

INSPECTION REPORT

PENROSE SCHOOL

Bridgwater

LEA area: Somerset

Unique reference number: 123942

Headteacher: Ms S Neale

Reporting inspector: Dr M Megee
23629

Dates of inspection: 22nd – 26th October 2001

Inspection number: 191379

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

© Crown copyright 2001

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community special
Age range of pupils:	3 to 19 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Albert Street Bridgwater Somerset
Postcode:	TA6 7ET
Telephone number:	01278 423660
Fax number:	01278 431075
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Fox
Date of previous inspection:	13 th January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
23629	Dr M Megee	Registered inspector	Modern languages foreign Music English as an additional language	What sort of school is it? The school's results and pupils' and students' achievements How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
13911	Mrs J Gallichan	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils and students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
19996	Mr G Watson	Team inspector	Science Art and design Geography	
23412	Mr A Jeffs	Team inspector	Mathematics History Special educational needs	
18261	Mr T Hill	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Design and technology Physical education Equal opportunities	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils or students?
16930	Mr J Plumb	Team inspector	English Religious education	How well are pupils or students taught?
10638	Ms J Bavin	Team inspector	The foundation stage	

The inspection contractor was:

Bench Marque Ltd
National Westminster Bank Chambers
Victoria Street
Burnham-on-Sea
Somerset
TA8 1AN

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Complaints Manager
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	11
The school's results and pupils' and students' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	14
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	16
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS AND STUDENTS?	18
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	19
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	20
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	23
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	24
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	27

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Penrose School is a small community special school for boys and girls aged between 3 and 19 years. The school is part of the Bridgwater Educational Achievement Zone. There are 43 pupils and students on roll. All pupils have statements of special educational needs identifying severe, profound or complex learning difficulties including autism, and some of these pupils additionally have visual or hearing impairment. There has been an increase in the number of pupils with autism and with complex and profound learning difficulties since the last inspection in 1997. The attainment of pupils when they enter the school is well below the standards achieved by pupils of the same age nationally because of their special educational needs. Pupils are admitted to the school from the north west of Somerset, and nearly half of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. Pupils are grouped into classes by their age.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Penrose School is an effective school. Pupils and students with a wide range of special educational needs achieve good standards in English and mathematics and in relation to their own individual needs. This is because of good teaching and because all the staff know the pupils very well. The headteacher provides good leadership and management, and the school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The school ensures that pupils and students achieve well in many subjects through good teaching.
- Staff know the pupils' and students' individual needs and capabilities very well.
- The school fosters very positive relationships which ensure that pupils and students behave very well and are keen to learn.
- The school makes very effective use of its support staff, and all staff work well together as a team.

What could be improved

- The way the curriculum is planned and monitored means that the school cannot be sure that all pupils learn the right things at the right time.
- There are insufficient opportunities for pupils' spiritual development, developing personal responsibility and taking initiative, especially for older pupils and students.
- The governing body has a high level of vacancies, and duties and responsibilities are spread amongst too few individuals.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvement since it was last inspected in January 1997. The quality of teaching and the curriculum have improved greatly throughout the school and pupils' and students' progress in all the subjects of the curriculum is now at least satisfactory and good overall. In some subjects such as mathematics and information and communication technology, the improvement has been significant because of good leadership in the subjects. The senior management team now monitors the quality of teaching and learning as part of the new performance management system, and improved

formal procedures to observe teaching will be in place this term. The school has made good improvements in developing an effective framework for reviewing pupils' gains in learning and monitoring their personal development. The accommodation is now satisfactory, although some areas continue to provide difficulties for pupils and students who use wheelchairs.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets.

Progress in:	by Year R	by Year 6	by Year 11	by Year 13	Key
speaking and listening	B	B	B	B	very good A
reading	B	B	B	B	good B
writing	B	B	B	B	satisfactory C
mathematics	B	B	B	B	unsatisfactory D
personal, social and health education	B	B	B	B	poor E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	B	B	B	B	

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

Pupils and students of all ages and with a diverse range of educational needs generally make good progress in relation to their own individual needs and in all aspects of English. The effective introduction of the National Literacy Strategy, the use of age-appropriate literature and the widespread use of communication aids ensure that all pupils make good gains in learning. Some older pupils and students lack confidence in speaking. Progress in mathematics is good throughout the school.

Pupils and students across the school make satisfactory progress in art and design (within the limited range of opportunities provided), music, geography, science and history. Progress in design and technology and information and communication technology (ICT) is good throughout the school. Progress in French is good in Years 7 to 11. Pupils and students make satisfactory progress in religious education up to Year 2, and from Year 7 to Year 9. In other years, they make good progress in the subject. Students at post-16 make good progress overall and achieve success in their accredited programmes.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils and students are very enthusiastic and well motivated.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils and students behave very well throughout the school and respond very well to the teaching.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils and students enjoy good relationships with each other and all the adults who teach and care for them.
Attendance	Good. Pupils and students enjoy coming to school and attend regularly.

Pupils and students are very positive about the school, and work hard throughout the school day. Pupils participate well at the expected level, given their learning difficulties, and this means they make good progress and learn effectively.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 – 6	Years 7 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Good	Good

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

The quality of teaching is consistently good and often very good throughout the school, and in the majority of subjects. Teaching is very good in Years 3 to 6. During the inspection, 50 lessons were observed. Teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons, good or better in 92 per cent of lessons and at least very good in 37 per cent. The overall high quality of teaching is a major factor in the good progress which pupils and students make and in the effective learning which takes place. The strongest element in the teaching is the very good knowledge and understanding which staff have of the special needs of each pupil and student. This means that pupils and students are managed efficiently and most rapidly develop self-confidence in learning. The quality of teaching is good in English, mathematics, science and personal, social and health education. Pupils and students who experience complex difficulties receive the same high standards of teaching as others.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school offers a good, broad curriculum that is socially and educationally inclusive, enabling pupils and students of all ages and levels of attainment to benefit from it. Its organisation as a three-year rolling programme of themes makes it difficult for the school to determine whether each subject receives the recommended time allocation to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. Pupils' achievements in art and design, French, music, and science are not always fully recognised.
Provision for pupils' and students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The provision for pupils' and students' moral, social and cultural development is mostly good, although opportunities are limited for some pupils and students to take responsibility and use their initiative. The provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory but limited.
How well the school cares for its pupils and students	The school provides a safe and welcoming environment for all pupils and students. There are good procedures for monitoring and promoting pupils' personal development. The governing body does not fully monitor the health and safety policy, and the school has no bullying policy.

The school works in close partnership with parents and their views of the school are very positive. The school actively encourages parents to be involved in their children's education, and identifies ways that parents can make an effective contribution to their children's learning.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides effective leadership and management to the school, although there is insufficient monitoring of the balance of the curriculum. All staff work effectively as a team.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The governing body fulfils its responsibilities satisfactorily and has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. It is currently under strength and this means that the responsibilities and duties are spread among too few members.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. The senior management team and some, but not all, subject co-ordinators evaluate teachers' performance.
The strategic use of resources	There is a good range of resources which are used effectively. Staff, especially learning support assistants, are deployed well and good use is made of grants available to the school. The principles of best value are being applied.

The school is well staffed and teachers have a satisfactory range of expertise across their subjects. The accommodation has improved since the last inspection through internal modifications which have created more space for learning and ensured the privacy of pupils and students in toilet and changing areas. The accommodation still has some shortcomings for wheelchair users. Resources are at least satisfactory and often good.

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 school and make good progress. • The quality of teaching is good. • They are kept well informed. • Behaviour is good. • The school is well led and managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision for homework should be more consistent. • Activities outside lessons.

Parents have very positive views about most aspects of the school's provision. The inspection team agreed with parents' positive views, but found that the school's provision for homework and activities outside lessons is appropriate.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Although some students at post-16 achieve success in nationally accredited courses, it is inappropriate to compare the achievements of pupils and students with national averages because of their special needs. Over half of the learners have profound or complex difficulties and a quarter of all pupils have a significant degree of visual impairment. There are other, smaller groups who have complex physical and sensory difficulties and the number of these and of autistic pupils and students is rising. These learners are now successfully integrated into all of the classes within the school. This makes the range of abilities within each class group very broad and presents challenges to teachers in every class.
2. The standards achieved and the progress made by learners, throughout the school and with this broad range of special educational needs, are good in most subjects and in relation to the individual needs of pupils. This is an improvement since the last inspection and is the result of good and often very good teaching and the very good knowledge which staff have of the pupils' individual abilities and needs.
3. The one child in the foundation stage is taught alongside pupils up to Year 2. All pupils in this class generally achieve well and make good progress.
4. Pupils achieve good standards in all aspects of English and make good progress in relation to their capabilities. The effective implementation of the National Literacy Strategy, the use of reading materials that are relevant to the age of the pupils and the very effective co-ordination of the subject have all contributed to the pupils' success.
5. Pupils generally make good progress in speaking and listening across the school, although some of the less able pupils at Year 10 and older, lack confidence. By Year 2, pupils listen well and less able pupils make good eye contact with good support from learning support assistants. By Year 6, pupils enjoy listening to stories, and those with more complex needs make good use of communication aids. By Year 9, pupils take up the good range of opportunities provided for them, and the less able make choices with the aid of tactile resources. By Year 11, more able pupils act out scenes from Shakespeare, while less able pupils are a little hesitant when it comes to speaking. Students post-16 speak well in front of an assembly but some of the less able speak hesitantly.
6. Pupils make good progress in reading throughout the school. By Year 2, more able pupils know which way up books should be held, read their own name and recognise symbols. Pupils with more complex needs enjoy sensory books. By Year 6, some pupils make use of phonics to sound out the initial letters of words. By Year 9, more able pupils continue to improve their reading skills using phonics while the less able are given good support to make eye contact. By Year 11, more able pupils match text from Shakespeare, while less able pupils use their fingers to point at the initial letter of their name. By the age of 18, some students read texts appropriate to their age and less able pupils use a picture exchange system.

