its early stages of development. In a Year 4 mathematics lesson there was a very effective "Tell the teacher" session at the end of the work where pupils identified how well they had learned. This type of strategy bolsters their knowledge of their own learning very well and contributes to the overall positive impact on standards. Across the school, pupils' own knowledge of their learning is satisfactory. The school has some good practice to build on when making improvement to the effective use of targets for learning, but target setting forms part of key issue 4 because it lacks consistency and precision.
28. Teachers usually show a good mix of methods and activities in lessons. This ensures, in the main, that all pupils receive the same opportunities to succeed and so pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language work well and make the expected progress. This is sometimes at a good rate. Boys and girls are encouraged to give the same effort to their work, and they generally show the same determination and interest in what they are doing. The exception is on the few occasions when one or two boys lose interest as identified above. Teachers often provide separate, yet linked, tasks for pupils of differing attainment level. This encourages a positive response to the work.
29. In advance of the inspection, some parents expressed concerns about the quality and amount of homework set. Inspectors judge that homework is planned and set properly and makes appropriate demands on the pupils. The homework set in the nursery is excellent and it is of good quality in Key Stage 2.

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

30. The 1997 inspection report stated that the curriculum was broadly based and met the needs of pupils on the whole. The work for the under fives, however, did not provide appropriate experiences for pupils of that age. Today, the school's curriculum meets statutory requirements for the National Curriculum and follows the guidelines for religious education set out in the locally agreed syllabus. The curriculum for the under fives is a strength and this enables the youngest pupils to make good progress in learning.
31. The school has successfully implemented the National Literacy Strategy in Key Stage 1. There is now a need in Key Stage 2 for the development and application of literacy skills across the curriculum in order that pupils may have opportunity to practise and consolidate their newly acquired expertise in other subjects. The school's implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy is satisfactory. Most lessons start with a spirited mental arithmetic warm-up that is already having a positive impact on standards.

32. The curriculum promotes the pupils' personal, social, and physical development very effectively. The school makes effective provision for health, sex, and drugs education. The curriculum for children under five in nursery and reception is matched to the Desirable Outcomes for Learning and is appropriate for the needs of the children.
33. Daily collective worship, with themes co-ordinated on a termly basis, is of a broadly Christian character and meets statutory requirements, with parents aware of their right to withdraw their children. Assemblies are well planned and provide a positive start to the day with contributions provided by staff, pupils and visiting speakers enriched by music and drama. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on values and beliefs with opportunities to recognise the existence of a deity through prayer and meditation. Collective worship provides a significant contribution to the spiritual, social and cultural development of pupils throughout the school.
34. Arrangements for the moral and social development of pupils, including those aged under five, are good and are a strength of the school. Moral development is addressed through day to day teaching, stories and discussions. Issues of right and wrong are tackled with sensitivity by teaching and non-teaching staff who provide good role models. Pupils both inside and outside the classroom demonstrate a good understanding of what is acceptable or not acceptable.
35. Since the last inspection, the school has promoted and improved the social development of pupils. There are many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and show initiative whether looking after the school animals, participating in school performances or acting as monitors within the classroom, or researching information in groups. From the earliest age pupils are involved in putting away after activities, and have group rules such as 'We are sensible, polite, quiet'. Pupils co-operate well in activities the reception class, and there is some collaboration in Year 2 when researching information on Florence Nightingale. In Year 5, pupils collaborate well to identify Victorian artefacts and by the end of Key Stage 2 pupils use their initiative to arrange a class assembly on the weekly theme of 'Patience'. Relationships are very good and children feel secure. They respect the contributions of others, as when spontaneous applause accompanied the success of a pupil with special educational needs when correctly forming letters after previous lack of success, or pupils received merit awards in assembly. There is good provision for social development in extra-curricular activities especially music, drama and sport. The residential experience for older pupils is valued both by pupils and parents.
36. The school has increased the opportunities for pupils to develop spiritual awareness and knowledge since the last inspection and the overall provision is now satisfactory. Opportunities for spiritual development occur through daily acts of collective worship, the religious education programme and in the day to day life of the school especially in music art and literature. Staff provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on their experiences as during circle time in Year 4. In science, pupils in Year 3 were enthralled when investigating the passage of light through various prisms. There were gasps of wonder with one expressing 'It looks like a stained-glass window!' Younger pupils showed delight and wonder when watching coloured footprints unfold on paper after foot painting.
37. The curriculum has good breadth and balance because it covers all subjects in appropriate depth and makes good provision for the personal development of the pupils. It is enriched very effectively through visits in, for example, history and music, and by recent workshop sessions led by a visiting specialist in the history of World War II. Visits to places of interest such as the Cannock Chase Museum, and visitors to school, add to the breadth of pupils' cultural development. Pupils are learning about other cultures through experiences in religious education programme, history and geography. Overall, pupils' knowledge of their own culture

is good. Collective worship is used effectively to highlight cultural traditions such as Easter, Remembrance Sunday, and Christmas.

38. Policies and schemes of work are in place for all subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. There is detailed long and medium term planning for English, mathematics, and science which is closely matched to the requirements of the National Curriculum. This planning is thorough and provides effectively for progression in these subjects. The school follows the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. Curriculum coverage is monitored through the scrutiny of planning by the co-ordinators to ensure all areas and attainment targets are covered. However, the curriculum is not yet monitored closely in classrooms in order that the impact of the planning may be measured and appropriate targets for learning set for the pupils.
39. An appropriate level of extra-curricular provision for pupils enriches the curriculum. The school has a range of lunchtime and after-school clubs. These include clubs for musical and sporting activities and, in Years 5 and 6, a homework club, which is well attended. These extra-curricular activities are popular and open to both boys and girls. They significantly enrich the curriculum. Older pupils have worthwhile residential experiences in visits to Bryntysilio Outdoor Centre where they take part in a range of activities, and to the Isle of Wight for a holiday. Visits are very successful. The school makes satisfactory provision for the arts through drama, dance, and music where pupils take part in productions for parents and friends in the community.
40. The school makes effective provision to ensure that all pupils have equal access to the whole curriculum, regardless of gender, disability, or ethnic background. The ancillary staff support pupils well in ensuring this equality of access within lessons, and teachers generally take care to ensure equal attention is given to all pupils in lessons.
41. The school makes good curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs and pupils make good progress towards targets in their individual education plans. The school has a clear policy for special educational needs, which complies fully with the Code of Practice. Pupils with special educational needs are included well in all school activities. They are provided with a broad and balanced curriculum which includes extra curricular activities such as performances, clubs and sporting activities. No pupils are disapplied from the National Curriculum. When withdrawn, pupils are given experiences that reinforce and consolidate the class activities planned and respond to the targets identified on individual education plans. There is, however, a need for clarification with outside agencies of strategies for the identification and recording of specific needs and consequent progress for pupils who have English as an additional language as opposed to special educational needs.
42. Links with the local community are satisfactory. Educational visits and visitors to the school help to support the work pupils do in class. The school farm provides high quality first-hand experiences that greatly enhance the pupils' learning experiences. Residential visits for older pupils in Years 5 and 6, and regular sporting links with other schools make significant contributions to their personal development. Pupils' awareness of the needs of others and their sense of responsibility are raised in a number of ways. Arrangements for receiving new pupils into the nursery, and for the transfer of pupils from Year 6 to secondary school, are good. Pupils visit the local secondary schools on several occasions before transfer and parents particularly note that the school's homework provision prepares their children well for the expectations of secondary education.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

