

INSPECTION REPORT

MILL MEAD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Port Vale, Hertford

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117297

Headteacher: Mrs Marilyn Mitchell

Reporting inspector: Mrs E M D Mackie
23482

Dates of inspection: 3 – 5 April 2000

Inspection number: 191388

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant and junior
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Port Vale Hertford Hertfordshire
Postcode:	SG14 3AA
Telephone number:	01992-582776
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Sharon Goodyer
Date of previous inspection:	20 January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Mill Mead Primary School is situated in a residential area near the centre of the county town of Hertford. There is a mixture of privately owned and rented housing, much of it small and terraced, and mobility is high as many parents move out of the area to larger homes as their families grow. The majority of pupils live near the school. Most parents work locally but a significant number commute to London. There are 190 full-time pupils in the school and 29 children attend the nursery on a part-time basis. There is also a pre-nursery class for three to four year-olds, privately run by the school, held on the site.

Children enter the school nursery in the September of the academic year in which they are four and the reception class in the September of the academic year in which they are five. There is a wide range of attainment on entry and overall attainment is average, but a significant number of children have above average speaking and social skills. Eight per cent of pupils are registered for entitlement to free school meals and this is well below the national average. Four per cent of the pupils speak English as an additional language. Current languages include Cantonese and Bosnian. Eight per cent of pupils are on the school's register of special educational needs and this is well below the national average. Two pupils have statements of special educational need. The average class size is 27. The school aims to engender a positive attitude to lifelong learning and to promote an atmosphere of support, trust and confidence.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an outstanding school with excellent leadership, very good teaching, very high standards and responsible pupils who behave very well. By the time they are eleven, most pupils reach standards well above those expected for their age. Teachers provide an exciting, motivating environment where pupils are challenged. An exceptional variety of opportunities is provided for pupils to extend their learning outside the school day and throughout the holidays. Citizenship is integral to the aims of the school. The school council, run by pupils, gives them valuable opportunities to evaluate school life and see what they can do to improve it. Educational visits and links with schools in Europe prepare pupils to play their part in society confidently. Parental support is very good. Governors manage the school very well to get the very best for the pupils. The school gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Attainment in English, mathematics, science and music is well above average by the time pupils leave the school at eleven years old.
- Overall, teaching is very good.
- Pupils are keen and eager to participate in the broad range of activities which the school provides and personal development and relationships are excellent
- The curriculum, including provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, is very good.
- The headteacher, key staff and governors provide excellent leadership for the school.

What could be improved

- Ensure that parents fully understand the most recent homework arrangements.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Significant developments since the last inspection in January 1997 have given the school the capacity to carry on getting better, improve on high standards and continue to explore fresh avenues in order to bring new ideas and expertise into the school. There are now very effective whole-school systems for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress. Findings are used well by teachers to plan individual strategies for pupils who are underachieving. There is an appropriate marking policy. In daily acts of collective worship and throughout the day, the rich learning environment is used effectively to develop pupils' sense of reflection and self-expression. The newly-built and well-equipped nursery, paid for by the school during the last financial year, provides appropriate provision for children under five. Very good planning ensures that the six recommended areas of learning,

including opportunities for children to learn through practical activities, are taught regularly for children under five. The learning environment has improved for all pupils, with extra teaching space and enhanced outdoor provision. Mill Mead has achieved the Schools Curriculum Award 2000.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
English	B	B	A	A	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
Mathematics	C	A	A*	A*	
Science	A	C	A	A	

Results at Key Stage 2 were very good indeed in the 1999 National Curriculum tests. At Key Stage 1, results for seven-year-olds in writing were well below the national average at the expected level and well above at the higher level. In reading, results were close to the national average at the expected level and above at the higher level. Results in mathematics were well above at the expected level and above at the higher level. In science, teacher assessments of pupils' attainment were well above the national average at the expected level and above at the higher level. At both key stages, the trend over four years has been upwards in all subjects.

By the time they are five years old in the reception class, most pupils achieve above what is normally expected in speaking and listening, personal and social development and physical development and they reach the nationally agreed desirable outcomes in the other recommended areas of learning. Pupils are on course to achieve above average results in English, mathematics and science by the end of Key Stage 1. Standards are well above average in English and science, and very high in mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2. Throughout the school, standards in speaking and listening are very good. Attainment in music is very good and the work seen in a range of foundation subjects was good overall.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very positive. Pupils are keen and eager to come to school. They show high levels of interest in school life.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils are courteous and they show respect for each other and for property. The strong positive ethos in the school promotes good behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Pupils demonstrate a mature regard for each other and adults. They make constructive relationships and show high levels of responsibility.
Attendance	Well below the national average. This is because some parents take children for holidays during term time. The school discourages this. There is little absence for other reasons.

Pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour contribute strongly to the high standards of academic attainment in the school. Excellent relationships create a pleasant and purposeful atmosphere in which pupils make good progress.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years	aged 7-11 years
	Very good	Good	Very good

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

The quality of teaching observed was excellent in six per cent of lessons, very good in 49 per cent, good in 42 per cent and satisfactory in three per cent. Teaching in English and mathematics is very good throughout the school. Literacy and numeracy are developed effectively in all subjects so that skills are practised and used well. Teachers' very good subject knowledge and planning of work provides challenge for all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language. As a result, pupils learn at a good rate and want to do well. Interesting and exciting tasks motivate pupils to want to know more. Teachers have high expectations of high quality work and good behaviour and they ask probing questions which keep pupils 'on their toes'. Children are taught very well in the nursery and they are well prepared for the brisker pace of learning in the main school.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The school has very good provision for the prescribed subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education and this is augmented by very good extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision is good and pupils make good progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. The school works hard with these pupils and they do well once they are proficient in English but there is insufficient specific language support when pupils are at the early stages.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Very good. The school provides a wide range of opportunities so that pupils become mature, confident, thoughtful, environmentally aware, respectful and well-rounded people.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well. Before and after-school care is very good indeed. Early morning keep-fit sessions enable the pupils to be mentally alert for the rigours of the school day.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership is excellent. The headteacher provides very clear educational direction for the school. There is a well-established process of debate and discussion before initiatives are introduced.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. Governors use their wide range of expertise very well in the service of the school.

The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good and a great strength. Governors are constantly trying to improve provision for the pupils and raise standards.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Finances are used very effectively to ensure good provision for the pupils. Governors consistently apply principles of best value very well in their transactions.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational visits arranged by the school • Their children make good progress • Their children are expected to work hard and do their best • Children behave well • The teaching is good • The school encourages their children to be responsible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework arrangements; some want more and some want less • Information on how their children are getting on

Inspectors agree with parents' positive views of the school. A significant number of parents say that they do not always fully understand initiatives such as the new homework arrangements. The amount of homework required is similar to that of other primary schools and is judged to be appropriate. End-of-year reports are comprehensive and the school provides information on pupils' progress at formal consultation evenings for parents, though appointments are necessarily short on these occasions. Teachers are available on one afternoon each week and parents are invited to arrange individual appointments at any time of year if they wish to discuss their children's progress. These arrangements are sufficient to keep parents well informed about their children.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Attainment in English, mathematics, science and music is well above average by the time pupils leave the school at eleven years old.

1. Attainment in speaking and listening is very good throughout the school. Pupils aged eleven achieved well above average standards in English and science and very high standards in mathematics in the National Curriculum tests in 1999 and these high standards have been maintained. At Key Stage 1, results in 1999 for seven-year-olds in writing were well below the national average at the expected level and well above at the higher level. In reading, results were close to the national average at the expected level and above at the higher level. Results were well above average in mathematics and science. Standards in reading and writing are above average for seven-year-olds in the current Year 2. English skills have been developed effectively through well-focused study of texts during the literacy hour. Achievement in music is very high at both key stages.
2. Teachers use every opportunity to develop pupils' language skills. Appropriate vocabulary is encouraged in all subjects and, throughout the school, pupils speak confidently and clearly. They are keen and eager to contribute to lessons. When teachers ask questions, hands shoot up and answers are well expressed. A love of books is fostered from the earliest days in the nursery and reception classes and pupils know about authors and illustrators. By the end of both key stages, pupils in the school read with very good levels of fluency, understanding and expression. They use their reading skills very effectively to find information in reference books, on CD ROMs and, by the time they are eleven, on the Internet. Teachers use relevant material very effectively to stimulate pupils' interest and help them develop a range of writing styles. In a reception class lesson about how characters behave, pupils expressed their ideas very clearly about 'Prince Biffer'. In Year 2, pupils wrote well about the life cycle of a frog and illustrated their work with lively drawings. In Year 5, very good teaching ensured that pupils were very clear about what they had to do. A pupil said, *'We are seeing how the poet creates an atmosphere – it's dark and gloomy because he doesn't like the bullying.'* Pupils in Year 6 produced writing of very good quality after a high level of discussion on how they would feel when faced by a fierce animal.
3. In science, teachers have high expectations of pupils and there is a strong emphasis on scientific investigation. Pupils in Year 2 used magnifying glasses to make detailed observational drawings of tadpoles, daffodils and tulips. They looked at the previous week's science diary to see how much the tadpoles had grown. In an experiment using chromatography, pupils in Year 4 investigated the composition of a felt-tip dye. They overcame difficulties by changing the colour of ink or the size of paper. In Year 6, there were very good opportunities for individual work as pupils produced effective electric circuit diagrams, completed the circuits and added switches.
4. Attainment in mathematics lessons is consistently good, with very good attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. Because lessons are well organised and there are relevant activities which motivate pupils, learning is of consistently good quality. Pupils in Year 1 enjoyed working together as they measured their handspans, feet, waists and height accurately in centimetres. In Year 3, pupils found imaginative ways of joining squares so that shapes were symmetrical. Pupils throughout the school work hard and show eagerness and excitement about mathematics. By the time they are eleven, higher attaining pupils know about the constant pi. They use mathematical equipment to construct an accurate spiral.
5. Musical achievement is of a very high standard throughout the school. In a whole-school assembly, pupils from all classes were willing to contribute to songs and they sang solo verses confidently. Pupils responded very well to hand signals and their singing was well-pitched. In a percussion session, pupils from all classes repeated exciting rhythmic patterns on a wide variety of multicultural instruments. Instrumental playing is of a very high quality and pupils play in a mature way. Social skills develop very well as pupils in the school orchestra organise ensembles of a variety of stringed and wind instruments to produce music of a very high quality.