7. Good progress is made in writing throughout the school. Less able pupils improve their skills in overwriting and copying text as they get older and move through the school. By Year 2, writing skills are beginning to emerge for the more able pupils and by Year 6, these pupils are writing using the computer. By Year 9, even the most able are copying words and phrases, but by 16, these pupils make good progress by using symbol software. By the age of 18, some students write long accounts of visits they have made, and are using capital letters and full stops.
8. Achievement in mathematics is good across the school. By Year 1, more able pupils count by rote and match objects, and pupils with more complex needs make gestures and point with their eyes when staff sing to them. By Year 2, some pupils distinguish big objects from small ones while the more able can name shapes like 'square' and 'circle'. Higher attaining pupils by Year 6 recognise some number symbols and match two-dimensional shapes. Less able pupils join in number songs and are beginning to understand 'over' and 'under'. By Year 9, some pupils know number facts to ten, while lower attainers are matching pictures and mathematical symbols. In Years 10 and 11, pupils with more complex needs experience 'half' and 'quarter' through practical activities like cutting up food, and the more able students at post-16 practise mathematical skills in real-life situations like telling the time.
9. The school has done well in incorporating elements of the National Numeracy Strategy into mathematics lessons and there is now a good combination of mental mathematics and experiences that assist in the exploration of space, shape, time and money. This is having a positive impact upon standards.
10. Pupils' achievements in science are satisfactory throughout the school, but their levels of achievement in using scientific methods, although satisfactory, are less well marked.
11. Pupils up to Year 6 find out about differences in the habitat of snails and earwigs, and know about magnetic and non-magnetic materials. Those with more complex needs learn about science through their senses, for example by choosing and tasting different drinks. Older pupils up to Year 11 make electrical circuits and identify different parts of a plant. By Year 13, students consider real-life issues such as safety in the home as part of their accredited vocational course.
12. Throughout the rest of the curriculum, pupils of all ages and levels of attainment make good progress and achieve well in design and technology, information and communication technology, physical education, and in religious education in Years 3 to 6, and in Years 10 and above. They also achieve well in French in Years 7 to 11. The subject is not taught at other key stages. Achievement and progress are satisfactory in art and design (within the limited range of opportunities provided), music, geography, and history across the school, and in religious education in Years 1 and 2, and in Years 7 to 9.
13. Progress for pupils with profound difficulties is good throughout the school. The inspection team found no difference between the progress made by these pupils and that made by others at Penrose. Personal and academic development and progress against the targets identified within individual educational plans is good for all pupils whatever their level of difficulty. There is some variation in progress with regard to mobility, but this relates very much to the complexity of the problems experienced by the pupil.

Pupils' and students' attitudes, values and personal development

14. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and relationships, both with each other and the adults that teach and care for them, are very good. Pupils respond positively to the many and varied experiences provided for them throughout the school day. The way in which pupils participate at their own expected level in all the school offers means that they make good progress and learn effectively. This aspect was a strength of the school at the time of the last inspection and remains so.
15. Classes have fully included pupils with severe and complex difficulties only since this September. Attitudes by all staff and pupils to this initiative have been extremely positive and the move has been a success. The inclusiveness of the classes has contributed to the welcoming ethos and this, in turn, has assisted in the development of personal skills on the part of all pupils. There is great respect for each pupil throughout the school.
16. Parents report that their children enjoy coming to school and many pupils show their obvious pleasure when they arrive in the mornings. They greet their teachers and learning support assistants and quickly settle into the clear routines which are familiar to them. Pupils and students want to be actively involved in lessons and many listen carefully to their teachers, ready to make their response to questions. Pupils enjoy opportunities to make visits outside of school. The school's intensive programme of inclusion means all activities are designed to encourage the maximum participation by all pupils. Pupils and students work hard and are helped by the sensitive support and encouragement they receive from teachers and learning support assistants to gain maximum benefit from the range of activities and experiences offered to them.
17. Teachers and learning support assistants expect only the highest standards of behaviour and pupils respond well. Their behaviour is very good and sometimes excellent, especially when they are making visits outside of school. Behaviour around the school is very good and pupils move about the premises sensibly. They behave well at lunch and break times. Pupils and students are polite to visitors and warmly welcome them to join in with activities. There is a calm, purposeful atmosphere in each classroom. A number of pupils do find appropriate behaviour difficult but these pupils are handled firmly but kindly and do not disrupt the learning of others. Parents felt behaviour was good in school; inspection evidence supports their positive views.
18. Pupils and students show their very good attitudes and behaviour over a wide range of learning opportunities and activities. For example, young pupils enjoyed their riding session, they listened carefully to the instructor and tried hard to follow the given directions. They concentrated and remained well motivated throughout the whole session. Their behaviour was exemplary. In a country-dance session, pupils from a local primary school joined the session and all the pupils worked well together. The teacher's clear directions, very good management and the very good use of learning support assistants meant pupils responded well to the music and rhythm, smiling, laughing and gesturing their pleasure. Visiting pupils enjoy working with their friends from Penrose and participated fully by pushing wheelchairs when dancing. During work experience at the local supermarket, post-16 students enjoyed a very social time, chatting to learning support assistants as they made their way to the supermarket. They were patient and efficient in their work. They enjoy the responsibility of the work and were polite and friendly to customers.

19. Relationships are very good. The whole school meets together for assemblies and school lunches and these are very sociable occasions, particularly for the older pupils. Pupils enjoy strong, supportive relationships with teachers and learning support assistants and these have a positive impact on their learning. Pupils' personal development is good and they willingly undertake some responsibilities, for example taking attendance registers to the office or tidying away after activities. Some pupils, and particularly post-16 students, are not sufficiently encouraged to take responsibility, especially within their own class setting. Pupils treat equipment and resources with care. They have respect for the environment they are working in; for example when pupils made a visit to a pottery during the inspection, they were respectful of the unfamiliar surroundings and responded well to their host.
20. Pupils and students enjoy coming to school and attend regularly. Overall, school attendance levels are similar to those reported at the time of the last inspection and remain good. Unauthorised absence is very rare. Authorised absence is usually because of illness or when pupils need to attend medical appointments. There have been no exclusions in the past year. Pupils' regular attendance has a positive impact on the good progress they make.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

21. The quality of teaching is very good for pupils in Years 3 to 6 and in Years 10 and 11 and good throughout the rest of the school. There is a little excellent teaching in Years 3 to 6. There has been a very significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. This is because of the good leadership and management of staff, the good teamwork and the very good knowledge of the individual needs of the pupils. All teaching is at least satisfactory. In 92 per cent of lessons, teaching is at least good and in 37 per cent, it is at least very good. The quality of teaching in English, mathematics and science is at least good and in English and mathematics it is sometimes very good. Levels of confidence and competence in the use of computers to support teaching are satisfactory.
22. The very skilful teaching enables the school to develop pupils' confidence and self-esteem. A very significant strength of the teaching is teachers' and learning support assistants' knowledge and understanding of the special needs of each pupil. This expertise enables them to plan activities so that each pupil makes good gains in their learning and so achieves high standards. This was evident in the provision of unstructured activities for a shy and quiet pupil on a farm visit which resulted in the pupil 'flapping' and imitating the noise of a chicken and making an independent and informed choice to move away from a pig because she disliked the smell. Similarly, a pupil with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) is encouraged to read by eye pointing. The very effective deployment of learning support assistants in a history lesson ensured that a large number of pupils with visual impairment gained the same satisfaction and understanding as their peers when making wattle and daub walls following a visit to an Iron Age site.
23. The high quality teaching focuses on improving pupils' communication. Good use is made of Makaton signing to support the teaching of most subjects but this is not consistent throughout the school. The symbols used to support writing help pupils to make good gains in their writing but a few of them are confusing. Overall, all pupils make good gains in their communication and those with PMLD are stimulated well and make responses by lively eye contact and gorgeous smiles.

24. The quality of teaching for post-16 students is good. They develop important life skills such as planning and shopping to prepare a meal and experience the use of real money. Their work-related curriculum on a local farm and in a large supermarket close to the school is a strength. However, opportunities to further the development of independence skills are sometimes missed. For example, opportunities are sometimes missed to encourage students in wheelchairs to move independently.
25. The quality of teaching in the joint classes with neighbouring schools is very good. For example, very effective teaching took place when pupils from a local mainstream school learned country dancing alongside the pupils from Penrose as part of a citizenship programme.
26. The teaching of literacy and numeracy across all subjects is good. All subjects make a valuable contribution to pupils' communication skills. Teachers and learning support assistants are very good at introducing number and shape concepts within other curriculum topics and in social settings. Thus, pupils moving from a classroom up steps join with the learning support assistant in counting as they go. Tuck shop sessions enable older pupils to gain confidence in handling money and listening to individual requests.
27. Teachers' short-term lesson planning is good. A particular strength is the sharing of individual objectives with the pupils but this sometimes slows the pace of a lesson. Where it is done 'snappily', for example in the Key Stage 4 lesson on Shakespeare, it has a very effective impact on the learning of all pupils. Clear learning targets are determined at pupils' annual reviews and are used to devise specific learning targets on individual education plans. These targets are then used well to improve planning and result in pupils making good small step gains in English and mathematics. Most teaching challenges pupils and good use is made of technical language. In a Key Stage 4 English lesson, a pupil answered a question about 'swine' with confidence and others in the class gained in their comprehension of collective nouns as a result. Expectations are high and challenging behaviour is managed well and this has a very positive impact on learning. The use of Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) enables pupils on the autistic spectrum to begin to make informed and independent choices.
28. The teaching fosters a good learning environment in which all pupils are treated with dignity. Teaching methods are good and fit for the purpose. Teachers have excellent relationships with pupils and teaching is relaxed. Good-humoured activities are well matched to individual needs thus ensuring good development of important skills in most lessons. Brisk pace characterises most lessons and good use is made of sensory material, such as 'book bags', to support pupils of all abilities.
29. Assessment is used well to assist planning and raise standards in English and mathematics. However, the use of assessment in most other subjects is not well established and this weakness results in a failure to monitor progress over time in these subjects.
30. The good and very good teaching is mirrored predominantly in good and very good learning in lessons. Gains in confidence and self-esteem are very good. For example, a post-16 student had the confidence to read aloud in a whole-school assembly. The good teaching results in pupils enjoying their work and taking an enthusiastic interest in their learning. Concentration is often very good. Pupils' productivity and pace is

consistently good, and in work-related activities in the post-16 class, students often work at a cracking pace.

31. In all subjects there are examples of good and very good teaching. In French, for example, staff support pupils' learning very effectively by providing a 'sensory commentary' of smells and sounds which are matched to the activities being discussed. In mathematics, teachers very successfully reinforce the pupils' abilities to sequence numbers by using a combination of songs, role-play and 'feely' bags. Again, in music, support staff take the initiative and set out all-weather drums in the playground at lunchtime so that they and the pupils can have an impromptu practice of African songs which they have learned in class. In physical education, staff especially trained in 'rebound therapy' work very hard to support pupils in developing their skills on the trampoline.
32. Pupils who experience complex difficulties receive the same high standard of teaching as others. Often more time is required for them to respond, communication has to be carried out with sign or symbol support and tasks have to be significantly modified. Teachers understand what is required and respond well by adapting their methods accordingly. Teachers are able to call on very experienced and sensitive learning support assistants who work extremely well with these pupils. However, the use of signing and symbols is not always carefully thought through and insufficient attention is paid to why and when such support should be provided. In addition, pupils with autistic tendencies, behavioural difficulties and visual impairment often require techniques and approaches of a more specialist nature than those on offer.