43. The school makes thorough arrangements to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its pupils. In these respects, it has maintained the strengths identified in the previous inspection report.
44. The quality of the school's informal provision for health, safety and welfare matters is good. Members of staff know pupils as individuals and therefore are well placed to oversee their welfare. Pupil-teacher relations are very good, and pupils of all ages feel safe and secure. Children starting in the nursery unit are very well supported, and as a result settle in quickly and make good progress. The school has also put in place good formal procedures on health, safety and welfare. Arrangements for child protection comply with local and national guidelines. Members of staff are well briefed on the issues and are familiar with the school's policy. Health and safety procedures meet all the relevant legislation on checks of equipment and storage of substances. The school makes very good provision for first aid cover. There are four trained first aiders on the staff, including the school secretary and the senior lunch time supervisor.
45. Procedures for promoting good attendance are effective, as the low rate of unauthorised absence from school shows. Teachers call and complete registers in accordance with legal requirements and monitor the attendance of both their classes and individual pupils. The school works well with the Educational Welfare Officer in investigating cases of repeated absence or lateness. Where necessary the Educational Welfare Officer will make a home visit in order to get the pupil back into school.
46. The school sets high standards regarding pupils' behaviour, which it shares with pupils and parents via its code of conduct and classroom rules. All pupils are aware therefore of what is expected of them. They know, for example, that bullying and aggression are not tolerated. The school's system of discipline includes an appropriate and effective scale of sanctions and rewards. Pupils particularly appreciate house points, saying that they provide real incentives to behave well and work hard. Formal sanctions such as detentions, are used to deal with serious breaches of discipline. Exclusion is used only as a last resort in accordance with policy. The school has successful strategies for dealing with bullying. Pupils are very well supervised in the playground, so that there are few opportunities for incidents to occur. Instances of bullying are rare, but when they do arise the school deals with them promptly and effectively.
47. The school makes good arrangements for assessing pupils' attainments and progress. It has a formal assessment policy, and a whole school policy on marking which is applied in practice with consistency. As a result the quality of marking is often good and supports improvement in pupils' work. Subject profiles are in place and also serve as records of achievement. The progress and development of nursery pupils are very thoroughly assessed to the benefit of their attainment and general welfare. The personal development of older pupils is adequately assessed on an informal basis through teachers' knowledge of individuals, but is not recorded systematically.
48. The school has recently introduced target setting for groups and individual pupils. Targets, which are largely confined to the core academic subjects, are shared with pupils and parents, but are not the subject of negotiation between teacher and pupil. The effectiveness of the system is not monitored and evaluated rigorously. Assessment is not used sufficiently to guide planning. The school's efforts are therefore unfocused and do not fulfil their full potential to raise standards.
49. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good and all statutory requirements are met. The level of support given by teaching and non-teaching staff is good. Their strengths and weaknesses are assessed and records are maintained of progress made. Progress is reported to parents at least twice a year. Targets are reviewed at least annually and when the

need arises teachers are prepared to liaise daily with parents. Frequent and regular activities are planned to enable pupils to achieve in literacy and numeracy. Where appropriate, outside agencies are used well and links with agencies such as speech therapy are made. The needs of pupils are identified by discussing with class teachers and parents, and by assessing data received from testing when pupils join the school, national testing at the age of 7, and optional national testing at Key Stage 2.

50. The quality of support and guidance for pupils is satisfactory, with some strengths, such as the homework club, and good preparation for the transfer of Year 6 to secondary education. Throughout the school, pupils find teachers approachable and they have faith in their ability to resolve problems. They are therefore willing to turn to them for help. In class, members of staff give pupils good support and encouragement on an informal basis. For example, they give advice to pupils who are experiencing difficulties with their work, and praise those who are making good progress. The school also gives adequate recognition to both academic and non-academic achievement via its formal system of rewards, and successes of all kinds are duly celebrated. In general, pupils are adequately informed of their strengths, weaknesses and targets for improvement. However, there are some inconsistencies in practice. On occasions, teachers do not tell pupils precisely what they have achieved or what they should do to improve their attainment.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

51. As in 1997, at the time of the previous inspection, parents express a high degree of satisfaction with the school. Most are happy with the quality of education that it provides for its pupils, and think that standards of attainment are good. They believe that their children are well cared for, and that the school helps them to become more mature and responsible. Today, some parents have concerns about staff absences and the use of supply teachers, which they feel has an adverse effect on their children, and a significant minority would like more information on pupils' progress. Nearly all parents feel comfortable about approaching the school if they have any queries or complaints. However, a few think that the school does not work closely enough with pupils' families.
52. The quality of information for parents is satisfactory overall. The school's provision has several strengths and is generally effective in encouraging families to become involved in pupils' learning. For example the school gives parents plenty of opportunities to discuss their child's progress and targets for improvement with teachers. It organises three consultation evenings per class per year, and operates an open door policy that allows parents to talk to staff informally at other times. The school prospectus contains useful advice on how parents can help children with homework. There are regular newsletters, and pupils' reading records and homework diaries act as an on-going line of communication between home and school. The school prospectus and the annual report of the governing body comply with legal requirements on the publication of information for parents. The least satisfactory feature of the school's provision is its annual written reports on progress. These focus on reporting pupils' positive achievements, rather than on identifying areas where they are experiencing difficulties, or advising them and their parents on what to do to raise attainment. On the other hand, the reports give parents an adequate account of what their children have learned during the year, know and can do, even though the comments on the core subjects of the curriculum are sometimes impersonal, having been drawn from a computer comment bank.
53. Parents of pupils with educational needs are actively involved at all stages of the Code of Practice and are fully involved in review procedures. Generally they are fully supportive of the work of the school and encourage pupils to complete homework tasks, assist with reading, and

discuss progress on formal and informal occasions. The school liaises with parents on more regular occasions, and when necessary on a daily basis.

54. The school values its partnership with pupils' families. It is aware that some parents have low expectations regarding academic attainment and are reluctant to talk to teachers. It has therefore made considerable efforts to strengthen its links with them and to win their support. It has introduced home-school contracts and initiated a family literacy project. Parents are encouraged actively to come into school to discuss pupils' progress and to help in the classroom. They are also asked to support their children's learning at home by hearing them read, and by helping them with homework. The school's efforts have been at least partly successful. Overall, the response has been satisfactory and has had a positive impact on attainment and progress. For example, many parents hear their children read at home. Nearly all have signed the home-school contract, and most are very supportive with regard to their children's attendance, and behaviour and attitudes to work. Families will provide useful resources for learning, as was the case when the school requested Second World War memorabilia for use in history lessons. They will also attend school performances in large numbers and give good support to fund raising and social events organised by the "Friends of Castlefort School". The response from parents is less positive in other areas. Although attendance at consultation evenings is satisfactory overall, it falls off as pupils get older, and curriculum evenings are poorly attended. The number of volunteer helpers in the classroom is relatively small for a primary school, and the family literacy project has had a low take up, though the school continues its efforts to increase the participation rates.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