Overall, the quality of teaching is very good

6. Very good teaching is evident in all parts of the school. The quality of teaching observed was excellent in six per cent of lessons, very good in 49 per cent, good in 42 per cent and satisfactory in three per cent. Teachers' high expectations, energy, enthusiasm and excellent relationships with the pupils ensure that there is a purposeful working atmosphere in classrooms and pupils work hard. Lessons are prepared thoroughly so that there are clear learning objectives and work is appropriate for different groups of pupils to make progress. Individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs are followed carefully and there is step-by-step progress towards the targets in the plans. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are integrated well into lessons. Teaching is very good in the nursery and children are motivated to learn through stimulating experiences which include the six required areas of learning. Classroom assistants are deployed very well throughout the school and they make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good. They question pupils very well and encourage them to use specific subject language so that they contribute to discussions in a mature way. During a religious education lesson, pupils in the reception class spoke confidently about the 'consequences' of their actions. In Year 3, pupils used words such as 'lure' and 'stealthily' during an English lesson.
7. Teachers employ a wide range of strategies and resources to keep pupils' interest and extend their learning both inside and outside the classrooms. In Year 5, the teacher explained that, after pupils had practised specific computer skills for drawing and bending lines and moving shapes, they would design plans for the development of the school's environmental area. Teachers use information technology effectively to develop teaching materials and organise their planning. They plan the use of computers in most lessons so that pupils become proficient with the available equipment. Literacy and numeracy are taught very well and there is appropriate practice of letter sounds and patterns from the earliest days in the nursery. Throughout the school, pupils use dictionaries as a matter of course because teachers expect spellings to be checked when there is uncertainty. Teachers manage pupils very well so that the achievement of very good behaviour seems effortless.

Pupils are keen and eager to participate in the broad range of activities which the school organises. Personal development and relationships are excellent.

8. Pupils participate enthusiastically in activities before and after school. The breakfast club is popular and pupils in Key Stage 2 are expected to do keep fit for ten minutes before lessons begin. They change into appropriate kit and members of staff join them to exercise outside when weather permits. At playtimes, pupils play together happily as they use the various areas of the playground in turn. Activities include an adventure area, a climbing section, ball-game area, outside chess and quiet areas. In assemblies, pupils sit where they wish and younger brothers and sisters express pleasure as they find and sit with older siblings. There is an absence of embarrassment, as excellent relationships are a strength of the school.
9. Lessons include many opportunities for pupils to use their imagination and develop ideas of their own. Homework in Year 1 included a task for pupils to make tape recordings of sounds in their homes. Pupils brought back work which they were keen to share with the rest of the class. Pupils in Year 2 were deeply interested in the growth of their frogspawn. One child was motivated to find some for herself. She drew a picture of the trip to collect it with her father and was keen to tell that it was 'really true and she did go.' This motivation and excitement is a strong feature in the school. Older pupils take part in 'jam' sessions when they realise the fun of making music together. Children in the nursery were excited about necklaces they had made at home after listening to a story. Pupils say that school is an enjoyable and important part of their lives.

Curriculum provision, including provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is very good.

10. The school provides a wide range of learning opportunities in addition to the National Curriculum and religious education. Personal and social education is a significant feature in the school and pupils are prepared well to benefit from and contribute to the community. There is wide interest in the environmental development around the school. Pupils are consulted about plans and the school council brings forward ideas from classes. The council meets formally and is chaired in turn by older pupils. Two members from each class join discussions

about issues raised by pupils throughout the school. Debate is mature and well organised. Public speaking is promoted and pupils were finalists at the Children's Parliament on the Environment in 1999.