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

33. The school offers a good, broad curriculum, including the National Curriculum, which is well suited to the different needs of the pupils and students at different ages and stages of learning. It has significantly improved since the last inspection when there were a number of weaknesses, for example in the provision for a modern foreign language, design and technology, religious education, reading and writing. It is socially and educationally inclusive, providing all pupils and students access to a wide range of learning experiences and worthwhile activities.
34. The curriculum experienced by pupils and students with complex difficulties is the same as that for all pupils. To make it appropriate to the needs of those pupils, it contains a strong multi-sensory component. Within lesson and curriculum planning, teachers ensure that every pupil has the opportunity to experience the full range of National Curriculum subjects. There is also a sensible and practical balance between this academic curriculum and the care and therapy aspects that are so essential. The inspection team was impressed by the equality of opportunity for all pupils with regard to the school-based curriculum and the extensive range of trips and visits available.
35. The curriculum is organised on a three-year rolling programme in which National Curriculum subjects are supported through cross-curricular themes. Most subjects have been reviewed recently, linking them to the recent changes to the National Curriculum. The balance of the curriculum is difficult to evaluate, especially since the specific subjects, apart from design and technology, are not clearly mapped on to this rolling programme, and the balance of the curriculum is not effectively monitored, apart from literacy, numeracy and personal, social and health education. This means that it is difficult to be certain that pupils and students of all ages are taught each

subject for the recommended time, and that all aspects of each subject are fully covered.

36. The curriculum is enriched through day and residential visits and through the school's very good relationships with nearby primary, secondary and special schools. The post-16 curriculum is a strength, with its developing provision that prepares students for further education and a working and social life beyond school. This includes some good provision for work experience and appropriate national accreditation that requires students to undertake individual study and to take on tasks that aim to prepare them for life in the community. Many of these tasks are organised through a local school farm. Opportunities to run 'mini-enterprises' are taken up enthusiastically by students. The teacher responsible for the post-16 provision has built a business and education partnership, managed by staff and the careers adviser, in order to explore further productive links with the community.
37. The provision for literacy and numeracy is good and both the national strategies have been successfully introduced and implemented. These have had a positive impact on the teaching of English and mathematics.
38. The good provision for personal, social and health education, including citizenship, pervades the school curriculum and includes lunchtime and break-time eating and social activities. These are planned against individual long- and short-term targets. The special medical and physiotherapy programmes for those with more severe and complex special needs are built into the curriculum so that they do not interfere with the provision for other pupils. The school has good links with the community which supports the school in providing minibuses and residential facilities to widen the social and personal experience of the pupils and students.
39. The provision for pupils' and students' spiritual development is satisfactory, while the provision for moral, social and cultural development is good. Staff encourage and welcome pupils' contributions in lessons, and are also successful in creating an atmosphere in which ideas are treated with respect during, for example, the end of day assemblies as well as in lessons. As a result, provision for the pupils' spiritual development is now satisfactory, and in this respect the school has responded appropriately to the findings of the last inspection. The inspection team were impressed by the joy and wonder experienced by pupils with profound and complex needs. However, occasions that actively promote the pupils' spiritual development are rarely identified within the curriculum, and the contribution made by subjects such as art and music is not as significant as it should be.
40. Staff provide positive role models which effectively enable pupils to distinguish between right and wrong, and their expectations regarding what is and is not acceptable are clear and consistent. Staff within the school provide clear boundaries and a very consistent approach to behaviour for those pupils who have severe difficulties in this area. This contributes well to both the settled classroom atmosphere and to individual programmes of personal development.
41. Although there is no formal policy or scheme of work for personal, social and health education, there is effective provision for the pupils' personal and social development embedded in the relevant contexts of necessary daily routines such as registration and preparation for lessons. These occasions are well organised, and underpinned by the very good relationships between all concerned. Since the last inspection, the school has reorganised classes so that pupils with more complex needs are now

taught alongside their more able peers in integrated classes reflecting the pupils' ages. The ethos of acceptance adds to the understanding shown by all pupils for each other, and this in turn assists in the development of a socially mature environment which benefits everyone. As a result, provision for the personal and social development of all pupils has been enhanced and is now good.

42. Pupils learn to exercise choice regarding drinks and snacks; they take turns and share, and lunchtimes are civilised affairs. More able younger pupils are sometimes encouraged to help their less able classmates by, for example, recording instructions on communication aids such as Big Macs, whilst some older pupils and students perform tasks such as marking the register and taking it to the office. However, opportunities for pupils and students to exercise initiative and take increasing responsibility for their own learning are not sufficiently encouraged, despite the fact that the framework of the accredited courses for post-16 students provides good opportunities in this respect.
43. The school makes good use of the local community by visiting, for example, shops and the swimming pool, and visits further afield have included residential trips to the Calvert Trust Centre. Provision is further enhanced by the presence of visiting musicians and by trips to such places as the Muchelney Pottery, all of which make a positive contribution to the pupils' cultural development. The emphasis upon equality of opportunity ensures that all pupils, regardless of the complexity of their difficulty, participate fully in visits, drama, dancing, singing and art events that take place within the school and outside. These activities support the pupils' good cultural development.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS AND STUDENTS?

44. The school successfully provides a safe and welcoming learning environment for all pupils. This is because of the strong, caring and supportive relationships which are apparent across the school. Pupils receive good support and guidance throughout the school day. Clear routines help pupils to feel relaxed and secure and this has a positive impact on their learning. Every effort is made to meet the very individual personal needs of pupils and all are treated with the utmost care and dignity. Good standards have been maintained in this area of the school's provision since the last inspection.
45. Attention to matters of health and safety is good overall. There are very good procedures for the administration of medicines and these are fully implemented by the staff. Teachers and support staff are appropriately trained to deal with first aid and pupils' personal needs. All who work at the school conscientiously ensure the health and safety of pupils during activities and the routines of the school day. For example, when staff are lifting or moving pupils, they always follow very safe procedures. Pupils are reminded about potential hazards and how to keep safe. For example, before making visits out of school, pupils are reminded of the dangers of traffic. There are high levels of supervision and care at all times. An appropriate health and safety policy is in place. However, its implementation is not rigorously monitored to ensure practice fully reflects policy, and governors have little active involvement.
46. The monitoring of pupils' attendance is good. Absence is followed up carefully if no message has been received from either parents or escorts. Telephone calls are made immediately if there are any concerns. Registers are marked appropriately and absence coded appropriately to enable the headteacher to quickly identify any child who is not attending regularly and who might need the school's support. Parents are

clearly informed of the importance of regular attendance through the school prospectus and usually inform the school about reasons for absences. Child protection procedures meet requirements and teachers are fully aware of their responsibilities in this area.

47. The success of procedures to promote good behaviour is illustrated well by the high standards of behaviour the school achieves. The quality of teaching is good and the wide range of activities offered ensures pupils maintain their interest and this creates an atmosphere where good behaviour is the norm. Praise is used effectively to encourage all pupils. Staff implement consistently specific programmes for pupils who have difficulty in achieving appropriate behaviour. Successes are celebrated in whole-school assemblies with the award of certificates. Pupils' behaviour and response to specific strategies is monitored carefully and further targets set when these are achieved. However, the school does not have in place an agreed policy to deal with any incidents of bullying should they arise. The detailed programmes, the close links with therapists and the high quality of learning support provided ensure that a high standard of care is maintained within every classroom for those pupils who are vulnerable or experience severe and complex learning difficulties.
48. The school has developed a coherent framework for reviewing pupils' gains in learning, and monitoring their personal development, which accords well with statutory requirements and reflects the Code of Practice. It is based around an effective format for pupils' individual education plans which allows teachers to identify long-term objectives in the key areas of literacy, numeracy and personal, social and health education. Pupils' and students' progress towards these individual targets is then monitored through short-term objectives which are in turn addressed successfully through the lessons and activities planned for the various classes. The annual review of pupils' statements of special educational needs usefully draws on all this information regarding pupils' and students' gains in learning, and there are appropriate arrangements for transition reviews for pupils in Year 9. Educational psychologists and external agencies such as the careers' service, together with local health care professionals such as speech and language therapists, are able to make a positive contribution. The school actively invites and encourages parents to be involved in the process and identifies ways that parents can work on their children's targets at home. As a result, parents are able to make an effective contribution to their children's learning. In all these respects, the school has made a positive response to the findings of the last inspection, and the arrangements are appreciated by parents.
49. These procedures are sufficiently versatile to allow the school to assess pupils' and students' gains in learning across the whole curriculum. However, some subjects, for example art and design and music, are not planned in sufficient detail to make it clear what pupils will actually learn, and so it is difficult for the subject co-ordinators to be clear as to the progress made by pupils in their subjects. This in turn compromises the co-ordinators' ability to make sure in their planning that what pupils will learn next builds upon what they already know, understand and can do. The school does, however, value and celebrate pupils' successes, and marks them with an extensive range of in-house certificates that in turn contribute to the pupils' records of achievement. There is also, now, a broad range of relevant opportunities for post-16 students' work to gain external accreditation, although there are no equivalent opportunities for pupils under the age of 16.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

50. The school continues to work in close partnership with parents and their views of the school are very positive. Parents recognise the many strengths of the school including the good teaching, high expectations and good quality of the leadership and management which all helps to ensure that their child makes good progress. Inspectors fully endorse their positive views.
51. Most pupils travel to and from school by escorted transport so parents do not have daily contact with the school. However, communication is good and all parents responding to the Ofsted questionnaire feel well informed about how their child is getting on and most feel comfortable about approaching the school with concerns and that the school works closely with them. The home/school diary is used effectively as a means of weekly two-way communication between teachers, learning support assistants and home. The diaries are used more often when required, but some parents would like the frequency of their use increased. Parents do appreciate this friendly, informative means of communication. Parents are invited to annual reviews as required and they receive comprehensive, written information about their child's progress, targets and long-term learning objectives for the future. The annual review provides the opportunity for in-depth discussion of every aspect of their child's progress, care and welfare. The school does encourage parents to come into school at any time if they have concerns or want further information but there is only one formal invitation to discuss pupils' progress each year. Parents work in close partnership with the school and careers service when plans are discussed for pupils when they leave the school.
52. Parents receive other information to help keep them informed of the work of the school. For example, each year all parents are provided with the appropriately detailed prospectus which informs them well of the school's aims, procedures and expectations. The governors' annual report provides a good overview of the work of the school over the last year and class teachers write to parents about specific events and activities related to their child. There is no regular whole-school newsletter which might usefully give parents a better overview of the successes, achievements and activities taking place across the whole age range. Parents are provided with weekly curriculum information so they can see what their child will be doing during the school day. Overall, the quality of information provided for parents is good.
53. A small number of parents come into school and help with class activities and even more assist when visits are made out of school or with swimming. Parents are encouraged to come into school and be part of the life of the school. They regularly attend special events involving their own child and half-termly coffee mornings are organised when parents can join their child in class. The parents, friends and teacher association has no parent members at the present time, although parents are supportive of any fund-raising or social events organised by the staff.
54. Just under a quarter of parents who returned the Ofsted questionnaire felt that homework was not set consistently for all pupils. However, the inspection team came to the conclusion that the school's arrangements are appropriate. There is no formal homework policy but parents are asked to support reading if this is appropriate or send items into school to support learning, and parents are happy to do this. Parents know the targets set for their children and many support and encourage their child to continue working towards these at home. Parents continue with the agreed programmes for behaviour management or physiotherapy at home which has a positive impact on pupils' progress in learning and personal development. Parents' support of their child's progress at school and home is good.