55. In 1997 it was reported that the headteacher provided stable leadership and that there was a good partnership in management. In many ways, this remains the case, though the good efforts put in by staff and governors require greater co-ordination and consistency. However, the visitor to Castlefort School is struck immediately by the calm, orderly and purposeful air that pervades the building. Managers and staff have worked very hard to establish good conditions for working and they have been successful in the main. Pupils know they come to school to work, they are prepared for this and get much personal satisfaction from their time in class. They develop as pleasant children who are good to know.
56. The headteacher has a clear sense of direction for the school and has ensured that, on the whole, its aims and values are pursued properly. During the inspection, and for some time before, the school was without a deputy head. This has impacted on the successes of management as the deputy's duties have been shared amongst key staff. These members of staff have accepted their new roles cheerfully and have worked busily to bring improvement. There remain weaknesses in management, however, that this collegiate approach has not yet eliminated.
57. Whilst everyone works hard, the result of the effort is rather too scattered. This is because procedures to check that what the school does is the best for the pupils are inconsistent and not everyone is involved in making direct, formal checks against rigorous and agreed criteria. There is a system of monitoring in place that centres on the head teacher and much data about the school's performance is collected, but this is not presented in a format that is easy to use by others. So, much of the information does not get far beyond the printed page. Since staff do not know all the strengths and weaknesses of the school, it is difficult for them to take concerted action. This situation is at the root of the low level of standards. Shortcomings in teaching are not identified completely and so they take too long to eliminate. In addition, the process of

target setting is only partially successful because of the lack of information or its presentation in cumbersome ways.

58. Subject coordinators have an improved role in management since the previous inspection. They are not, however involved enough in monitoring and evaluating teaching, standards and the curriculum. Individually, they are committed to the success of the school and put in much effort to manage their subjects but, collectively, their insight and impact are restricted because some key responsibilities are delegated insufficiently to them.
59. The co-ordinator for special educational needs has some non-contact time each half term for administration duties, and he responds positively and efficiently to his statutory duties that include arranging reviews. The register of pupils for special educational needs is maintained efficiently and outside links with other agencies are pursued well.
60. The governors ensure that the school meets all statutory obligations well. They give good support to the school and they ensure that finance is well managed and controlled. Governors are growing into the role of critical friend of the school, though greater involvement in monitoring the school's strengths and shortcomings would add greater incisiveness to this role.
61. All forms of resources are used as expected. Staff are matched well to the different teaching and support duties. The learning support staff give particularly good service. The quality of teaching in the nursery, which is staffed by two nursery nurses and has no teacher, is very good. Two other members of the support team give good support to the teaching of information technology and are responsible for many of its strengths. Special educational needs support staff are effective in their task of helping such pupils succeed in their learning.
62. Management has many strengths to build on in its task of making improvement. What is lacking is the well-oiled machinery to support this. Most of the components are installed but the linkages need strengthening, greasing and turning-over. Better systems of monitoring and evaluation will ensure that the pistons fire in sequence and to good effect in moving the school forward.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

63. Castlefort Primary School provides pupils with a sound level of education and there are many strengths in what it does. There is, however, one over-arching priority for the school, namely to boost standards achieved by the age of eleven. In order to succeed in this quest, governors, the head teacher, senior managers and staff must:
 - (1) **Drive up standards in English (especially writing), mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 2.**
 - See paragraphs 1-9, 19-21, 27, 57-8 and 79-107.
 - The following three key issues are the chief routes to success:
 - (2) **Improve all teaching so that it equals the best found in school.**
 - Evaluate teaching against agreed criteria
 - Identify where teaching is best
 - Match staff development to areas of identified weakness
 - Ensure that there is an effective free flow of information to assist discussion of teaching
 - Replace the ineffective with the best
 - See paragraphs 5, 17-29, 90-1, 97-99, 101, 106 and 114.

(3) Overhaul the strategies for monitoring the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

- ❑ All staff should be involved in classroom observation and other checking strategies.
- ❑ Governors should have an appropriate overview of these strategies.
- ❑ Set monitoring against shared criteria.
- ❑ Present the findings in easily understood, and usable, form.
- ❑ Evaluate the outcomes to ensure that subsequent action is timely, consistent and well focused
- ❑ Make sure the process is rigorous.
- ❑ See paragraphs 6, 9, 21, 38, 48, 57-62, 97, 102-104, 107, 111, 119, 126, 134 and 154.

(4) Use the information produced by assessment to make precise statements in planning of what knowledge and skills are to be learned.

- ❑ Set linked targets for pupils,
- ❑ Share them with pupils at the start of lessons
- ❑ Review them together at the end
- ❑ Revise them upward whenever appropriate.
- ❑ See paragraphs 27, 38, 48, 50-1, 91, 98, 125, 134, 152 and 154.

64. The school development plan includes priorities linked to these key issues and the school intends to press ahead with the necessary improvements. It has resolved that future development plans will take this process forward.

65. This report includes other, lesser issues, that the governors should include in their action plan:

- ❑ Develop rigorous means to monitor the progress of older pupils who lose interest in lessons (paragraphs 12-13, 22 and 28).
- ❑ Introduce clearer distinctions between pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language in the identification and intervention process (paragraph 41).
- ❑ Provide parents with better quality information about their child's progress (paragraph 52).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	65
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	21

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	20	38	37	5	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	16	194
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals		45

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs		2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register		21

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	16

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	6.7
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	0.5

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	0
Indian	2
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	191
Any other minority ethnic group	0

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	27.7
Average class size	23.6

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	4
Total aggregate hours worked per week	95

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	0

Total number of education support staff	2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	65

Number of pupils per FTE adult	8 fte
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	4	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.

Financial information

Financial year	1998-9
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	£
Total income	398,963
Total expenditure	385,359
Expenditure per pupil	1,620
Balance brought forward from previous year	19,396
Balance carried forward to next year	34,352

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	226
Number of questionnaires returned	95

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	47	46	3	0	3
My child is making good progress in school.	56	37	2	3	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	36	55	4	2	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	35	52	8	4	1
The teaching is good.	48	49	1	1	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	41	41	15	3	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	59	34	4	3	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	58	39	1	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	35	45	9	3	7
The school is well led and managed.	41	46	5	2	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	40	54	4	1	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	34	40	18	1	7

Inspectors agree with most of the views of the parents. The quality of information given to parents could be better than it is. However, the amount of homework and the range of activities outside lessons are both satisfactory.

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

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

66. In 1997, children under five made appropriate progress in their work, teaching was satisfactory and the standards achieved were much as expected. The main weakness reported then was the provision of a balanced range of appropriate experiences from the desirable learning outcomes. Since that time, the school has built well on the strengths identified and has eliminated the weaknesses. Today, the education provided for the under fives is a considerable strength of the school.
67. The children aged under five have a very good start to their education, which begins in the nursery and is continued in the reception class. This is a strength of the school, and the high quality of the provision enables most children to make rapid strides in their learning. Good progress has been made since the last inspection and the nursery is fully integrated into the life of the school.
68. Children come into the nursery on a part-time basis. Most of them attend for a year before they move into the reception class. The nursery is staffed by two nursery nurses, and the reception class has one teacher and part-time help from a classroom assistant. Children join the reception class at the beginning of the year they are five. About 25 percent of children are statutory school age in the reception class.
69. The vast majority of children enter the nursery with very low skills in all areas of learning. They make a very good start and their progress is good throughout. It is very good in personal and social development. When they join the reception class their skills are lower than most children of the same age in other parts of the country. In personal and social development their attainment is broadly in line with the rest of the age group nationally. By the age of five most children are likely to achieve the expected levels in knowledge and understanding of the world, physical and creative development, as well as in their personal and social development. In language and literacy and in mathematical development, a minority are on course to meet the targets set for their age group by the time they are five.