11. Music plays an important part in the life of the school and the orchestra is impressive. Pupils take part in bigger musical events; for example, members of Year 5 recently sang in the Royal Albert Hall with other pupils from Hertfordshire. Links with other countries include friendships in Belgium, where there is to be a visit by pupils in the near future. There are Internet links with schools in Sweden and Russia. Older pupils join with parents to produce a pantomime in a local theatre each year. Clubs, organised by the school and paid for by parents, are held before and after school to give opportunities for pupils to do homework, have tea, play together and extend their hobbies.

The headteacher, key staff and governors provide excellent leadership for the school so that high standards are promoted and there is a very strong and supportive community spirit.

12. The high standards achieved by pupils reflect the school's commitment to excellence. The headteacher, staff and governors work hard to ensure that all pupils have opportunities to excel. This is achieved through very good teaching, the extended curriculum and wide involvement of parents. Parent governors encourage others to contribute time and skills to enrich support for their children. Governors identify clear priorities for improvement through regular self-evaluation and the school development plan is monitored rigorously. Governors use their professional skills very effectively to manage the school and its finances. Robust analysis of results in school and national tests enables governors to direct resources appropriately to raise standards.
13. The headteacher and senior teachers monitor teaching and learning to ensure that classroom practice matches the agreed policies and schemes. Teachers evaluate their work and plan together with a strong sense of team spirit. The management has been vigilant in employing teachers of good quality during periods of staff absence. This has ensured consistently good day-to-day teaching in the classrooms but monitoring of homework and sufficient attention to the presentation of pupils' work has occasionally 'fallen through the net'. The leadership is aware of this and steps are now in place to avoid such occurrences.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Ensure that parents fully understand the most recent homework arrangements.

14. Governors and staff work hard to consult parents comprehensively before initiatives are taken on board and parents have very positive views of the school. However, some expressed concern in the pre-inspection questionnaires and at the parents' meeting about the amount, regularity and marking of homework. A significant number of parents do not approve of their children doing homework but many think that the school provides the right amount. The most recent homework arrangements afford a reasonable amount to be done each week. The arrangements do not include teachers' marking of completed work and many parents do not understand this. Tasks include reading, learning of spellings, research to support a range of subjects and exercises to consolidate work in English and mathematics. Pupils have a week to complete them. The system is not sufficiently clear to some parents.
15. There is some parental concern about information on their children's progress. Formal consultation evenings provide opportunities for brief exchange of information and target-setting, class teachers are available during one afternoon each week and end-of-year reports are thoroughly prepared. Parents are invited to contact the school for longer appointments if they wish to know more. This range of opportunities is judged to be sufficient to keep parents well informed.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

16. The school should now:

work with parents to find a system of setting homework which:

- (1) reinforces or extends their children's learning;
- (2) clarifies the deadline for work to be completed;
- (3) provides some indication for parents that it has been done satisfactorily, or not.

(Paragraph 14)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	31
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	20

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6	48	42	3	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	14.5	190
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	0	15

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	0	24

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	7

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	2
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	7.0
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.7
National comparative data	0.5

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	23	11	34

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	19	15	22
	Girls	10	9	11
	Total	29	24	33
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	85 (100)	71 (100)	97 (97)
	National	82 (80)	83 (81)	87 (84)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	19	22	22
	Girls	9	11	11
	Total	28	33	33
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	82 (100)	97 (100)	97 (100)
	National	82 (80)	86 (85)	87 (86)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	14	10	24

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	14	13	14
	Girls	8	8	10
	Total	22	21	24
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	92 (74)	88 (74)	100 (69)
	National	70 (65)	69 (59)	78 (69)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	14	13	13
	Girls	7	7	7
	Total	21	20	20
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	88 (83)	83 (65)	83 (83)
	National	68 (65)	69 (65)	75 (72)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	3
White	163
Any other minority ethnic group	0

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	23.8
Average class size	27.1

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	4
Total aggregate hours worked per week	58

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	0.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15:1

Total number of education support staff	1
Total aggregate hours worked per week	17

Number of pupils per FTE adult	15
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
	£
Total income	420 746
Total expenditure	516 968
Expenditure per pupil	2361
Balance brought forward from previous year	99 947
Balance carried forward to next year	3 725

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	238
Number of questionnaires returned	108

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	53	38	6	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	36	50	5	1	8
Behaviour in the school is good.	39	56	2	1	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	44	17	7	5
The teaching is good.	36	51	4	0	9
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	24	50	16	4	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	38	5	5	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	62	32	3	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	44	44	6	5	1
The school is well led and managed.	40	45	8	0	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	51	44	1	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	50	39	5	1	6