

INSPECTION REPORT

MIDDLETON SCHOOL

Ware, Hertfordshire

Local Education Authority area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117676

Headteacher: André Staras

Reporting inspector: George Derby
25349

Dates of inspection: 8 – 10 May 2000

Inspection number: 191563

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	5 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Walnut Tree Walk Ware Hertfordshire
Postcode:	SG12 9PD
Telephone number:	01920 485152
Fax number:	01920 486738
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Derek Goodall
Date of previous inspection:	May 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
George Derby	<i>Registered inspector</i>
Julian Sorsby	<i>Lay inspector</i>
Sue Lewis	<i>Team inspector</i>
David Walker	<i>Team inspector</i>

The inspection contractor was:

*Westminster Education Consultants
Old Garden House
The Lanterns
Bridge Lane
London
SW11 3AD*

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33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Middleton school is a community special school for 78 pupils aged 5 to 11 years. The majority of them have moderate learning difficulties, although a significant minority (12 pupils) are also autistic. Pupils' language difficulties are a significant factor which affects their learning. Very few pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Nearly 30 per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school's roll has fallen over recent years, although a base for eight autistic pupils has been established as part of the school's provision. 'Outreach', supporting pupils in mainstream schools, is planned to begin in the autumn term and, recently, senior staff have been trained for this new role.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a highly effective school where the 'total' learning environment is exceptional. That is, the school's excellent accommodation and resources, high quality teaching, and excellent learning opportunities have a significant effect on pupils' achievements. The school benefits from a highly committed staff, who plan, share, and celebrate pupils' very good achievements together. There is a real 'buzz' about the school, reflecting its excellent ethos and a quality of teaching which is very good, with some excellent features. All the pupils gain the important skills of literacy and numeracy, and their achievements in communication are really good by the time they leave the school. The school's care for its pupils, and the provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is excellent. The quality of classroom and therapy support is excellent, and the way in which all staff, including school secretary, caretaker and lunchtime staff contribute to pupils' achievements is outstanding. The school gives very good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Pupils' liking for school, their interest in what they are learning, their behaviour, and their personal development are exceptional. By 11 they are confident, well-adjusted children who are very well prepared for their next school.
- Overall, the quality of teaching is very good with some excellent features, enabling pupils to make the best possible progress. Significant strengths are the way in which every opportunity is given for pupils to make oral contributions to lessons and the superb emphasis on ensuring that they learn thoroughly.
- The pupils' achievements in speaking and listening are excellent. The same is true of the development of pupils' social and verbal communication, through the high quality provision in the autism base and across the curriculum as a whole.
- The way in which the school is implementing the numeracy and literacy strategies, and the very good quality of teaching in these areas, is having a significant effect on pupils' progress in English and mathematics.
- The school is very well led and managed by the headteacher, who is very ably assisted by the senior teachers.
- The classroom support staff and therapy staff significantly contribute to the overall excellent care which the school has for its pupils.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Given the school's outstanding achievements, there are no significant areas for improvement, though some less important issues relating to monitoring and target setting have been identified in the main report.

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 May 1996. Although there were no key issues for governors to respond to, the school development plan was used as the basis for the school's action for improvement. The quality of teaching has significantly improved and there is now no unsatisfactory teaching; most of it is very good or excellent. The role of co-ordinators is now clear, and literacy and numeracy teams have been established across the different departments. Formal, but mostly informal, monitoring has been undertaken by the headteacher, but co-ordinators do not yet have an opportunity to check on the teaching of their subject across the departments. Departmental heads do meet regularly with each other to identify strengths or weaknesses of the work in their departments, to monitor the quality of pupils' work, and to evaluate the systems in place to enable pupils to make progress. There are now greater opportunities for extended writing through other subjects, but these could still be developed further. There is now a wider range of reading material throughout the school. Baseline assessment is in place, and that and other forms of assessment are now being used to establish targets for school target setting. Through a wide range of religious celebrations/festivals and visits, there are more extensive cultural opportunities and multicultural experiences. Sex education is now part of personal social and health education and is supported by the school curriculum and by the school nurse.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets by the time they leave the school.