Personal and social development

70. The children enter the nursery with very limited personal and social skills. They are very well taught, very good progress is made, and they quickly settle into the routines and systems of the nursery. For example, when they arrive they come in quietly and settle down promptly. Many of them make choices about which activities to do, and they take turns when it is snack time. When they move into the reception class their skills have improved, and there are many examples of them working together. One good example was in a lesson where they were making a plan of either a zoo or a farm. With some adult help the children worked together to plan the enclosures for their zoo or farm animals, finally putting their animals in place. The teaching was very good, helping the children to extend their knowledge and develop their relationships with each other. Relationships are very good, and the children behave very well in all activities. Work is enjoyed and they begin to concentrate for longer periods of time, maintaining good progress throughout.

Language and literacy

71. When children start in the nursery they have very limited skills of speaking and listening. They make good progress and by the time they move into the reception class their skills have improved but they are still below average. The children in the reception class make good progress but it is unlikely they will reach the level expected for five year olds. All children develop their use of language successfully, but a significant number have a limited vocabulary and they find it difficult to speak in complex sentences in both the nursery and reception classes. Many reception pupils listen attentively to stories, and they talk using an increasing vocabulary about things they have seen such as pictures of animals in their book. Books and pictures are enjoyed, and the children handle books correctly. Higher attaining pupils in the reception class can read a simple text fluently, other pupils learn the sounds and shapes of letters and practise forming them correctly. Some pupils can write their name correctly without help, and they record their experiences through drawing and writing.

Mathematics

72. Mathematical skills develop as children learn to match, count, sort and handle objects. Their attainment is much lower than expected when they start in the nursery. Good progress is made but even so, by the time they start in the reception class their attainment is still below average. Reception age children are keen and enthusiastic about their work. Many of them can sort objects by their shape and they can count aloud to 10 and beyond. Higher attaining pupils in the nursery can also count to 10 and they recognise some numbers. Many pupils are familiar with number rhymes and games. Talking about mathematics has a high priority, and the children always try to use the correct vocabulary. Sand and water play are enjoyed with the vocabulary “more than”, “less than”, being used extensively as part of an activity. All the pupils make good progress but it is unlikely that by the age of five they will reach the expected level for their age.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

73. The children in the nursery are curious and they want to know more about their world. Their class topic on sound helps them to learn about different sounds and noises, as well as developing their listening skills. They make good progress but by the time they start in the reception class their attainment is below average. This good progress is maintained in the reception class and they are likely to reach the expected level for children of similar ages. Their knowledge and understanding of the world is developed through talking about past events such as Christmas or their birthdays, construction sets are used with enjoyment, and the children use simple computer programs with confidence.

Creative development

74. Nursery children really enjoy painting, printing and making collages. A good example happened when they were printing footprints as part of their topic on sound and the “Funky footprints” game. Singing is enjoyed by both reception and nursery children, and they use their imagination when painting and drawing. Good progress is made and the children are likely to reach the expected level by the time they are five.

Physical development

75. Children of all abilities make good progress, and by the time they reach their fifth birthday they are likely to reach the expected level for the age group. In physical activity nursery children can run and jump with confidence, and they enjoy riding their bikes and trikes. As they progress in the reception class they develop an awareness of space and others around

them. The children can handle scissors, glue, paintbrushes and pencils successfully, and their cutting and sticking skills are developing well.

76. The quality of teaching in the nursery and reception classes is very good in personal and social development. Teaching is also very good in the nursery in the other areas of learning. In the reception class teaching is good with some very good teaching. This has a very positive impact on the children's progress. Adults work very well together, and all the staff have a secure understanding of the ways in which very young children learn. They have high expectations of them. The work for the under fives is planned carefully, and it is based on very good day to day assessments of what the children know, understand and can do. There is a good balance between activities directed by adults and opportunities for the children to choose for themselves. The children are well prepared to move into the National Curriculum as they reach statutory school age.
77. Good use is made of time and resources. The classrooms are stimulating and interesting, and the nursery has a good range of inviting activities, which are set out attractively. All the adults make very good use of praise and encouragement and relationships are very good indeed. Children gain in confidence, their self-esteem is raised, and this helps their learning. In both the nursery and reception classes the teachers use homework very well to support the children's work in school. There are excellent links with parents in the nursery, helping parents to feel confident and happy about their children's education.
78. The work of the nursery nurses is of a very high quality, and this has a positive impact on children's learning, and the progress they make. All the staff provide very good role models, and this makes a significant contribution to the children's personal and social development.

ENGLISH

79. At the time of the previous inspection, standards achieved in the National Curriculum tests were above average at the end of Key Stage 1 but below average at the end of Key Stage 2. Whilst standards have altered in the intervening period, it is evident that these relativities still hold, with attainment stronger at Key Stage 1 than 2.
80. Today, overall standards in English are low. National Curriculum assessment in 1999 shows attainment well below the national average at the end of Key Stage 2. Standards are also below those of pupils in similar schools. Attainment in spoken English is below average at the end of Key Stage 2 and there is a particular weakness in writing, which is poor. The pupils presently at the end of the key stage have similar levels of attainment to those in 1999. Over the four years 1996 to 1999, pupils' performance has been consistently well below average.
81. Standards in reading and writing at the end of Key Stage 1 are similar to those of children aged seven in other schools. In the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 1 in 1999, standards in reading and in writing were close to the national average although few pupils attained the higher level 3. In comparison with similar schools the level of attainment was above average in reading and broadly in line with the average in writing. Children's skills in speaking and listening are similar to those of seven-year-olds in other schools. The results of tests since 1996 show that standards have mirrored the national average for the last three years. The attainment of pupils now in Key Stage 1 is similar to that of recent years.
82. The introduction of the literacy hour is having a significant impact on standards in Key Stage 1 and the early years of Key Stage 2. Younger pupils are making good progress in learning to read through shared and guided reading. They pay close attention to print and are alert to spelling patterns and the structure of sentences. Pupils are responding well to a range of

fiction and non-fiction and this is developing their competence in both reading and writing. Pupils are making good progress in lessons, which are well organised and provide skilled direct teaching.

83. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils' attainment in speaking and listening is in line with national averages. Standards benefit from the early emphasis on speaking and listening in nursery and reception and good progress is maintained as pupils move through Key Stage 1. By the end of the key stage, skills are developed very effectively in class discussions where teachers use questioning very effectively to extent pupils' use of language, and pupils use questions confidently themselves to clarify their own understanding. There is insufficient opportunity for the systematic development of speaking and listening skills in Key Stage 2 for pupils to make satisfactory progress. Good practice was seen in a literacy lesson in Key Stage 2, where pupils used drama to demonstrate their understanding of the use of the apostrophe. There is, however, no consistent development of spoken English throughout the key stage, through drama, debate, and presentations to peers for pupils to attain the required standards in the use of Standard English.
84. Standards in reading are in line with national averages at both key stages. Pupils' enthusiasm for reading has been stimulated by the introduction of the literacy hour and by the excellent supply of attractive books. By the end of Key Stage 1 many pupils read fluently with expression, although a minority are as yet unable to achieve the required standard. Pupils have good levels of appreciation of both literature and non-fiction and show a developing interest in poetry. At Key Stage 2 pupils read a suitable range of books and many pupils read independently, with expression and understanding. The introduction of the books associated with the literacy hour is beginning to have a significant impact on pupils' interest in reading at Key Stage 2 as they experience a wide range of literature in a variety of forms. Research skills are good.
85. At the end of Key Stage 1 attainment in writing, with the exception of handwriting, is in line with national averages. Handwriting is generally not correctly formed, or even, and pupils do not take pride in their work. By the end of the key stage most pupils write simple stories and factual accounts, often linked to their learning in other subjects. This is an improvement on the previous inspection findings when it was felt there was insufficient opportunity for pupils to experience a range of purposes for writing. Pupils use phonic knowledge effectively in their spellings and many are beginning to use simple punctuation in their sentences. Pupils make good progress in writing throughout Key Stage 1.
86. In Key Stage 2 only a minority of pupils achieve the standard expected for eleven-year-olds. The higher attaining pupils have a reasonable understanding of how to write narrative, factual pieces, and poetry. Most pupils, however, find it difficult to produce a sustained piece of writing with the variety of language and the accuracy expected at this age. The last inspection noted few opportunities for extended writing across the curriculum. There is still little evidence of extended writing or of redrafting of work, and although pupils experience a range of styles and purposes for writing this is not developed sufficiently to extend and challenge the skills of pupils and to enable them to attain the appropriate levels for their age. Handwriting and presentation of work are poor.
87. Pupils in Key Stage 2 who receive additional literacy support in small groups make good progress and enjoy the sessions greatly. They are very proud of their achievements. Pupils with special educational needs are well catered for through differentiated work and make sound progress towards the targets in their individual education plans. Pupils for whom English is an additional language make good progress alongside English speaking peers, and they benefit from regular support from external agencies.

88. The introduction of work based on the structure for the literacy hour is having a marked impact on progress in the development of Standard English, reading, and writing at Key Stage 1 and in the early years of Key Stage 2. Pupils in Key Stage 1 are now working at levels that are in line with expectations for their age. Progress in these tightly focused lessons, where pupils are taught the skills of phonics, and of sentence structure, is good and it is often very good. Progression across the key stages in writing, however, is currently too slow to enable pupils to attain in line with national expectation at the end of Key Stage 2.
89. Pupils' attitudes to learning in English across both key stages are good, and where teaching is particularly lively and enthusiastic the response of pupils is very positive. They enjoy the literacy hour and respond well to the familiar routines. However, pupils in Key Stage 2 rarely show initiative in checking or extending their work and too often higher attaining pupils are satisfied with a minimum standard of work.
90. The quality of teaching across both key stages is good overall, with a few examples of very good and even excellent lessons particularly in Key Stage 1. There are instances, however, of unsatisfactory teaching in Key Stage 2. Teachers are beginning to expect more from pupils, particularly in Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2, where planning takes account of national expectations for each year group. However, teachers in some classes in Key Stage 2 are having to bridge a wide gap between what pupils can do and what they should be able to do, and sometimes insufficient support is given to enable the pupils to succeed. Where lessons are most effective they are well planned, and a good structure is given to pupils in order that they may model their work on the strategy given, to meet the targets of the lesson. This was seen in a Key Stage 1 class where pupils modelled their language carefully on the patterns demonstrated by the teacher in oral work, and then applied this learning very effectively in their writing to use connectives to form complex sentences. Where lessons are less successful or unsatisfactory it is usually because there is no clear focus for learning that is shared with the pupils, and insufficient clear teaching of skills which pupils may then apply to their own work in a challenging way.
91. Assessment in English is thorough and the results of national tests are analysed rigorously throughout Key Stage 2. This data is not yet, however, used effectively to plan learning and to agree specific targets with pupils. Teachers keep detailed records of pupils' progress in reading. This now needs to be extended to encompass the skills of written English in all its forms in Key Stage 2 in order that clear targets may be set for pupils and attainment measured regularly against these targets. The co-ordinators have worked very hard to raise standards with the introduction of the literacy hour and a focus on reading. Results are now becoming evident in Key Stage 1. There is now an urgent need to address the development of written English throughout the school, within the targets already identified in the school development plan, in order to raise standards overall and standards in Key Stage 2 especially.

MATHEMATICS

92. At the time of the previous inspection in 1997, standards in mathematics were satisfactory by the age of eleven, progress was sound through the school and teaching was of the expected quality. In 1998 standards achieved in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 2 fell dramatically and have not recovered much since then.
93. Today, pupils start school with much below average knowledge and skills in very basic number and counting. During their time in the nursery and in the reception class, the children make spirited progress because teaching quality is so good. By the age of five, these very

young children have made up some ground and their level of attainment, whilst still below that expected, is better than when they started school.

94. The pupils continue to receive a good mathematics education in Key Stage 1. Teaching and learning continue to be strengths, pupils build skills and knowledge at a good rate and their attainment is average by the end of the key stage. This is considerable improvement.
95. In Key Stage 2, the path of improvement is not as clear. In the first half of the key stage, teaching and learning are sound overall, but there are also times when they are better than this. However, by the second half of the key stage, teaching is not as good, learning is more ordinary and standards fall. Progress improves towards the end of the key stage, but since there is so much ground to make up, pupils do not achieve anywhere near the expected level at the age of eleven.
96. An examination of the results of the National Curriculum tests in the time between the two inspections shows how the variations in the quality of education affect standards. At Key Stage 1 standards in mathematics have been on the positive side of average. In 1997 and 1999, attainment was broadly in line with standards found nationally. In 1998 they were above the national average. When the 1999 figure is set against the picture in similar types of school, attainment at Key Stage 1 was well above average. These results testify to the clear impact that good teaching has at this key stage.
97. At Key Stage 2, the results were nowhere near as good. In 1997, mathematics results were not much different from the national average. They slumped to be within the lowest 5 percent to be found nationally in 1998. They crept up in 1999 to be well below the national average and also the average level found in similar schools. The school has tried hard to identify the reasons for this pattern of low achievement in mathematics and has had marginal success in boosting standards. For example, the introduction of the numeracy strategy has led to a much firmer structure for learning, there are some good introductions to mathematics lessons in which basic number and arithmetic are well taught, and pupils are generally interested in the work. However, problems remain as the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 is inconsistent and monitoring to identify strengths and weaknesses, although improved over 1997, has still to have major impact.
98. One of the shortcomings of teaching is planning. The basic structure for this does not lack good qualities, but the precise identification of the skills and knowledge to be learned is not sharp enough. Objectives such as "*improve pupils' knowledge of fractions*" as seen on one lesson plan, are difficult to use successfully. It is not clear at what level this refers, whether the focus is on the fractions themselves or on arithmetic using fractions, and it is difficult to judge whether the objective has been accomplished. It is also difficult to set a target for pupils that they understand, or can later gauge whether it has been reached. Inspectors saw a number of vague objectives, though in one or two lessons, the quality was better and teachers set meaningful targets for the pupils. These were well reviewed and evaluated at the end of the lesson, as in a Year 4 lesson on subtraction strategies. The "*Tell the teacher*" session in this lesson was an impressive demonstration of the power that pupils' self-evaluation has on standards and could serve as a model for any school.
99. Another weakness is the level of expectation. Especially towards the end of school, pupils are not expected to reach for the heights in their work. The school has set the required targets for attainment in mathematics until 2001 but these are too low and serve as a ceiling to attainment. Some members of staff find reasons in discussion why pupils won't achieve at good levels, rather than voice high aspirations. Barriers to success are sometimes preferred to opportunities to show that Castlefort pupils can outreach pupils from other schools.