55. For many pupils, the complexity of their needs is such that very close links with home are required. This is always the case. School and parents share information through the home/school diary. They ensure that the appropriate physiotherapy support is available during the holidays and notice is taken of parental concerns with regard to health and safety. There is also detailed discussion of what are often complex and problematic needs during the annual review process.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

56. The overall leadership and management of the school are good. This is an improvement on the last inspection when they were found to be satisfactory. The governing body, although supportive, remains under strength. The headteacher provides effective leadership, has gained the commitment of all staff and has a good understanding of what is necessary to move the school on. As a result of this effective leadership, pupils achieve well in most areas of the curriculum. Some subject co-ordinators do not have the opportunity to fully monitor planning and teaching in their subjects. Effective and efficient administrative procedures enable teachers and support staff to concentrate on their work with pupils.
57. The school has a clear sense of purpose with an emphasis on the personal development of pupils, and there is a shared commitment to this from all involved in the school. The school has too many written aims which means that staff do not understand which are deemed more important. The governing body has several vacancies and is currently stretched in its ability to provide the necessary strategic steer to the school's work. This impairs the school's ability to maintain its drive in raising pupils' achievements.
58. Key members of staff have clear roles and responsibilities which they generally fulfil well. One member of the senior management team left the school at the end of the summer term, and the composition is currently being reviewed. The remaining members of the senior management team work effectively, regularly observe lessons and give useful feedback on how to raise the quality of education provided. During this term, this process will be formally tied in to the performance management system which the school has successfully introduced.
59. Some non-contact time has been allocated to some subject co-ordinators to monitor teachers' planning and to observe colleagues teaching the subject. For some, for example in science, this has allowed the co-ordinator to identify points for development and to be well placed to work out how good the provision actually is. Other co-ordinators are not as successful in this respect. Co-ordinators in some subjects have yet to develop clear long-term systems for planning and assessment, which would identify and value the gains in subject skills, knowledge and understanding which pupils are making over time.
60. The school has identified appropriate priorities for development in its improvement plan which are in line with the findings of the inspection team, although some of the school's targets are not stated in sufficient detail to make it clear how to judge when they have been achieved. The plan is well supported by subject development plans. Financial implications of developments are clearly identified, as are time-scales and criteria for evaluating the effect of them on standards. However, the school does not identify clearly who is responsible for evaluating (as opposed to achieving) each of the targets in the plan.

61. Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities and have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. However, because of the high number of vacancies it has, the governing body currently finds it difficult to carry out all its functions, such as monitoring policies like health and safety or helping to shape the direction of the school.
62. Financial procedures and controls are thorough and all the recommendations in the recent auditor's report have been rectified. The school's administrative staff have good systems which ensure that the school runs smoothly. The school is beginning to compare its costs with similar schools and to apply the principles of best value.
63. The expenditure per pupil is usually about the national average for similar schools. However, the local authority unexpectedly provided a significant sum of money after the budget had been set and consequently, it is well above average for this year. The overall good progress which pupils make, together with the good quality of teaching and good leadership and management, means that the school provides good value for money.
64. The school is well staffed with teachers who understand the needs of their pupils very well and who have a satisfactory range of expertise across the various subjects. The school is also very well staffed with learning support assistants, and the way in which they are deployed and fulfil their role is a particularly positive feature. There are good systems for induction, and the school identifies appropriate training needs through the effective procedures for performance management and the school improvement plan. Roles and responsibilities are adequately outlined through policies and job descriptions that are understood by all concerned.
65. The accommodation has been improved since the last inspection through internal modifications that have created more space for learning and ensured the appropriate level of privacy in toilet and changing areas. Good multi-sensory areas have been designed into most classrooms. The site creates difficulties for staff who have to push heavy wheelchairs up long, winding ramps from mobile classrooms to the main building. The school has done its best to ease those difficulties. This, and the lack of any guardrails along the path at the rear of the school, creates further difficulties for any pupils or student who may have to use an electric wheelchair. The lack of a level grassed area restricts the physical education programme, although the school makes good use of local primary school facilities from time to time. A local swimming pool has improved its facilities for the disabled, in response to the Disabilities Discrimination Act, and can now be used by all pupils and students. The school does not have its own hydrotherapy pool, but is negotiating for the shared use of a local facility sponsored by a national charity. The school makes appropriate use of local school facilities and a riding centre to broaden its physical education programme. It also makes good use of a local farm and a supermarket to provide work and study experience for post-16 students.
66. Resources are always adequate and often good. There has been significant investment in materials for developing the literacy and numeracy strategies and this has supported these developments well. The last report indicated that equipment and software for ICT was not satisfactory. This has been rectified and the school is now appropriately resourced with computers and programs. The community is used to support subjects such as science, history and geography. Trips, visits to local buildings and the use of artefacts provide all pupils and students with good learning

experiences. Physical education is supported by very good equipment. Design and technology equipment is good within each individual classroom. All staff show great resourcefulness in using and enhancing the resources available. Thus, the Key Stage 1 class is used very effectively as a sensory room for lessons on churches and Hallowe'en. Clay and basketwork is used effectively to give young pupils a very good experience of wattle and daub houses; while a teacher uses plastic tennis racquets and clay to assist pupils in understanding the nature of Tudor writing and 'horn' books.

67. The level of staffing for pupils with severe and complex difficulties is good and resources in the form, for example of alternative switches, assist in the full inclusion of these pupils. However, the nature of the site places significant limitations on the mobility of some older pupils, while there is a clear need for more effective standing frames for a few pupils who require highly specialised resources of this kind. There has been training to assist staff to deal with new challenges. This has been effective. One class teacher is receiving visual impairment training and this is clearly a practical response to the gradual change in the pattern of needs within the school. Some training has been carried out with regard to supporting language through sign and symbol and in devising programmes for pupils with autism. This training has not yet been extended fully to all members of staff.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

68. In order to raise standards further, the headteacher, staff and governors should:

- 1) Ensure that the curriculum is fully balanced by:
 - a) detailing on a year calendar how and when subjects are to be taught within the three-year rolling programme; (paragraph 35)
 - b) identifying the time appropriate to each subject taking into account the National Curriculum and the school population; (paragraph 35)
 - c) designating staff to monitor teachers' compliance with (b); (paragraphs 35, 56, 59)
 - d) regularly assessing pupils' and students' work to check what skills they have and what they know and understand. (paragraphs 29, 35, 56, 59, 99, 102, 114, 118, 133, 128,129, 140)
- 2) Support pupils' and students' personal development by:
 - a) designing policies and schemes of work so that there are planned opportunities for spiritual development and for taking personal responsibility; (paragraphs 20, 39, 42, 91, 98)
 - b) providing a formal anti-bullying policy. (paragraph 47)
- 3) Take measures to encourage people to become governors so that the governing body can be brought up to full strength. (paragraph 61)
- 4) Introduce procedures for monitoring the health and safety policy. (paragraph. 45)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	50
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	35

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	1	17	27	4	0	0	0
Percentage	2	35	55	8	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than two percentage point(s)

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	43
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	16

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	1
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	0

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	9.5	School data	0.1

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	38
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	7.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	5.9
Average class size	8

Education support staff: YR – Y13

Total number of education support staff	21
Total aggregate hours worked per week	4625

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
	£
Total income	658,770
Total expenditure	637,589
Expenditure per pupil	16,348
Balance brought forward from previous year	43,192
Balance carried forward to next year	64,373

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	0.7
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	38
Number of questionnaires returned	19

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	79	21	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	63	21	5	0	11
Behaviour in the school is good.	58	32	0	0	11
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	37	11	21	0	32
The teaching is good.	74	26	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	63	37	0	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	84	11	0	5	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	63	32	0	0	5
The school works closely with parents.	68	21	11	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	74	21	5	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	58	16	1	0	26
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	53	16	11	11	9

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

69. There are usually no more than two pupils under five attending the school at any one time, and these pupils are educated in a class alongside pupils in Years 1 and 2. There are too few children (only one aged four) in the foundation stage who attended the school for sufficient time during the inspection to make judgements about standards in specific areas of learning, but from scrutiny of documentation and from discussion with relevant staff, it is possible to make a reliable judgement about the provision.
70. The school makes good provision for children in the foundation stage. There has been good improvement since the last inspection in adapting work to meet individual needs and which is relevant to children under five. This is because the school has provided staff with good, relevant training which has enabled them to develop relevant specialist skills and understanding. There has also been good improvement in the use of learning support assistants. They are now more fully involved in devising lesson plans, and in assessing pupils' development.
71. The curriculum provided for any child not yet five is good. It covers all the recommended areas of learning, although these are identified as National Curriculum subjects. There is a suitably high emphasis upon personal, social and communication skills. The school successfully plans to meet children's individual needs and so ensures that the curriculum is relevant to each child. For example, in a design and technology lesson, which contributes to the recommended area of learning 'Knowledge and understanding of the world', the class teacher plans effectively for children to learn through their senses to distinguish between materials. Children under five benefit from recent curriculum development of sensory and individual programmes, which means that the teaching is more clearly matched to the needs of each child.
72. Each child is assessed on entry and the school uses this baseline information sensibly to begin to plan to meet individual needs. Great care is taken to gather reliable and helpful information about a child's responses.
73. The teaching of children in the reception year is good. Teaching is consistently good because members of staff share an understanding of the specific and individual learning intention for each child or pupil in each activity.