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

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

The school has set challenging targets for individual pupils and for year groups. It has thoroughly assessed all the pupils to establish where their attainment lies in relation to the new guidance on the early National Curriculum levels (*the differentiated performance criteria*). It intends to repeat this so as to obtain more information about pupils' achievements and to set challenging targets for the whole school. Pupils' achievements are very good overall. This is because of the high quality of the teaching and the very good way in which pupils' learning opportunities are put together.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' attitudes are excellent; they are courteous and polite. They show a wonderful enthusiasm for work and for the school in general. In lessons they concentrate superbly well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils' behaviour at lunch times, in the playground, and when departing from school is excellent. In class they behave exceptionally well. There are no exclusions.
Personal development and relationships	Personal development is excellent. Pupils have a good understanding of their place in society, and function in a mature and sensible manner. Relationships between pupils and with adults are excellent. Pupils have a real concern for each other and are sensitive to each other's feelings.
Attendance	Pupils' attendance is 95 per cent and is in line with what is expected of all schools. It is very good in relation to that of similar special schools.

In class pupils are polite and courteous and concentrate on their work really well, causing no significant difficulties. The result is an environment which is really conducive to learning. The ethos of the school promotes pupils' personal development very well. In lessons pupils are given every opportunity to make a full contribution, and the school successfully encourages pupils to learn and think for themselves in a variety of ways, including research through books or the computer.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 5-11
Lessons seen overall	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 very good and sometimes excellent teaching is particularly creative, imaginative and lively, and contributes significantly to the high standards which pupils achieve. Overall, 61 per cent of the teaching seen on the inspection was very good or excellent, and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. The rest of the teaching was good with the exception of one lesson, which was satisfactory.

In English and mathematics (including literacy and numeracy) nearly seven tenths and three quarters respectively was very good or excellent, contributing to teaching of an exceptionally high standard in these subjects. In science, the teaching in half the lessons was judged to be very good. Too little teaching of personal, social and health education was seen to enable an

overall judgement to be made, but in the three lessons observed the teaching was good or very good. The quality of teachers' planning is excellent and very clearly identifies what the pupils are to learn in the lesson, though not all teachers tell the pupils what they are to going to learn. Teachers are particularly skilful in matching the activities to pupils' abilities, a key to why they learn so well. The highly supportive way in which teachers question, observe, discuss, and explain ensures that pupils' learning is thorough and effectively builds on what they have learned before.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Curriculum provision is excellent and has no significant weaknesses. The quality of teachers' planning, understanding and knowledge of the curriculum is particularly high, and results in highly relevant creative and imaginative learning experiences for the pupils. Information technology is very well used both within topics and in discrete subjects, such as English, to support pupils' access to the curriculum and to extend their understanding; consequently pupils have high levels of information technology skills. The school's broad, balanced curriculum is underpinned by a deep understanding of pupils' needs and the learning process.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent overall. Opportunities for spiritual development are very good. Provision for social, moral and cultural development is excellent. Pupils develop a high respect for themselves, the feelings of others, and their school. They are given many opportunities to increase their personal responsibility as they move through the school. There is an effective code of conduct, and staff are excellent role models.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Excellent. Every effort is made by the school to provide the highest standard of care. All staff have high regard for pupils' welfare, and they know their pupils very well indeed. Child protection procedures are excellent; staff have regular training, and the school has a very close working relationship with the local social services department, to the benefit of pupils. Very thorough risk assessment is routinely carried out throughout the school. Teachers know their pupils thoroughly because of the way they assess them.