100. Teaching quality is satisfactory overall and there are a number of strengths, not least the good class control that teachers have and the way in which time is used. Lessons are usually brisk and pupils work productively. Homework use is good and supports the learning in lessons effectively. Support staff make a particularly valuable contribution to learning, especially for lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs.
101. As identified, the quality of teaching is the major factor in the quality of learning. Castlefort pupils are keen to learn mathematics, they are interested in the work and they put in much effort. They are capable of building skills and knowledge at a very good rate, as in a Year 3 lesson on three-dimensional shape. They also work independently for long periods, concentrate well and accept responsibility willingly. These qualities are not always promoted in lessons. In some cases, the tasks are ordinary and the teaching is not very inspiring. There is no reason why this should be the case as the school has some good and very good practice to build on.
102. Threading through this analysis is the fact that monitoring is not as effective as should be. Staff put much effort into evaluating statistics about performance in mathematics, they know that standards must be higher, but are not yet sure how to achieve this. Some direct monitoring has taken place, but not everyone is involved and the criteria for the work are not clear. Much data is produced but it is not presented in a user-friendly fashion and so it is difficult to disentangle the points of substance. Monitoring of mathematics forms a substantial element of key issue 3.

SCIENCE

103. At the time of the previous inspection, standards in science were judged to be average at the end of both key stages, though there was not enough opportunity for pupils to experiment and investigate scientifically. In some respects, the school has built soundly on the positive judgements of 1997, though standards at Key Stage 2 have declined in the intervening period.
104. In the 1999 Key Stage 1 teacher assessments, standards were not significantly different from the national average. However, standards were well below the national average at the end of Key Stage 2. In comparison with Key Stage 2 results in similar schools, the 1999 results were below average. In the years between 1997 and 1999 there were times when the results in science at Key Stage 2 were amongst the lowest 5 percent nationally. This pattern of results is due to the same set of circumstances that apply to English and mathematics, namely, that monitoring does not pick out the shortcomings (or strengths) of the subject quickly enough. This means that action to boost standards is left too late. There are some good signs of improvement through Key Stage 1 and in Years 3 and 4, but this process is arrested in the later years of Key Stage 2.
105. The curriculum for science is satisfactory and gives pupils appropriate opportunities to investigate and experiment in practical ways. Good links are made to other subjects in order to increase the level of skill and knowledge. The school makes good use of its visits programme, for example, to help pupils understand basic scientific facts more effectively. In addition, the school farm is used well to support pupils' science work. This all ensures that pupils make satisfactory progress overall in science during their years in school. Progress is however, better in Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2. On the whole, the pupils like science and they work with interest and motivation. There were few signs during the inspection that boys do better than girls in the subject, as in most lessons both showed the same level of effort and productivity.

106. The quality of teaching is basically satisfactory through the school but there are peaks and troughs in the pattern. In Key Stage 1, teaching is effective because skills and knowledge are built systematically and the lessons provided are interesting. This ensures that the pupils enjoy good opportunities for learning that take their basic understanding forward. This is also seen in Years 3 and 4 but teaching loses impact later on in this key stage. One element of weakness in teaching is to be found in teachers' over-control of some lessons. Where this is the case, the teacher chooses the equipment and method for the work and tells the pupils what to do. The teacher also explains how to write-up the work. Pupils have insufficient opportunities to suggest how to organise their own work and observations, predictions and ways of checking the outcome are all very similar. This gives pupils one level of knowledge but it does not do much to give them the necessary skills of managing a scientific investigation.
107. The management of science is satisfactory. The coordinator has ensured that there are enough resources for the work and provides much support and advice for colleagues. However, the level of monitoring of standards, teaching and the curriculum within classrooms is low and there are no clearly defined, or shared, criteria for the monitoring of planning and work that takes place at present.

ART

108. Standards reached at the last inspection have been maintained. There have been sound improvements in the rate of pupils' progress, and they now make satisfactory progress in all aspects of their work. Standards at the end of both key stages are in line with those expected for pupils aged seven and eleven. At both key stages the pupils make effective use of a variety of media, working with paint, paper, card, fabric and clay. At Key Stage 1 they show a growing appreciation of colour, texture, tone and shape in their self portraits, mixing their paint to achieve the desired effect.
109. At Key Stage 2 this continues in much the same way, with growing accuracy and discernment shown in pupils' work, such as when they are drawing and painting in the style of Toulouse Lautrec. Some interesting work is achieved in Year 5 with shades of colour and perspective in landscapes. Three-dimensional work is not neglected in either key stage, as evidenced by some good clay and paper models.
110. Teaching is sound in Key Stage 1, and good overall in Key Stage 2, with the occasional very good lesson. Where the teaching is stronger there is a clear focus on demonstrating how specific techniques, such as sharp delineation between colours, can improve the desired effect. This enables learning to be effective as the pupils use and apply their new skills to their work in hand. Lessons are clearly introduced and well planned, with resources carefully prepared, and all this has a direct bearing on improving standards.
111. Progress is satisfactory overall across both key stages. Good progress is made by pupils with special educational needs. Learning is good throughout the school. All the pupils are improving their skills and techniques in two-dimensional and three-dimensional work, demonstrating increasing confidence in using a range of media. However, teaching and learning are not monitored effectively, strengths and weaknesses are not identified, and this limits the pupils' overall improvement. Work is displayed attractively in classrooms and around the school, and pupils take pride in their art work, explaining about how they have achieved a particular effect. They behave well, they are interested and they try hard to succeed. All of this has a positive impact on their learning.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

112. The previous inspection report indicated that standards in design and technology were average at the end of the first key stage and above average at the end of the second. Teaching was judged to be satisfactory overall, with some good practice in Key Stage 2. For the most part, the school has preserved the strengths in the subject since 1997.
113. Unusually, design technology is rotated with religious education on the timetable but this practice works because pupils are given appropriate experiences in both subjects. The curriculum for design and technology includes the necessary elements of plan, design, make and evaluate. This commences in Key Stage 1 where pupils have worked on several useful projects to design and make different items. At Key Stage 2, this sort of approach is extended to include discussion of the materials and tools to be used and, at the end of Key Stage 2, the specification of size, material and methods of joining. Some good analysis of design was seen in a Year 6 lesson that focused on the “*London Eye*.” Older pupils are able to talk convincingly of how they would improve their work so that the product is better next time.
114. Teaching is satisfactory overall. As in science, there are times when some pupils have the tools and materials chosen for them by the teacher. There is, however evidence of older pupils in Key Stage 2 being given appropriate opportunities to make their own selections from the available range. Teachers’ subject knowledge, control and discipline and use of time and the pace set are all sound. Most design and technology lessons are interesting and the pupils respond well to the opportunities created for learning. They build skills and knowledge at a good rate in the best lessons and by the age of eleven have experienced a good variety of work using different materials. They have produced some good models and items that show careful attention to detail and good joining techniques.