ENGLISH

74. Pupils make good progress in relation to their capabilities from the time they enter school and achieve good standards in all aspects of English. Pupils achieve very good standards in Years 3 to 6, and in Years 10 and 11, where the teachers make lessons come alive, and learning support assistants support the pupils very skilfully. This is a very significant improvement since the last inspection. The successful implementation of the National Literacy Strategy and the very effective co-ordination of English are responsible for the improvements in standards.
75. This is a fully inclusive school with pupils with PMLD in each class so that they are with higher attaining pupils of the same age. It would not therefore be appropriate to

expect normal advances in learning from Class 1 (aged four to seven) to Class 5 (post-16) as there is a very wide range of complex needs in each class. However, the school very successfully enables pupils in each class to make good progress through using age- appropriate reading materials and this is a strength.

76. By the end of Year 2, pupils have made good progress in speaking and listening. The higher attainers watch and listen carefully as the teacher speaks to them and aids their understanding by signing. These pupils respond to instructions by placing symbols in a sequenced order on the day board when planning the activities for the day. Pupils with PMLD respond with lovely eye contact and gorgeous smiles to stories told by their teacher using puppets as a stimulus. Pupils with the most severe and complex difficulties are supported by excellent learning support assistants who lift their heads so that they can make fleeting eye contact, with the object of reference being used as a stimulus. Because the teacher knows the pupils so well, it is recognised that some pupils respond to questions better in informal situations outside the classroom and so regular visits are made to a farm. In this setting, a pupil who is shy and reserved in class responded to a chicken by 'flapping' and copying the noise made by the chicken; she moved away from a pig gesturing that she did not like the smell and asked to go to the toilet using words.
77. These pupils enjoy sensory books and make good progress in their development of the skills which are necessary to begin reading. The higher attainers hold books up the right way and turn the pages. These pupils recognise symbols on the day board and the highest attainers recognise their name in print. However, the lower attainers are unable to eye point for more than a fleeting moment and they need head support to bring their eyes in line with the book. The majority of pupils in this class are unable to write independently because of their special educational needs; however the highest attaining pupils are beginning to make the meaningful marks and patterns which they need to produce before they move on to proper writing. They make good progress because their teacher has a good understanding of the importance of emergent writing and supports the pupils in 'zigzag' movement of the pencil and in making 'dot, dot and dot' on the page.
78. By the end of Year 6, pupils make very good progress in speaking, listening, reading and writing and some achieve very good standards. They love stories such as the 'Hat Teller,' which are acted out by their class teacher with enthusiasm and energy. They respond well when the objectives of the lesson are explained to them and they also answer questions about the stories told to them. Those pupils with PMLD are fully included and encouraged to make responses using a communication aid. The highest attainers show an improving knowledge of phonics which they use to recognise the initial sounds of words and so work out the correct word. Good gains are made in reading and writing using a computer, using appropriate wordprocessing and reading software. One pupil with PMLD has made very good progress in reading by using his eyes to point at words. He is able to make sense of jumbled sentences.
79. By the end of Year 9, pupils show an improving knowledge of phonics. Most can read in unison from the big book about 'The Owl'; the lowest attainers though still need to be supported to make eye contact. The higher attainers copy individual words and phrases but none are able to write completely independently because of their special educational needs. However, beautifully produced and handwritten books about snails are a strong feature of their good achievement. These pupils are given many opportunities to speak and listen because of the patience of an outstanding teacher who gives them time to work out the difference between 'a foot' (singular) and 'feet'

(plural), and their understanding is reinforced by touching their own feet. Those pupils with the most severe difficulties are encouraged to make choices on a one-to-one basis, using tactile resources to elicit a response.

80. By the end of Year 11 some pupils are confident speakers and listeners, as shown by their acting out of a scene from Macbeth with the post-16 class as an audience. This confidence demonstrates very good achievement in speaking and listening. However, the speech of a significant minority remains hesitant and lacks clarity, and this is a reflection of their special educational needs. The highest attainers successfully demonstrate their understanding of adjectives such as 'messy' and 'dirty' in their acting, for example in messing up their hair on the sound of the key adjective on the tape. The learning support assistants successfully include the PMLD pupils in this very enjoyable activity. Good progress in reading is evident as the higher attainers are able to match text on Shakespeare and identify key words in the text such as 'witch'. The pupils with PMLD are encouraged to point with a finger or an eye at the initial letter of their name from the same text used by the higher attainers. Using a symbol program on the computer, these pupils make good progress in writing but a few of the symbols are too elaborate and on rare occasions, this leads to a degree of confusion.
81. By the end of Year 13, higher attaining students have well-developed skills of listening and communicating with each other. The speech of the lower attaining students remains hesitant and unclear, but as their self-esteem improves, so does their confidence. The speech of the highest attaining students is confident and articulate, as shown by the student who read aloud to the whole school in an assembly. These students speak out to be heard in lessons and can argue a point of view. The lowest attaining student is encouraged to make independent and informed choices using PECS. Most students read age-appropriate texts in lessons although some are still very dependent on symbols to support them. Lower attaining students continue to copy and overwrite words but the higher attainers are able to write lengthy accounts about visits they have made, for example to a pottery. Although able to use capital letters and full stops in the correct place, the desire to 'get it down' with speed and without help results in written work with many spelling and grammatical errors. However, when challenged, these high attaining students are able to recognise mistakes and correct themselves without help. Effective use is made of a computer program to promote independent writing.
82. The quality of teaching is at least good throughout the school. It ranges from satisfactory to excellent. Teaching is good or better in 98 per cent of lessons, and very good or better in 36 per cent. It is very good in Years 3 to 6 and in Years 10 and 11. Literacy lessons are very effectively planned and organised. Teaching is confident and skilful, always based on a good knowledge of pupil needs and so pupils make good progress. Pupils have learned good work routines so that no time is wasted. Assessment of pupils' achievement is good and used to plan new activities to raise standards for all pupils and students. Teaching is conducted at a cracking pace with enthusiasm and all pupils are included in the range of activities provided. In the best teaching, for example on Macbeth and in the story about the 'Hat Seller', expectations are high and pupils are challenged to develop their vocabulary and make rapid gains in learning. In another lesson, a pupil in Year 10 revealed that 'swine' meant a 'family of pigs' as a result of very effective questioning by the teacher. Challenging behaviour is very well managed and is a strength of the teaching and enables all pupils to learn well.

83. Attitudes to learning and behaviour are very good and contribute to good learning because pupils and students are interested in and enjoy the range of speaking, listening, reading and writing activities. Personal development is good, for example when a high attainer passes the communication aid to a pupil with PMLD whilst having physiotherapy so that the pupil is provided with the means by which to make a response to a stimulus from the teacher.
84. Co-ordination of English and literacy is very good. There is regular monitoring and evaluation of the subject and this practice is helpful to teachers. The co-ordinator shapes the development of the subject and gives it clear, educational direction. The lessons on the National Literacy Strategy and the requirements of the National Curriculum have been very well adapted to fully support the small steps in attainment of which the pupils are capable. The co-ordinator gives outstandingly good model/demonstration lessons to develop other teachers' skills. Great care has been taken to systematically build up pupils' skills and knowledge from year-to-year and this helps to promote good progress. Teachers very effectively gather information about pupils' and students' attainment in English and literacy so that pupils' individual literacy targets are based on reliable evidence. Their targets are realistic, challenging and achievable and give the pupils a real sense of confidence in the good gains they make. Very good use is made of the P-scales to demonstrate the value added by the school in literacy. These scales give very detailed information on the achievement of pupils who are working towards Level 1 of the National Curriculum. A strong programme of visiting drama groups motivates pupils well and extends their learning by offering them good opportunities to act out roles which might occur in real life.
85. Since the last inspection, there has been a very good level of improvement. Pupils' and students' attainment in reading and writing has improved. Assessment procedures have improved and the use of assessment to set objectives is impressive. Schemes of work are better than at the time of the last inspection by offering more appropriate learning experiences in English to pupils as they get older and move from class to class. The monitoring of teaching and learning is now very good. The quality and quantity of resources has improved, particularly the amount of big books, many of which are sensory books. These very good books are greatly enjoyed by the pupils. 'Book bags', to support reading in a multi-sensory way, have been effectively developed. Older pupils and students have age-appropriate reading materials to handle and explore. Good use is made of videotapes, for example to support the 'The Owl' story. Provision of communication aids such as Big Macs and computers has improved and these are used well for reading and writing in symbols and real words. Teachers and learning support assistants are very well supported by a very effective co-ordinator and this has a positive impact on the gains in learning made by all pupils and students.

MATHEMATICS

86. There has been good improvement in mathematics since the last inspection. Progress and pupils' achievements are now good in all years. This results from very good leadership in the subject, which has ensured the effective implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy, staff training to support it and the development of good resources throughout the school. In its development plan for the year 2000-01, the school identified raising achievements in mathematics in Years 3 to 9. It has achieved this and inspection evidence suggests that improvements will continue throughout all years.

87. Progress is good for all pupils and students of all ages. In Year 1, they display a range of mathematical skills and a wide range and complexity of learning difficulties. Those with the most complex difficulties are only just beginning to respond to adult stimuli during rhymes and song, often with gesture and eye pointing. They are starting to relate to their surroundings, but concepts such as counting and differences of shape and colour are only just gaining any meaning. More able pupils are developing good skills in counting by rote and are beginning to match objects and see that counting helps in identifying 'more' and 'less'. They are also developing a small, but reliable vocabulary of colours and concepts, such as 'big' and 'little'. In Years 1 and 2, pupils of all abilities make good progress.
88. By the end of Year 2, pupils with profound and complex difficulties are beginning to distinguish between 'big' and 'small', 'long' and 'short' and 'heavy' and 'light'. This development takes place by experiencing 'real-life' activities and objects, rather than by just being told about them. More able pupils are starting to deal with some abstract concepts. For example, they name shapes such as 'square' and 'circle', and recognise and name the numbers 'one' to 'five'. Good progress is made within all three areas of number, space and shape and the application of mathematics.
89. Good progress continues up to Year 6, where the higher achieving pupils match sequences of pictures, recognise numbers up to ten, distinguish between and sort six colours, match two-dimensional shapes and understand simple addition sums to ten. Those with more complex learning difficulties still require support in developing skills relating to size and basic matching, but join in number songs well and understand turn taking and the sequence of events of the day on a timetable which has symbols to represent activities such as 'breaktime' and 'music'. They are beginning to understand concepts embodied in words such as 'over' and 'under', 'in front' and 'behind' and 'next'.
90. As they progress through Year 7 to Year 9, higher attaining pupils develop skills relevant to the first levels of the National Curriculum. Number facts to ten are easily coped with, an early understanding of symmetry develops, number symbols are formed accurately and addition is undertaken both across and down the page. Those pupils with complex learning needs continue to need support in developing an awareness of the world, for example how events occur during the day, but they also develop in their understanding of what is 'bigger' and what 'smaller'. They begin to match pictures and mathematical symbols and trace over number symbols.
91. In Years 10 and above, pupils and students continue to be taught in a practical and sensory form, learning about halves and quarters, for instance by cutting up cakes, by counting on from the teacher and continuing to join in songs and activities that require sequence, stopping, starting and turn taking. They visit supermarkets and have the experience of shopping, and they relate these experiences to further practical activities, such as parties and tuck shop sales. More able pupils consolidate their skills in adding numbers up to 20, gain regular experience of counting and time-telling in practical situations and are beginning to develop a good concept of basic fractions. They begin to see that two-quarters equal one half and gain a good understanding of how sharing relates to fairness within the group. Teachers keep records of pupils' and students' development within mathematics, but these records are not yet sufficiently detailed. Older pupils and students are rarely given tasks to do by themselves which could assist in building their confidence without adult assistance.