The learning opportunities for pupils who are autistic are also excellent. The way in which the staff encourage the pupils' communication through the subjects they teach has a significant impact on the pupils' personal development and enables them to integrate into classes as soon as they are ready.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher, whose leadership is very strong, has a clear vision for the development of the school. The thoroughly considered plan for improvement ensures that the school continues to provide a high quality of provision.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Good. Governors are highly committed to the school and very supportive of it. The long-standing chair of governors is a regular visitor who knows the pupils well and has a very good knowledge of virtually all aspects of the school's work. The newly constituted governing body is developing its role as a critical friend, but some members are currently too reliant on the headteacher for information.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The school reflects carefully on all aspects of its work, and the headteacher, staff and governors are constantly evaluating how they can do things better, to further improve standards and quality. Through the headteacher's work on a range of local working parties he is able to bring in new ideas and information, and use them to check on aspects of the school's work.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent use is made of all the school's very high quality resources (books, equipment and materials), and the headteacher is adept at attracting additional funds. The improvement plan guides the allocation of resources very well. The use of standards funding has been very well targeted to develop the literacy skills of pupils who have been identified as needing extra help.

The principles of best value are beginning to be applied, and what the school has done so far is good. The headteacher has a very good knowledge of how the school compares in terms of cost with other similar schools. Governors always seek the best value in services and resources supplied to the school and adhere to local education authority procedures. Ways of comparing standards with those of other special schools are being sought.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What most parents like about the school	What some parents are not happy about
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching is good; children make progress. The school is approachable if parents have any problems. It expects their children to work hard and achieve their best. It is well led and managed. It helps their children to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The amount of work their children are given to do at home. Parents are not well informed about their children's progress.

Inspectors share the positive views expressed by all the parents who made their views known. The amount of homework (including reading work at home) is appropriate and is in line with the school's published homework policy. Parents are very well informed about their children's progress, and reports are detailed and informative. However, parents are not always sufficiently informed about the work that their children are to study in the coming term. Parents would welcome such information in order to help their children better at home.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

1. Pupils' liking for school, their interest in what they are learning, their behaviour and their personal development are exceptional. By 11 they are confident, well-adjusted children who are very well prepared for their next school.

2. The staff make learning a pleasurable and exciting activity. They provide meaningful work, some of it in the form of topics which have been very well thought out and constructed. The high quality of the planning means that the work is well linked to the National Curriculum programmes of study. This enables pupils to make progress in the subjects studied and, above all, helps them to make sense of what they are learning. As a result, pupils work hard and try hard.

3. Pupils are courteous and polite and take a genuine interest in people. They have good manners and frequently say 'please' and 'thank you' when speaking to adults and their peers. For instance, a pupil readily responded with 'thanks' when a teacher praised his work. They readily praise each other for their efforts and are sensitive to one another's feelings. They show good imagination, for example making the observation that Henry VIII was 'around in Tudor times' and that they would like to turn the clock back and meet him. At the end of a Year 6 science lesson, pupils reported back to the class about what they had found from their research about animal characteristics and groupings. One pupil exclaimed 'impressive!' at a pupil's delivery. There is no bullying in the school, and pupils confirm this. They say that it, *"used to happen, but not any more. The pupil concerned is still in school but has decided to behave"*.

4. Pupils often show a high level of interest in their lessons, such as in Year 3 / 4 science lesson. They compared parts of the plastic skeleton the teacher was using as an exhibit with their own bones, feeling them through their skin, and describing the similarities.

5. Their keenness to do their best can leave them a little frustrated, as in a Year 6 numeracy lesson when they were unable to accurately make up party bags to a specified sum of money. They wanted to get their answers correct and as a result of the way in which the teacher dealt with their frustrations, they learned well from what they did wrong. Such excellent ability to concentrate is in contrast to the difficulties which most pupils have been identified as experiencing prior to entering Middleton. The pupils' levels of attention and concentration throughout Key Stage 2 are particularly impressive. In form time, there are high quality opportunities for supported, guided, paired and independent reading, as well as opportunities for other independent work and choices. In all these, pupils concentrate intently and learn very effectively.