GEOGRAPHY

115. Geography is taught in tandem with history. During the inspection, history was the focus. The school provided enough work in books and folders to make judgements about the quality of education and standards achieved in the subject.
116. As at the time of the previous inspection, standards in geography are at the expected level by the age of eleven. This is also the case at the age of seven. Pupils develop a satisfactory knowledge of a range of places. This builds from knowledge of their home locality at the start of school, to places further afield in this country, and then to places overseas. The oldest pupils know the main features of the British Isles and locate the different capitals. They can also show the location of Walsall. Year 6 use maps of Europe and the world to find well known places and they develop sound knowledge of larger scale plans and maps. The programme of visits, as in the case of Year 3 to Cannock Chase and Year 6 when they make their residential visit, makes a good contribution to pupils’ knowledge of other places.
117. The oldest pupils are able to compare and contrast other places with the area around their homes. They also know about the water cycle and some good work is completed in Year 6 to show the effects of pollution and damage to the environment.
118. This knowledge is built up systematically through the school. Teaching is satisfactory at all stages and learning takes place in orderly, productive lessons. This is shown by the quality of work in books and files. There are some good opportunities for pupils to research for themselves and this represents an improvement since the previous inspection. Most pupils experience a soundly structured programme in geography that builds knowledge and skills systematically. Because of this, their progress is at the expected level.

119. Geography is managed successfully by a hard working co-ordinator. There are not opportunities at present for the direct monitoring of geography by the coordinator and so, the strengths and weaknesses of the subject are not shared effectively enough.

HISTORY

120. Since the last inspection standards have been maintained and teaching is now good.
121. Attainment is as expected for pupils of the ages of seven and eleven, and overall progress is good for all pupils, including those with special educational needs, and English as an additional language. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils have developed their sense of sequencing events from simple terms such as today and yesterday to a deeper understanding of chronology with events from before their living memory. In a Year 2 activity about famous people, pupils demonstrated a deeper understanding of the need for hygienic conditions in hospital, in the topic on 'Florence Nightingale'. They worked very well in pairs, with higher attaining pupils being challenged to research questions.
122. In Key Stage 2, Year 3 pupils showed a greater understanding of the way the past is represented by selecting and linking information from historical sources during their visit to Cannock Chase Museum. They observed, handled, and interpreted artefacts from World War II. This good practice was also evident in Year 5, where pupils working in groups had a good understanding of the Victorian period when handling and interpreting artefacts collaboratively. By the end of the key stage pupils accurately link study periods such as the Egyptians, Romans, Vikings, Tudors and Victorians, and study the characteristic features of societies and periods. In discussion they relate well to the legacies of the Greeks, Egyptians and the Romans.
123. Pupils have positive attitudes towards learning, concentrate for extended periods and enjoy their lessons. However, their pride in their work is not always reflected in the standard of their presentation when recording information.
124. Relationships with teachers are good and pupils grow in confidence when their contributions are valued. Overall, teachers have good subject knowledge which enables them to explore pupils' contributions, as in Year 2, where hospital cleanliness in the Crimea was linked to pupils' experiences of hospitalisation, and in Year 3 the contributions of pupils and their parents enriched the experiences gained by all. Clear lesson objectives ensure that pupils build on their previous gains in skills, knowledge and understanding. Teaching methods are good and pupils are managed well, with brisk introductions giving many more opportunities for pupils to research, explore and discuss. Good examples were evident in Years 2, 5, and 6 where research and discussion played a significant part of the lessons.
125. Since the last inspection pupils have been given more opportunities to develop a capacity for independent learning. A more successful balance between giving information and allowing pupils to investigate for themselves is evident. Consequently in Years 3, and 5 the levels of historical enquiry are good, extended by the contributions of parents and grandparents. Information technology is used satisfactorily to enrich experiences, as when CD-ROM is used to strengthen knowledge and understanding in the topic on Invaders and Settlers in Year 4. There are no formal procedures for recording gains in knowledge and understanding, and informal assessment by questioning and marking pupils' work is not always used to set targets for raising standards.
126. The co-ordinator gives positive leadership, but his role is underdeveloped. Apart from handling a budget for resources, supporting colleagues, and checking planning on a half termly

basis there are no consistent systems for raising standards by checking the quality of pupils' work or teaching.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

127. At the last inspection, it was judged that standards in information technology were a strength of the school and that teaching was good. Today, much of the work is taken by support staff who give good service to the school and standards are at the expected level at the end of both key stages, including pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language.
128. By the age of seven pupils are developing satisfactory communication skills. They have explored text and sounds, retrieve, store and print work with help from adults. Their communication skills with text are satisfactory. They have developed satisfactory keyboard and mouse skills and understand commands such as shift, spacebar, return and backspace. These skills are applied across the curriculum so that word processing using 'Storymaker' is used to draft their accounts of Florence Nightingale. With assistance they use CD-ROM and the Internet to control and find information about Tutankhamun using index, search and menu.
129. In Key Stage 2, attainment is in line with what is expected for pupils at this age. Pupils have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of e-mail and search engines but as yet they do not have the experiences or the resources to develop their ideas. Most pupils demonstrate a range of skills reinforced in some cases by experiences brought from home. By the end of the key stage, pupils are confident using keyboard and mouse skills, which have been refined so that they work without the need for adult assistance. Most pupils have developed sound research skills using CD-ROM to enhance the curriculum such as finding information about Christmas, Greece, India and Egypt. By the age of 11 pupils have developed appropriate communication skills, using their word processing skills to write poems about space, book reviews and factual reports. They use "Excel" to store information and graphic packages to interpret information. When investigating the effects of friction on moving objects in science, they collect, analyse and evaluate data.
130. Pupils enjoy using computers. They apply themselves well and they are keen to learn. They are willing to share equipment and help each other when working in pairs. This was clearly evident when a group of Year 2 pupils shared an activity on study skills, and Year 5 pupils collaborated in pairs during the literacy hour to develop a story plan.
131. Since the last inspection information and communications technology has become a core subject and guidelines based on national recommendations for progressive gains in skills, knowledge and understanding have been adopted. Plans are well in hand to improve the resources in the computer suite with provision for all computers in the school, including the nursery, to be networked. Recently, lap tops have been provided so that skills learned in the computer suite, may be consolidated and extended in the classroom.
132. Although there were no opportunities during the inspection to observe direct teaching by class teachers, regular opportunities are provided for groups of pupils to take turns in the computer room. They are assisted most effectively by classroom and learning support assistants who have secure subject knowledge. Where parents are available to support learning, as in the research on the Internet in Year 2, structured guidelines are provided. Pupils are given good support and this is making a significant impact on the quality of learning for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and English as a second language. Good questioning is used to ascertain knowledge and understanding and encourage independence such as, 'Do you remember how to?' 'What should you do next?'. Planning is generally good

with a balance between communicating, investigating, control and data handling but there is no system for recording gains in skills, knowledge and understanding.

133. Learning and progress are satisfactory across the key stages for all pupils including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language. Lower attainers showed confidence when collaborating with a support assistant to present a book review to support their guided reading in the literacy hour. Pupils in the nursery explore words and sounds in the computer suite. Pupils in Year 1 print simple sentences such as 'It is warmest' when investigating the adaptation of clothes to the effects of the weather. Scripts for plays are produced in Year 4, and older pupils relate factual accounts, for example of their visit to the National Indoor Arena as part of their celebrations for Christmas. Pupils are encouraged to draft directly onto the screen. Their learning is effective throughout the school as they develop and use their computing skills.
134. The co-ordinator provides clear direction. Her subject knowledge is very good; she supports colleagues well by providing clear curriculum guidelines and in-service training; checks planning on a half-termly basis; and handles a budget for resources. However, there are no consistent systems for checking standards in teaching and learning by providing targets to raise standards. The revised policy and guidelines for the use of information and communication technology across the curriculum are based on national guidelines that which will provide a good basis for changes in the National Curriculum later this year. The school gives information technology a high priority and the governing body is very supportive. A commitment by the finance committee to monitor and evaluate the decision to update hardware and software is indicative of a commitment to 'best value'.