92. Good progress results from good, and sometimes very good, teaching in mathematics. All pupils are given an opportunity to participate, while good use of questioning and adaptation of tasks by teachers and learning support assistants alike allows pupils to work at an appropriate level with suitable challenges. Thus, in a very good lesson for pupils in Years 3 to 6, an exciting number session uses song, role-play and a feely bag to extend the class's understanding of the number sequence from one to eight. The teacher uses language well to ask questions that are relevant to each pupil and support assistants copy this approach on a one-to-one basis. Where necessary, pupils use a switch to make their response or a musical instrument to count. Two pupils with complex needs work together developing sensory awareness by stretching and working dough. The more able pupils work in the hall moving from number to number laid out on the floor, developing early addition skills.
93. Similarly, within a very good lesson for those in Years 10 and 11, more able pupils are challenged by being asked to divide biscuits between the class. There is constant reinforcement of previously learnt number skills by the teacher and assistants and this emphasises number sequence and concepts such as 'same' and 'different'. The good teaching of mathematics is also seen within other subjects. Teachers and learning support assistants are very good at introducing number and shape concepts within other curriculum topics and in social settings. Thus, pupils moving from a classroom up steps join with the support assistants in counting as they go. Tuck shop sessions see older pupils selling crisps to others within the school and developing, in a supported way, the skills of payment, giving change and listening to individual requirements. Similarly, in a good science lesson, number skills are taught in another practical setting as pupils do work with timers and measure temperature.
94. The good development that has taken place since the last inspection is largely the result of very good leadership in this subject. The subject leader has incorporated practices normally associated with mainstream schools into the mathematics provision and these have blended well with the best of good 'special school' practice. She has led by example, providing very good teaching, excellent planning and the development and the imaginative use of a wide range of resources. Detailed schemes of work that were not in place at the time of the last inspection are now established. Elements of the numeracy hour have been incorporated well into mathematics lessons and there is now a good combination of mental mathematics and experiences that assist in the exploration of space, shape, time and money. Teaching is not yet regularly monitored, but this is a priority for the co-ordinator. The subject is well resourced and ICT is beginning to be used more regularly and effectively. Recording is sensible, but the information from all classes is not yet collected so that individuals' long-term progress and the way the curriculum works throughout the school can be analysed. Where data has been collected and analysed, the school has useful indicators of its areas of strength and weakness in mathematics. Little work on data handling is undertaken in Classes 3, 4 and 5.

SCIENCE

95. The school has maintained the good provision in science noted at the time of the last inspection.
96. Pupils throughout the school make satisfactory gains in learning, and their pace of working and their effort are good. This is particularly the case with regard to pupils extending their scientific knowledge of living things, different materials and physical forces. However, their levels of achievement in understanding how to approach things

in a scientific way, though still satisfactory, are less well marked. Pupils are interested in their work, and behave well. Up to Year 6, pupils explore the world of mini-beasts such as snails and earwigs, and discover differences in their respective habitats. They understand what is involved in a simple food chain, and that different materials are either magnetic or non-magnetic. Pupils with more complex needs access science through sensory activities, such as making choices based on the smell or taste of different drinks.

97. Pupils in Year 7 to Year 11 know how to make a simple electrical circuit, and record the effects of static electricity. They know what a bean needs in order to grow, and can identify different parts of the plant such as roots and shoots. Students who are post-16 apply their knowledge of science effectively in the context of their accredited vocational courses, particularly when considering social issues such as recycling or safety in the home. As such, the subject makes a significant contribution to their personal and social development.
98. In the two discrete science lessons seen, the quality of teaching was good. All staff know the pupils and their needs very well, and there are very positive relationships between all concerned; as a result, pupils are keen to learn and activities are well organised in ways that allow pupils' individual communication and social objectives to be addressed. Teachers understand the subject well, although opportunities for pupils to predict what will happen, record their findings and consider their results are not always exploited. Good use of strategies such as questioning, together with the good use of ICT resources such as Big Mac communication aids, means that all pupils are effectively helped to reach the right conclusions. On some occasions though, as in a lesson on the principles behind solar energy, pupils are not actively encouraged to conduct the experiments, and tend to remain passive spectators. This limits the extent to which pupils can use their initiative and develop their independence.
99. Science is taught through the termly themes and, as such, makes a positive, relevant contribution to other subjects. The subject has a low profile in the school, but there is a good range of planned learning opportunities. However, these are not always identified in ways that make it clear how the themes will help pupils develop their understanding of science as opposed to merely extending their factual knowledge. Opportunities to accredit pupils' work at Key Stage 4 are also missed. There is no specialist area for science, but this does not adversely affect the delivery of the curriculum.

ART AND DESIGN

100. Pupils and students throughout the school make satisfactory gains in learning within the limited range of opportunities available. However, these opportunities reflect, almost exclusively, the development of pupils' practical skills, and art activities are largely used to illustrate pupils' work in other subjects. Little consideration is given to developing pupils' self-expression and their understanding of art and, as a result, the subject's contribution to the pupils' spiritual development is not as strong as it should be. In these respects, the school has made an unsatisfactory response to the findings of the last inspection. The school recognises this, and the subject is earmarked as a priority for development in 2002.
101. There were no lessons that were distinctly recognisable as just art during the inspection week, and no judgements can therefore be made concerning the quality of teaching. However, photographic records show that pupils and students enjoy their

work, and the way in which individual pupil's work contributes to whole-group displays suggests the subject makes a positive contribution to the school's provision for the pupils' personal and social development. Pupils up to Year 6 develop skills such as cutting and sticking when producing striking images in black and white as part of their work in science, illustrating the effects of animal camouflage. Older pupils and students use a satisfactory range of simple media, such as chalk and pastel, to good effect when producing atmospheric images of caves following their visit to Cheddar. They make simple clay pots as part of their work in history, and follow this up by visiting a local pottery to see how a professional potter does it.

102. The limited range of learning opportunities, which include local arts festivals and visits to local craftsmen, provides good support for other subjects through the termly themes. However, these opportunities are neither organised nor outlined in sufficient detail to help teachers focus on what the pupils should learn in art at any given time in their school career; nor do they clearly identify how pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding may be developed. As a result, the school tends to record only pupils' participation in activities, and has difficulty in assessing whether pupils' levels of understanding have improved. There is no specialist teaching area for art and design but classrooms are used to good effect, as demonstrated by the cheerful displays that brighten the building. The impact of ICT on standards in this subject is generally satisfactory, and good use is made of art software at post-16.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

103. Lessons were seen which involved pupils in Years 1 and 2, 10 and 11, and post-16. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, and from discussion with staff and scrutiny of planning, standards of achievement are good throughout the school. Teachers have a very good understanding of pupils and students and plan well for the different levels of ability in classes. This enables all pupils and students to be fully included in lessons and they work hard to respond to the overall good teaching in ways that indicate good progress in lessons and over time. The subject has broadened in scope and made a significant improvement since the last inspection, especially in resources and in developing the scheme of work.
104. By the end of Year 2, pupils experience wattle and the effects of wind and water blown through it before any daub is applied. In a following lesson, they mix different materials such as clay, sand, flour and paper with water, to produce a range of daubs, which they then apply to the wattle. Pupils with more profound and complex special needs are given 'hand-on-hand' support in mixing materials. They construct model walls, with support from staff, and test their relative stability by rolling balls against them.
105. By the end of Year 6, pupils work in groups to build model mud huts, based on a study of African villages, using straw, mud, plaster and clay. As part of a topic on Africa, they mix African fruits and vegetable into a salad. They explore the taste, feel, look and smell of the ingredients, comparing and evaluating them in the well-planned multi-sensory lesson. Higher attaining pupils are able to stretch different materials to test the relative strength of them and they separate metals from non-metals using a magnet.
106. By the end of Year 9, pupils with more profound and complex special needs explore rice, making independent movements to create patterns as part of the celebration of Diwali. In lessons of religious education, the higher attaining pupils are involved in tie-

dying fabric to make Indian saris, whilst in lessons of history, they make Tudor pomanders for pot-pourri. This cross-curriculum approach to a theme enables pupils to make very good progress over time.

107. By the end of Year 11, pupils with more profound and complex special needs have experienced a very wide range of foods and assisted in the preparation of meals that they are able to evaluate, using their senses. They eye point and gesture their responses clearly. Higher attaining pupils dictate their responses to the meal and help to wordprocess them using symbolled software. The resulting sentences are then used to support the development of their reading skills. In a lesson, they were able to name foods such as 'pear', 'apple', carrot' and 'onion', as they peeled and cut them to prepare a salad meal. Many were able to use the kitchen tools correctly, with minimal guidance and support.
108. Post-16 students prepare and cook fruit cake, which they slice and sell to staff and visitors as a 'mini-enterprise' project. They follow a symbolled recipe and prepare ingredients appropriately, needing support to read off the weights on the food scales. They know that baking tins must be greased before pouring in the ingredients. They work hard to produce and present the cakes for sale.
109. In lessons seen, and from teachers' planning and records, the quality of teaching is good throughout the school. It is very good in the post-16 unit. Teachers have a very good understanding of the individual needs of pupils and students and they plan and prepare lessons well for them. They make very good use of learning support staff and work well as a teaching and support team. Teachers and support assistants are very patient with pupils and students, ensuring that all are involved in the lessons at the appropriate level and make good progress. Opportunities to support communication through the use of signs and symbols are missed in some lessons, thereby failing to reinforce the literacy and communication skills of pupils and students. The very good relationships in classes motivate pupils and students and they work hard to carry out the planned lesson objectives. These relationships also make the lessons relaxed and enjoyable for all. The independence of post-16 students is not effectively promoted in some lessons, although the weekly lesson in which students prepare their own lunch is very effective in establishing a positive social setting which they enjoy taking part in, and that prepares them well for life in the community.
110. Since the last inspection, the role of the co-ordinator has been widened and the management of the subject has much improved. The cross-curriculum themed approach to teaching and learning means that design and technology is supported by many subjects and makes a contribution to many subjects, in particular literacy and numeracy. Food studies are a strength of the curriculum and provide opportunities to taste many ethnic foods and to reinforce the personal and social skills of pupils and students. Very good use is made of farm visits for post-16 students, giving them opportunities to study different forms of transport and to experience farm machinery, such as the potato lifter, in action. Such experiences accelerate the progress that students make in their accredited course work. New technology makes a satisfactory impact upon standards in the subject through the use of communication aids and wordprocessing software.