6. An example was to be seen in a Year 4 personal and social education lesson which took place at the beginning of the school day. One pupil independently chose to create a Mondrian style picture, using the computer, an idea presented the previous day in an information technology lesson. Another read a story, with expression.

7. Pupils are aware of their personal targets and try hard to meet them. In an interview with an inspector one pupil said, *"I've always been in trouble – but from now on I'm staying out of it"*. Pupils' personal development is very well supported through the developing programme of separate lessons for personal, social and health education (PSHE), based on

the scheme the school has adopted. Pupils are able to make very good progress towards their targets, and in their development. This results from the additional time for PSHE around registration, and from the careful support given across the curriculum for personal responsibility, independent learning, and citizenship.

8. Pupils enter the school at the beginning of Key Stage 1 with very few skills to help themselves, and they have limited awareness of the needs of others. By Year 6 they listen carefully to each other and to their teachers, collaborate, and help each other with work. They offer to open doors for visitors, chat freely and with confidence about their work, and can express views about their learning. They understand simple facts about pollution and smoking and have some understanding of the implications on healthy living.

9. **Overall, the quality of teaching is very good with some excellent features, enabling pupils to make the best possible progress. Significant strengths are the way in which every opportunity is given for pupils to make oral contributions to lessons and the superb emphasis on ensuring that they learn thoroughly.**

10. The quality of teaching was very good or excellent in just over three fifths of the 44 lessons seen, and was good or better in all but one, where it was satisfactory. In four lessons the teaching was excellent.

11. The lively and imaginative teaching has a significant effect on pupils' learning, which means that they learn very well and make very good progress. Teachers know their pupils thoroughly, and through excellent and particularly probing questioning they explore pupils' knowledge and understanding of what they are learning. They use the information gained to adjust pupils' learning experiences accordingly, and give additional support where necessary. In addition, the highly effective use of plenary sessions and of pupils' own ideas, research, and talk, means that teachers gain a great insight into how pupils are learning and any misconceptions they may have. There were some occasions, however, when teachers could have given more time to the very important plenary part of the lesson. Pupils' good opportunities for speaking and listening have a marked effect on their personal development, because of the way in which teachers value what they say and the encouraging feedback they give. The result is that pupils grow in confidence. As they get older, despite the fact that some have continuing speech difficulties, pupils are quick to volunteer ideas and take up opportunities for involvement. In practice, during lessons there is generally no shortage of contributors, though teachers are sensitive to those who may be shy or have more severe speech and language difficulties than the rest.

12. Planning is excellent. It is thoroughly thought out, and detailed, with clear aims and work planned to match the needs of the different pupils within the group. Teachers are clearly focused on the outcomes they want the pupils to achieve and most, but not all, make this clear at the beginning of the lesson. The practice of targeting specific well-matched work for individuals and groups is excellent and means that pupils learn particularly well, at their own pace for their abilities. Many different ways of achieving this are employed, such as providing different materials or identifying different expectations, and these are always well thought out before the lesson. Support staff are used particularly well in this respect and provide highly effective support. Examples are when they lead group work during

literacy and numeracy lessons, hear individuals read in the form time sessions, and supervise pupils using the computer. At times, however, in whole class sessions they could be used better, for example to make assessments on individual pupils. All staff have a shared understanding of their roles, and support staff use their initiative well, looking for pupils who need help and responding immediately.

13. Another significant strength is the way in which teachers present lessons, making the most of interesting resources, such as building materials, and sparking pupils' interest and imagination. An example was the use of roof tiles, bricks, and electric cable in a Key Stage 1 science / humanities lesson. The pace of lessons is always brisk, with a great deal expected from the pupils. The quality of teachers' talk, as they introduce and develop their lessons and talk about pupils' learning opportunities, is exceptional. It supports pupils' development not only in the subject in question but in other areas of need. For instance, in a lesson in the autism base the teacher's clear exposition of what was expected and how the lesson would develop supported pupils' security and understanding. Her very expressive delivery kept pupils spellbound and focused their attention on identifying rhyming words. Throughout the school the very good emphasis on subject-specific vocabulary, and explanation of it, enables pupils to develop a clear understanding of the ideas they are presented with. For instance, in a Year 3 / 4 science lesson on growth and the skeleton, the idea of 'nutrition' was introduced. Building on previous work, pupils quickly gained an understanding of this in terms of healthy food. Because of the continual emphasis, reinforcement, and revisiting of ideas pupils are able use their existing knowledge.