MUSIC

135. The previous inspection report was complimentary about pupils' attainment in music, and identified several good features. The good quality of provision has been maintained.
136. It was not possible to observe any teaching of music in Key Stage 2 during the inspection but from observations of progress and attainment in Key Stage 1 and the pupils' use of music in assemblies and extra-curricular activities it is apparent that high standards are achieved.
137. Pupils in Key Stage 1 use instruments with good levels of competence for their ages. Younger pupils in nursery and reception are beginning to copy a simple rhythm, clapping and singing tunefully and rhythmically. They use percussion instruments to accompany singing but at this stage many have more enthusiasm than skill. They know the names of most percussion instruments and play them correctly. In assemblies, pupils sing tunefully with good volume and a sense of rhythm. Pupils in Key Stage 1 sing in unison effectively, with good expression and expertise in dynamics and rhythm. Pupils in Key Stage 2 demonstrate very good breath control and mastery of pitch as they use harmony very effectively to create dramatic effect and atmosphere in their singing. Pupils learn from an early age to listen appreciatively to music from a variety of traditions, and to enjoy the wide range of instruments available within the school.
138. Throughout both key stages all pupils, including those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, make good progress in developing skill in listening, appraising, composing and performing. This is the result of enthusiastic teaching and carefully planned lessons that include activities to extend the learning of higher attaining pupils.
139. Pupils' attitudes to music are good, and they enjoy music lessons and singing practice. Pupils of all ages are enthusiastic about playing instruments. Even the youngest usually display good

ability to take turns when provided with opportunities to perform with percussion instruments. Pupils in Key Stage 2 persevere with difficult tasks. They concentrate and listen with great care when composing their own music with a computer program and then use chime bars to play the compositions of peers.

140. The quality of teaching in music is good. Class teachers teach music, and singing practice is supervised by the co-ordinator in Key Stage 2. Although most of the staff are not expert in the subject, they prepare lessons diligently and use musical terms accurately and confidently. A clear scheme of work enhances teachers' planning. Support staff use their expertise very effectively to support learning. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' performance and the pupils, who rise to the challenge, appreciate this.
141. Teachers provide voluntary after-school clubs so that pupils learn to play the recorder and perform in assemblies. Opportunities for older pupils to sing in the school choir extend their interest and skill in music. Good use is made of the skills of visiting specialists who provide additional instrumental tuition for pupils whose parents wish them to learn. Some pupils who receive this tuition develop very good performance skills. The school has an excellent orchestra, "Castleforte," of some 25 players. This orchestra consists of strings, woodwind, brass, and timpani. The co-ordinator gives willingly of his time and pupils rehearse with enthusiasm, enjoyment, and developing skill. Pupils perform annually in the Walsall Schools Gala Concert and take part in "Young World" concerts at the National Indoor Arena where they experience the exhilaration of becoming a part of the massed choirs.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

142. At the previous inspection, standards in physical education were as expected in Key Stage 1 but better than expected at the end of Key Stage 2. Teaching was satisfactory through the school, with some good teaching in Key Stage 2.
143. Today, the programme for physical education is well thought out and pupils have enough opportunities in gymnastics, games, dance, outdoor activities, swimming and athletics to build the necessary skills and knowledge. Standards of work are as expected by the end of both key stages.
144. Pupils' movement skills are built well and from the first days in school they move confidently, safely and with good use made of the space around them. Key Stage 1 pupils hold balances soundly and develop good levels of self-assurance when climbing and crossing apparatus. They begin to produce simple sequences of movement and to work as part of a team.
145. Key Stage 2 pupils work with great energy and develop good ball control skills. They understand the rules of several team games and, although very competitive, they play as a team by Year 6. There is satisfactory opportunity for pupils to discuss, reflect on, evaluate and then improve their work, though this could be more widespread.
146. One of the strengths of provision is in swimming. The school ensures that the youngest pupils, as well as older ones, have good opportunities first, to become water-safe, and then to practise, refine and improve their swimming technique. Many pupils receive awards for swimming each year and the school has a good track record in making sure all pupils reach the basic level of competence and skill when swimming.
147. The quality of teaching is satisfactory across the school and lessons are productive and pleasant. The pupils enjoy their learning and put in good effort. Behaviour is good and pupils learn well to work together in small teams or in pairs.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

148. In 1997 it was reported that standards were above average in religious education, progress was satisfactory and teaching was effective.
149. Although no lessons were observed during the current inspection because of timetable arrangements, religious education meets statutory requirements. All evidence indicates that standards are in line with the expected levels at the ages of 7 and 11. There are examples of good standards in Years 2, 3 and 4. Standards are extended by the contributions made through collective worship that includes weekly visits by a local vicar. The school has a strong Christian ethos. Religious education makes a significant contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils. Since the last inspection, opportunities for spiritual development have been identified more regularly. Reflection is encouraged through drama, music and prayer, such as when pupils gasped in wonder at light passing through a prism in Year 3, 'It looks like a stained glass window!'
150. At both key stages pupils have a growing knowledge of Christian traditions whilst being aware of the other religions such as Judaism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. By the time they reach the end of Key Stage 1 pupils know some of the stories from the Bible such as 'The Creation' and 'The Good Samaritan'. They have compared Christian traditions with those of other faiths, for example when comparing weddings with a Hindu ceremony. They name important characters and explain the Christian traditions of the nativity and Easter.
151. By the age of 11, pupils have a greater understanding of Christian festivals and those of other major faiths such as the Jewish festival of Hanukah and the Muslim festival of Diwali. These experiences, together with an understanding of sacred writings and symbols, contribute significantly to the understanding of their own and other cultures. In discussions with pupils in Year 6, there is evidence that pupils enjoy their activities and relationships are good. Staff set good examples for their pupils and the attitudes and values fostered make a significant impact on the quality of learning.
152. Procedures for assessment have been improved with the development of a check sheet to track the gains in skills, knowledge and understanding as pupils progress through the school but are yet to be used to identifying targets for the raising of standards. Marking is consistent but comments on books do not always indicate how pupils may improve. There is evidence in the scrutiny of pupils' work of satisfactory gains in skills and knowledge for all pupils including those with special educational needs and for those for whom English is an additional language. However, plans to develop extended writing in both key stages are still in their early stages.
153. It is not possible to make an overall judgement on the quality of teaching as religious education is only taught in the second half of each term. However, planning is satisfactory and is reviewed on a termly basis and lessons having clear objectives based on the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. Pupils' topic books contain evidence that there is still a proportion of lessons where teachers control tightly the information to be recorded but by the end of Key Stage 2, opportunities are provided for pupils to investigate and research topics such as 'Christmas Traditions'. Where available, the richness of different cultures is harnessed, as when the comparison with Hindu wedding customs was enriched by a pupil's family experiences.
154. The co-ordinator gives a positive lead, and his review of curriculum guidelines indicates building on the current strengths by celebrating the festivals of major world faiths. His desire to share his expertise with colleagues and co-ordinators from other schools underpins his

secure subject knowledge. The co-ordinator evaluates planning on a termly basis. He supports his colleagues well and handles a budget for resources, but there are no consistent systems for checking standards in teaching and learning and then for using this information to provide targets for raising standards.