GEOGRAPHY

111. The school has made a positive response to the findings of the last inspection and now makes satisfactory provision for geography. A good range of learning

opportunities which have a high profile in the planning of the termly themes results in pupils and students throughout the school making satisfactory gains in learning.

112. Pupils up to Year 6 have a good understanding of the various qualities that make up a 'neighbourhood', and develop this understanding well, for example when conducting surveys on visitors to Burnham-on-Sea. They use a variety of resources, including ICT through the Internet and specialist software, to find out about other countries, and understand how various features and circumstances within Kenya have resulted in contrasting wealth and different degrees of development. They are keen and willing to answer questions, and are interested in finding out about other places. Older pupils use a map to locate the key features of a French town as part of their work in modern languages. They have a good understanding of environmental issues, and post-16 students have their work accredited in the context of their vocational courses. They visit, for example, Cheddar, where they learn about the features of a limestone landscape such as cave systems and stalactites. Throughout the school, pupils and students practise and apply their geographical skills and knowledge in a variety of other contexts, notably through local shopping trips and visits further afield, and in this respect, the subject makes a positive contribution to the pupils' personal and social development.
113. The way in which geography is taught through the termly themes means that there was only one discrete lesson that was clearly geography during the inspection period. In that lesson, for younger pupils comparing life in suburban Bridgwater with urban and rural Kenya, the teaching was very good. Relationships are excellent and all staff know the pupils very well. The teacher used street maps to good effect in preparing pupils for the walk through the local streets, with the result that pupils clearly understood what was expected of them. All pupils, regardless of ability, were involved, and due consideration was given to health and safety issues. Pupils' individual learning targets in communication and social skills were recognised and addressed within the planning for well-organised, relevant activities; these plans, however, were less clear in identifying how pupils would develop their geographical skills and understanding.
114. Since the last inspection, the school has developed a good range of learning opportunities that have strong cross-curricular links with other subjects, notably history and personal and social education, and which give good support to the termly themes. However, the way in which the themes are planned and organised makes it difficult for the school to make sure that pupils learn the right geographical skills and develop their understanding of the subject as they grow up and progress through the school. Opportunities for pupils' work to gain accreditation at Key Stage 4 are also missed. There is, though, a satisfactory range of resources, and good use is made of facilities both within the local community and further afield.

HISTORY

115. Provision for history at the school is satisfactory overall with many strengths. The range of activities and use of visits to places of historical interest are helping to improve pupils' understanding of the world as it was and this develops some historical skills.
116. In Years 1 and 2, pupils make sound progress and gain a clearer understanding of time sequence and some aspects of time past. They use chronology as they put pictures in order and arrange their daily timetable. There are photographs to show that

pupils benefit from a good range of historical activities, including visits to local churches and Iron Age displays. In Years 3 to 6, pupils also achieve satisfactorily. They begin to identify that people lived differently in the past. They look at artefacts from different periods and develop their understanding by dressing up and playing games from the past. In Years 7 and above, there are good opportunities to gain a greater understanding of different environments and ways of life. Good use continues to be made of visits, music and drama to provide sensory experiences which benefit all pupils. Opportunities, such as visits to churches, comparing houses and listening to Tudor music add much to the day-to-day experience, whilst also giving pupils some understanding of the diversity of our past.

117. A small amount of history and history-related teaching was observed during the inspection and this was supplemented by pupils' work, photographic evidence and displays. The quality of teaching in history is good overall while some teaching is satisfactory. Teachers enjoy teaching the subject and make good provision to ensure that pupils have fun and a wide range of experiences. In addition, emphasis is placed on enjoyment through seeing, listening, touching, tasting and smelling. In a good lesson with pupils in Years 1 and 2, the class follows up a visit to an Iron Age site by making wattle and daub walls. This is 'messy activity' that all can enjoy. The very effective use of learning support assistants means that the large number of pupils with visual impairment within the class gain the same satisfaction and understanding as their peers. Similarly, in a very good Key Stage 4 lesson on schools in Shakespeare's time, everyone listens to a short story and manages to answer their own question about differences. The more able pupils work with the teacher, using the computer, to produce a small piece of writing indicating how schools were different. Two pupils with severe learning difficulties work well with support assistants to role-play the journey to school on horseback, using movement and rhyme.
118. The co-ordinator has carried out good, detailed work to relate the themes to a history content. This works better in some areas, such as Homes and Habitats, than others, such as the Pilgrim Fathers. Very imaginative use is made of both resources and visits, and the co-ordinator has set a good example in this. The school does not identify sufficiently well what historical skills are to be taught and how they should be assessed. The range of visits to local places of historical interest and to local museums is a strength of the provision and ensures that pupils learn from first-hand experiences. Although historical elements are identified throughout the curriculum, there needs to be more work carried out to clearly identify which historical skills are being taught and when.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

119. Lessons of ICT tend to be short, and much of the pupils' learning takes place in other subjects, such as English and mathematics. In the few lessons where it was possible to observe teaching and learning over a sustained period of time, pupils made good progress in the planned sensory room or computer activities. The provision for ICT has improved significantly since the last inspection and continues to improve under the enthusiastic and hard working co-ordinator, who is upgrading computer hardware and ensuring that both teaching and support staff undertake basic training early next year.
120. From lessons and records of work seen and from discussion with teachers, the progress of pupils and students is good overall. In one lesson where two well-motivated Year 2 pupils were observed working on the computer, the very patient teaching from a well-chosen software program enabled very good progress to be

made over the lesson. They were able to control the mouse to colour given images and to build images from geometric shapes that had to be 'dragged and dropped' into place. Lower attaining pupils make good progress in their handling of switch pads, including adaptive buttons to activate the computer mouse and, where appropriate, adaptive head switches. They build on the eye pointing and indicating skills that are included in their 'short-term objectives'.

121. By the end of Year 6, pupils consolidate their understanding of cause and effect in sensory room activities, where they experience fibre optic apparatus and learn to control light and sound by pressing a range of single and double switch pads. They make good use of a sound module to produce sound effects and backing music on a tape recorder. Pupils, including those with more severe and complex learning difficulties, make good progress in these activities, especially where teachers use them to build up an interesting and stimulating interactive story. By the end of Year 9, pupils use 'Dazzle', 'Splash' and 'Textease' software programs to develop their mouse and keyboard skills. Those with more complex and severe difficulties use an appropriate program to build up their tracking skills and to consolidate their understanding of cause and effect. Higher attaining pupils use a symbolled software program to wordprocess short sentences that they have written with the support of staff. With guidance and support, they use CD-Roms to look up information on topics such as 'Africa'.
122. By the end of Year 11, pupils with more severe and complex needs use a variety of switches to activate lights, toys, fans, projectors and music players. They experience the effect of their movements on an electronic whiteboard. Higher attaining pupils can identify and type their name on a standard keyboard and learn to use the mouse on interactive CD-Rom programs. Post-16 students use the computer as a part of their accredited Youth Award Scheme (YAS) course on 'information handling'. Higher attaining students are able to assist in the designing and printing of certificates, on backgrounds that they have designed from a basic art software program. Lower attaining pupils use switch buttons to activate machinery in lessons of design and technology. They record visits they have made using symbolled wordprocessing. They also wordprocess letters of thanks to those who host their visits.
123. Teaching is good across the school. Teachers and learning support staff have grown in subject confidence since the last inspection and they have a sound knowledge and understanding of sensory room apparatus and basic computer programs. They are beginning to use the recently purchased electronic whiteboards, recognising their value in extending pupils and students of all levels of attainment. They use switch pads and 'jelly bean' buttons effectively to support communication in many subject lessons and in greetings sessions each morning. Post-16 staff make good use of computers to enable students to wordprocess their work, motivating them and building their confidence in confronting information and communication technology.
124. The ICT curriculum is being built increasingly into lesson plans throughout the school, founded on national guidelines for the subject. All classrooms have a networked computer and old computers are being replaced as money becomes available. Classrooms have a sensory area that is used to extend the basic communication skills of those pupils with more severe and complex special needs and to support the development of ICT skills of all pupils. All teachers and learning support assistants are to benefit from New Opportunities Fund (NoF) training in computer skills early next year.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

125. French is taught to pupils in Years 7 to 11. The school's provision for a modern foreign language is good overall, with effective teaching and pupils making good progress. This reflects good improvement since the last inspection when the school did not meet the necessary requirements for this subject.
126. Pupils make good gains in learning in their lessons, and achieve good standards. By Year 9, pupils use with understanding common phrases and words like 'bonjour', 'merci', 'au revoir' and 's'il vous plait'. They learn useful vocabulary like 'baguette' and 'fromage'. They role-play going to the 'boulangerie', and sing French songs. By the age of 16, pupils say the time in French and know the words for buildings like police station and swimming pool.
127. Teaching is good overall. Teachers have a good grasp of French, and bring to their lessons their own enthusiasm and interest in the language and culture. For example, one very effective lesson was based on comparisons of the important buildings in Bridgwater with those in Blere where the teacher had spent a good deal of time. Also in this lesson, all the staff made every effort to interpret the curriculum for pupils of all levels of ability, and to make it come alive, especially for pupils with more complex needs. They provided a sensory 'commentary' by using cotton pads smelling of chlorine to signify a swimming pool, joss sticks to denote a church, and a recorded siren to remind pupils of a police station.
128. Staff speak French with a convincing accent, and should soon be able to conduct their lessons almost entirely in the target language. Pupils are given good feedback on their performance. The school does not have a system which will enable teachers to recognise and measure the gains which pupils are making in their knowledge, skills and understanding of French.
129. The number of teachers of the subject has increased since September. This has meant a more widespread enthusiasm for the subject from both staff and pupils. These teachers receive good advice and guidance from the co-ordinator, who is knowledgeable and organises the provision well. However, the policy and scheme of work are out of date, and need to be reviewed; this is planned for next year, and should rectify the weaknesses in planning and assessment. Resources for the subject are satisfactory, but the range of relevant software is limited so the impact of ICT on learning is negligible.