14. As a result of the way in which the curriculum is planned, they learn very effectively because they see how ideas are linked. Reinforcement of literacy, numeracy and information technology skills is carefully woven into lessons. This is so much the case that pupils spontaneously use these skills across the curriculum, not simply within the lessons and subjects in which they have been taught. For instance, in a lesson on animal groups in Year 6, pupils responded by suggesting how they could use the computer to solve a problem or find out information. Similarly, when pupils saw magnets in a science lesson in the autism base, they immediately counted them.

15. The pupils' achievements in speaking and listening are excellent. The same is true of the development of pupils' social and verbal communication, through the high quality provision in the autism base and across the curriculum as a whole.

16. The progress which pupils make in speaking and listening is excellent and it continues to be a significant strength of the school, as it was in the previous inspection. Many pupils have very immature language and communication skills when they enter the school, and their confidence is also limited. Once in the school, they are immediately included in an environment where everyone's contribution is highly valued and all are expected to listen. Adults are excellent role models because they listen carefully to what pupils have to say. Even if the pupils' conversation is 'off at a tangent', staff show that they value the pupils' ideas and responses, and carefully endeavour to gently bringing them 'back on track'. At both key stages there were many examples where teachers and support staff sensitively extended what pupils had to say in such a way that their language development was enhanced. The support for speaking and listening is a strength across the school, not just in English but in science, food technology, and religious education lessons, for example, where

teachers' highly skilled and sensitive use of questioning supports pupils' language development and their use of language in their learning. In addition, teachers carefully promote subject-specific vocabulary. Pupils' knowledge of subject terminology in areas such as geography, information technology, literacy and mathematics is impressive, and it consequently supports the often very good development of ideas in those subjects.

17. By the end of Key Stage 1 many pupils have improved their communication skills and have moved from being reluctant communicators to more positive ones. Some still need support to express themselves and to 'stay on topic', but all, including those with autism, have made excellent progress in relation to targets set for them and their relative starting points. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils are confident communicators who are interested in what the world has to say and who use their language to talk well about what they know, understand and are doing. Although some still have delayed language for their age, they have made excellent progress, particularly in their use of language and the way in which they listen to learn. They retell stories they have heard and read, and talk with some awareness of their listener's needs. They enjoy such activities as presenting weather forecasts to their fellow pupils, projecting their voice, making very good use of expression, and using appropriate terminology.

18. Excellent support in subjects means that pupils' vocabulary includes subject-specific terms, and it systematically promotes higher-level skills, such as the use of language for reasoning, making judgements, inference, and prediction. Pupils in both key stages talked freely with inspectors about the books they had read or the lesson they were in. Their talk demonstrated clearly their excellent progress in speaking, listening, and reflecting on their own experiences.

19. The school makes excellent provision for pupils in the autism base, and support for their communication is particularly strong. The school's 'inclusive' nature, and the very strong leadership of the base, means that pupils have equal access to the school's programme of learning opportunities. The highly trained and experienced staff provide a creative and imaginative curriculum. Learning opportunities also exist through pupils' many integration experiences.

20. All staff are committed to fully meeting the needs of all the autistic pupils, and most have received training to manage those pupils' needs within the school's 'ordinary' classes as well as in the base. Other pupils are supported entirely in the base, where the detailed planning is excellent.

21. The ethos of the base is excellent. It promotes a calm, purposeful, yet highly motivating working environment. A significant factor in pupils' progress in the base is the excellent trusting relationships between pupils and staff, and the way in which pupils are managed with insight and confidence. Work is very carefully matched to pupils needs and abilities. In a science lesson for example, pupils sorted materials into metal and plastic. Higher attaining pupils went on to explore the properties of magnets and marvelled at their 'dancing'. Lower attaining pupils played a magnet fishing game and learned to aim their rod towards the fish. Both groups of pupils progressed in their willingness to work with one another, take turns, interact and make eye contact. Teachers' careful planning and recognition of each pupil's potential underpins their significant progress. In addition, staff are not afraid to provide elements of challenge and change for pupils in lessons. All such challenges are carefully thought out in terms of their relevance for the pupil and their desired outcomes.

22. Excellent co-operation between base staff and the speech and language therapist ensures that all those dealing with the pupils understand their needs and their programmes. Individual pupils have clearly-defined language targets, and in daily routines and lessons teachers ensure that full attention is given to them. At registration time, for example, pupils are divided into groups to enable maximum involvement and eye contact. Pupils are expected to listen to each other and to express their feelings and views. Home-school books are shared, and 'welcome' songs are sung. At times, higher attaining pupils have specific teaching in how to greet each other, respond, and extend their conversation. These very good opportunities for pupils to use language socially are extended into other lessons so that pupils learn to use these skills in different contexts. The use of action and signs where appropriate supports pupils' involvement and understanding. One pupil has his own individual symbol book, which aids his communication well. The excellent skills of support staff extend pupils' language in lessons, and the incidental conversation has a notable effect on pupils' language and attention skills.

23. There is excellent support for pupils' personal and social skills in the autism base, and especially for their independence. Teachers demonstrate a sensitivity and respect for individual pupils' space; pupils are given simple choices, responsibilities, and asked for their views. Careful explanation of what is happening, why, and what is planned develops their trust and confidence. When pupils do find activities stressful or withdraw, staff support them very well and are very skilful in managing these situations so that the pupils return to their work as quickly as possible.

24. Planning, record keeping and assessment in the autism base are excellent. Staff know their pupils extremely well, as a result of the detailed termly target setting, joint planning by staff, careful and detailed reviews, and the use of some diagnostic tests. Pupils' work is clearly annotated and attainment levels identified. There are exemplary links with parents. As well as personal contact, there are home-school diaries, an introductory prospectus aiding the pupil's understanding of the school they may be attending, and photographic and clearly annotated records of achievement

25. The way the school is implementing the numeracy and literacy strategies, and the very good quality of teaching in these areas, is having a significant effect on pupils' progress in English and mathematics.

26. The school has made very good progress in its provision for English since the last inspection, when weaknesses were identified in relation to reading and writing, and a small amount of teaching was unsatisfactory. During this inspection, all the teaching of English, including that within the school's 'literacy hour', was at least good, and nearly 70 per cent was very good. The school gives high priority to English, and the introduction of the literacy strategy has strengthened it further. The school's use of government funding to support reading has meant that pupils whom the school considers could do better in their reading are targeted for extra support. This is having a positive effect on their progress and reflects the school's determination to help all pupils to achieve their full potential.

27. The teaching of speaking and listening and the learning opportunities provided for them are exceptional. They are very good in the case of reading and good in the development of writing. The school's provision in these areas has improved considerably since the last inspection and takes careful account of national initiatives. The school now provides a broader range of reading experiences, including good quality worksheets devised by the

teachers, and books produced by the pupils themselves. There are 'real' books, shared texts, computer produced materials, a good range of fiction and non-fiction, and regular access to high quality library books. Writing across the curriculum has also considerably improved; for instance, in food technology lessons pupils document their experiences and respond to increasingly complex written questions at both key stages. However, opportunities for extended writing in other subjects could be strengthened further as some pupils still lack confidence at Key Stage 2.