MUSIC

130. Pupils and students make satisfactory progress in music lessons, but the school does not clearly and consistently identify and assess what pupils know, understand and can do as they grow older and move up through the school. The school has maintained its standards in music since the last inspection.
131. Pupils and students throughout the school take part in country dancing, and, from photographic evidence, enjoy the various demonstrations put on by visiting musicians, like a dance company from Tanzania, a south Indian drumming and dance troupe and a samba band. By age eleven, pupils sing well and tunefully, they play the pulse of songs from Africa on a resonance board and on other unpitched percussion

instruments. They stop and start on cue. By the age of 14, pupils say whether or not sounds are high or low in pitch, and can be conducted by the teacher.

132. No teaching was seen involving pupils in Years 1 or 2. Teaching is satisfactory overall across the school, but for pupils in Years 3 to 6, it is good. Most teachers have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the subject, with one or two members of staff making good additional contributions to the musical life of the school. A good example of this was seen where support staff encouraged pupils to play all-weather drums in the playground during the lunch break. All staff work together well to make music lessons enjoyable for all the pupils irrespective of their level of ability. Where teaching is good, this is because the teacher has good musical skills and whips up staff and pupils so that they all participate enthusiastically.
133. Pupils use a good range of pitched and unpitched percussion instruments, as well as resonance boards which are particularly suitable for those with additional complex needs. Occasionally, the resources used are not appropriate for the age of the pupils. For example, pupils in Years 7 to 9 were asked to respond to videotaped material developed for much younger pupils. Teachers make effective use of day-to-day assessment to ensure that activities are matched to pupils' abilities and needs. However, over a longer period, the school has not yet developed a whole-school system for tracking and recording the gains which individual pupils make in musical skills, knowledge and understanding. As a consequence, it is difficult to measure the progress which pupils make as they move through the school.
134. The subject makes a positive contribution to most aspects of pupils' personal development. It is used well to make other parts of the curriculum come alive. For example, in a numeracy lesson, pupils in Year 6 sang counting songs to count from one to five. In a French lesson, pupils sing in French about going to the baker's. Pupils and students in the choir perform for local church groups, and join in with a local mainstream school for country dancing. Opportunities to actively promote pupils' spiritual development are not provided routinely or identified within teachers' planning, which means that the subject does not make the significant contribution that one would expect. The school makes good use of a music therapist who uses music well to enable some individual pupils to build up their confidence in communicating.
135. The school does not have the benefit of a specialist teacher, although the co-ordinator is enthusiastic about developing the provision in the subject and provides satisfactory leadership. The school plans to review the subject policy and scheme of work next year, which will provide an opportunity for the school to redress the shortcomings in planning and assessment. The school is satisfactorily resourced for music, but there are weaknesses in its provision of electronic instruments and relevant computer hardware and software. As a consequence, the impact of ICT on learning is slight. The subject has no formal list of equipment which could be used to ensure that the scheme of work is fully resourced.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

136. Because of timetabling arrangements it was not possible to see sufficient lessons of physical education to make a clear judgement on the quality of teaching or pupils' achievements in lessons throughout the school. In lessons and work seen, and from teachers' records, the pupils achieve well and make good progress over time. Physiotherapy programmes for pupils and students with more severe and complex special needs are built into the school curriculum. This enables those programmes to

be effective without disrupting the educational programme of others. The progress of pupils is monitored by the visiting physiotherapist, who also ensures that teaching and learning support staff are aware of individual physical needs, and are able to use appropriate stimuli to mobilise and exercise both pupils and students.

137. The subject has not made any significant improvement since the last inspection because the limitations imposed by the site remain the same as were noted at the last inspection. Those in charge of the local swimming pool have responded positively to the Disability Discrimination Act and have provided changing and lifting resources that enable those with more complex and severe special needs to benefit from swimming lessons. The use of a local hydrotherapy pool is currently being negotiated between the school and a local charity.
138. A very good lesson of dance was observed in which Year 6 pupils were joined by a group of Year 6 pupils from the local primary school. This is a weekly lesson designed to raise the awareness of disability as part of the mainstream school citizenship programme, at the same time as it offers a very good social and personal experience for the Penrose pupils. The visiting pupils supported those in wheelchairs, following the dance routines planned by the teacher. It was clearly an experience that was enjoyed by everyone and from which pupils from both schools gained a positive social learning experience.
139. Riding lessons are held weekly for those who have a good sense of balance. In the lesson observed, pupils gained confidence as they were guided through basic riding skills. They were able to trot under the instructor's control. Teachers' records indicate generally good progress in swimming lessons, with clear gains in confidence and kicking skills being made. In a 'rebound therapy' lesson for Year 6 pupils, the teacher and learning support assistants worked well together to ensure that pupils benefited from the trampoline exercises in a safe, stimulating environment. Pupils showed great enjoyment in the routines, vocalising and gesturing their excitement as the trampoline challenged their balancing skills. The trained staff held those with more severe and complex needs appropriately and the pupils' responses indicated a growing awareness of the planned movements and a clear enjoyment of the experience. This lesson required a great deal of staff support and some of the pupils were not engaged in positive physical activities whilst they waited for their turn.
140. The co-ordinator is effective and has improved resources for the subject and works hard to maintain links with other school and community resources to compensate for the lack of outdoor physical space at the school. A scheme of work is being planned that should reflect the requirements of the new curriculum orders and should bring in an appropriate assessment system that will guide teachers to effectively monitor the progress of pupils throughout the school.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

141. The provision for, and standards achieved in, religious education are good and this is an improvement since the last inspection when progress was unsatisfactory. The improvement has come about because the co-ordinator for the subject has worked hard and skilfully to make the locally agreed syllabus accessible to the pupils within the school. She has successfully developed a policy and schemes of work which meet the requirements of the agreed syllabus and also the complex needs of the pupils.

142. No teaching occurred during the inspection. This is because teaching takes place on Friday afternoons in some classes and in others it is taught at set times each year and these times were outside the inspection week. Evidence for standards achieved and the quality of teaching is based on the scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning and also on discussion with the teachers. The evidence indicates that achievement by the end of Years 6, 11 and 13 is good, reflecting the good, demanding teaching, and by the end of Years 2 and 9, achievement is at least satisfactory because of the satisfactory teaching.
143. By Year 2, pupils make satisfactory progress through experiencing a stained glass window during a visit to a nearby church. Following an interesting visit to a local church, the Year 2 teacher created the atmosphere of a holy place in his classroom. With considerable support from effective learning support assistants, the pupils with the most complex difficulties were encouraged to make eye contact with a beautiful stained glass window in the church. Back in the classroom considerable sensitivity went into the use of coloured card to support pupils with visual impairment in experiencing a simulated stained glass window that told a story. The teaching contributed to the literacy development of these pupils.
144. By Year 6, pupils experience Bible stories from the Old Testament, through the medium of drama, which is effectively planned by their enthusiastic teacher. Through a sensory approach to teaching, which is fit for the purpose, these pupils tasted the foods associated with an important Jewish festival. Because of the developmental needs associated with their learning difficulties, their knowledge and understanding of a Jewish festival such as Purim is non-existent. However, in a manner which is fully inclusive, all pupils in the class have had the opportunity to join in the fun associated with an important religious festival. Unless a medical reason prevented them, pupils have shared in the food associated with important Jewish festivals, and photographic evidence indicates that they enjoyed the experience. Throughout Years 3 to 6, pupils have a relevant experience through their religious education lessons.
145. The topic on the Pilgrim Fathers planned to teach religious education in Years 7 to 9, proved to be too complicated and so the class teacher quite rightly abandoned it. Instead she explored the Ten Commandments given to the prophet Moses by Yahweh. She explained the Ten Commandments using a sensory approach, and with a tremendous amount of help, the pupils in her class made satisfactory gains in communication skills through signing, gesture and vocalisation and also in their development of pre-reading skills through the activity of producing their own class rules. The teacher, learning support assistants and pupils worked collaboratively to produce a set of class rules. This interesting activity contributed significantly to their moral development and the highest attainers in the class gained in confidence in their development of pre-reading skills through the literacy work involved in this exciting project. With encouragement and support, the highest attainer in the class can read some of these class rules.
146. Throughout Years 10 and 11, pupils continue to make good progress and so achieve good standards by age 16. The highest attainers, with learning support assistant help, have produced lovely pieces of writing about the parables Jesus told using a symbol program on the computer. Although this is an excellent project, a few of the symbols used are too complicated for the pupils and when they see a complex symbol which could have several meanings, they are somewhat baffled and progress in learning is slowed on these rare occasions. Pupils with more complex communication difficulty experience 'big picture books' about the parables Jesus told. In the lessons on Jesus'

stories it is evident that pupils are well supported by a signing environment but evidence indicates this is not consistent across all classes throughout the school.

147. At post-16, all students have had the opportunity to explore a Seder plate and to taste the foods associated with the Jewish festival of Pesach. The highest attainers have some understanding that Moses helped the Jewish people and a good understanding of what made the Jews sad when they were in captivity. One pupil has some understanding of slavery but becomes very muddled when he tries to explain it in any other way than what made the Jews feel sad. One of the highest attainers, who should achieve accreditation as part of the Youth Award Scheme, understands that there is a connection between the Christmas and Easter stories at a level appropriate to his special educational needs. By the age of 18, students have been taught about Judaism, Christianity and Islam in accordance with the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus.
148. Assemblies are used to support the teaching of religious education but it is sometimes difficult for teachers and the co-ordinator to distinguish between the taught religious education component and the act of collective worship. The lack of a formalised system for recording pupils' achievements in religious education and the inconsistency in annotating pieces of work make it difficult to monitor and demonstrate progress over time and this is a weakness. The co-ordinator keeps abreast with developments in the subject and she shares what she learns on courses with the whole staff. However, on their own admission, some teachers are not as confident in teaching the subject as others. Some really struggle to make the agreed syllabus relevant to the pupils and are genuinely concerned about the appropriateness of the syllabus for some of their pupils. They have also not received any formal training in how to teach this subject in recent years and this is a weakness.
149. The co-ordination of the subject is satisfactory. The co-ordinator is building up a stock of sensory resources suitable for the teaching of the subject and she gives good and practical advice to other teachers in the school. Following the development of the subject policy and schemes of work, she had the opportunity to check the quality of teaching and learning through observation of lessons. Teachers said that they found this helpful but she does not have non-contact time for this purpose at present and so is not now in a position to share the good practice that exists in some classes with the others.