28. The school's high quality response to the development of literacy takes account of all aspects of English in relation to the needs of the pupils and the National Literacy Framework. The very strong curriculum contains an excellent range of learning opportunities, including very good examples of drama and role-play, as well as reading and writing for different purposes. There is systematic and focused support for letter-sound development (phonics), library and dictionary skills, and a strong focus on research skills at Key Stage 2. This supports pupils' independent learning well and uses to the full their reading skills to access information. Inter-departmental planning has produced a seamless programme of work which firmly encompasses the National Curriculum, desirable learning outcomes, and literacy framework. The focus is not simply upon what is taught but upon the learning outcomes for individuals and groups. There is systematic support for handwriting, spelling, and work at both word level and sentence level. Excellent text-level work is to be seen across the school. Particularly strong are the understanding of story language and sequence at Key Stage 1 and of plot, characterisation and detail at Key Stage 2.

29. Reading, writing and communication are supported at both key stages by the excellent use of information technology. For instance, teachers make use of a program which predicts what pupils are going to write and allows them to choose the correct words.

30. This particularly helps lower attaining pupils by supporting and maintaining their motivation and presentation, and aiding their self-expression. Although symbols are used with autistic pupils, a very small number of pupils would benefit from a broader range of the use of symbols for self-expression and to support literacy. Teachers record excellent observational detail and make good quality assessments using the early National Curriculum *differentiated performance criteria*. Speech and language therapists also use detailed profiles and tests to establish pupils' language levels. Excellent co-operation between teachers and therapists means that this information is shared and used well to help teachers in their planning. However, the school uses few other objective measures at present.

31. The school's response to the numeracy strategy is developing very well and lessons are very well planned, with clear objectives closely based on assessments made by the teachers, using the *differentiated performance criteria*. Teachers have benefited well from the training they have received, and the school has produced its own good quality 'Middleton School Numeracy Framework', based on a detailed knowledge of the current pupils' needs.

32. Similarly, all the teaching in mathematics was good; numeracy sessions are having a significant effect on sharpening pupils' mental skills, and they are clearly enjoying the challenge of this work. In 75 per cent of lessons, the teaching was very good or excellent. Pupils' learning in English and mathematics is directly related to the quality of the teaching and the very strong curriculum, of which the literacy and numeracy strategy form a main part. The setting of pupils by ability, and the very good way in which teachers further match work to the pupils' needs, also has a significant impact on their progress.

33. The school is very well led and managed by the headteacher, who is very ably assisted by the senior teachers.

34. There is very effective leadership and management by the headteacher and by senior staff who manage each 'department': Key Stage 1, lower Key Stage 2, upper Key Stage 2 and the autism base. Standards and the quality of education have improved since the last inspection, when they were already good or very good. Clear priorities in the very good school improvement plan have enabled the school to move forward, with staff and governors reflecting on what the school does well and where it needs to improve. The development of the very high quality autism base has been well planned, with appropriate training of all staff, and it has the same excellent ethos as the rest of the school.

35. The headteacher sets high standards, and has very high expectations of all staff. He has built a team which is very effective in helping pupils in their all round development, both academically and personally. All staff directly support pupils, and there is a total commitment by all including the caretaker, lunchtime staff and school secretary as well as therapy staff, teachers and support assistants.

36. The headteacher empowers staff to take responsibility and, by leading by example, gets the best results. In English and mathematics there are two co-ordinating groups of staff who manage the interdepartmental arrangements for the subjects. The system works well. The quality of the relationships is good, and there is a strong mutual commitment to the subjects, to high standards, and to meeting the needs of all the pupils. Continuity and progression are assured, and there is good evidence that planning is shared with support staff and careful attention is given to training for all. Curriculum provision is excellent, and much thought has gone into the process as well as into the outcomes. Staff have worked very hard to put together programmes which are constantly being reviewed and which, through excellent planning, help pupils understand what they are learning. Pupils' personal and social education, their self-expression, and their thinking and independence skills are supported by their experience in individual subjects and in the curriculum at large.

37. The oversight of the curriculum by the headteacher is strongly supported by governors. Along with departmental heads he monitors planning and records and, informally, observes teaching. This process was completed more formally in the past by using appraisal as the focus; appraisal records are thorough and perceptive, with very good advice and support given to aid improvement.

38. There is no policy for teaching and learning, but as an Ofsted inspector himself the headteacher has used the Framework for Inspection as a model at staff meetings to discuss and determine what constitutes good teaching and learning. However, although co-ordinators have very clear roles within the school and execute these very well, they have no opportunities to monitor the quality of teaching in their subject.

39. The school has undertaken a great deal of work to identify pupils' attainment against the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's *differentiated performance criteria*. Careful analysis of the statements has been made, and internal moderation has been employed. The school is using this information to set whole school targets, following a re-assessment during this summer term. This should enable the school to set accurate and challenging whole school targets to complement the very good quality targets which are already being set for year groups and individuals. Annual individual targets are re-evaluated in an informal way

with parents each term and, if necessary, new ones are set. The school's work over the past few years has resulted in targets which conform more closely to the model known as SMART (Specific, measurable, attainment, realistic and time-related). However, it is sometimes the case that the targets are repeated; this is because they are too broad and need to be broken into much smaller learning steps.

40. The headteacher and senior managers are informed and knowledgeable about curricular and other developments. The school's planning and discussions demonstrate the staff's swiftness to reflect and take account of such initiatives. The school has been involved in a number of local and national initiatives such as target setting, and more recently the headteacher has become a member of a working party formulating a process of self-evaluation of school performance, based on the Ofsted model.

41. The classroom support staff and therapy staff significantly contribute to the overall excellent care which the school has for its pupils.

42. All staff work very successfully as a team. Significant contributions are made by therapy and classroom support staff in supporting pupils' progress. Teachers, support assistants and therapists plan very well together. Support for pupils' communication is particularly strong in the autism base, and excellent co-operation between base staff and the speech and language therapists ensures that all staff understand the pupils' needs and their programmes. It also supports teachers' understanding of pupils' linguistic needs generally in the school and helps them to plan for the next stage of development.

43. Support staff display a real enthusiasm and interest in what pupils have to say and in what they are learning; they are skilled in responding to pupils and helping them understand what they are doing. They understand the process of language development well and are used effectively in developing pupils' social use of language. They know how to aid the progress of pupils with learning difficulties. For instance, they are skilled at 'scaffolding' – cueing pupils closer to the answer they require and making them think for themselves. They expect pupils to apply what has been learned previously and use their time very effectively to support reading and writing, particularly when some pupils lack confidence; this practice is particularly strong in form time in upper Key Stage 2. Support staff have gained a number of relevant qualifications and are putting the knowledge and skills they have gained into practice with the pupils.

44. The support and care for pupils within the context of their broader needs is of very high quality. This can be seen at lunchtime, where all staff, including the school secretary, take a personal interest in pupils' conversations, what they say about their life outside school, and any problems they may be encountering. Pupils' respect and care for the broader environment is supported by the smooth administrative arrangements, the excellent day-to-day running of the school, the well looked after building, and excellent displays.

45. Child protection procedures are very good and are adhered to well by staff. Regular training keeps all staff up to date and there are excellent relationships with the local social services department. Health and safety procedures are excellent, and the caretaker and a governor carry out termly audits. Risk assessments are regularly and thoroughly carried out on all aspects of the school life, including all educational visits, and on individual pupils where needed. Pupils' medical care is excellent, and staff are very well versed in procedures required and in dealing with medication. The arrangements for monitoring pupils' good behaviour and attendance are also excellent.

46. Procedures for monitoring pupils' academic performance and personal development are very good, with some excellent features. These are particularly strong in the autism base, where very detailed personal targets are set and success criteria are very clear. In the rest of the school the target setting is very good for the core subjects, though at times the targets for personal and social education are not specific enough or do not have specific success criteria.

47. The school has explored a number of ways of involving pupils in the target setting and in evaluating their own learning. Currently, the methods are mainly informal, such as reviews at the end of lessons. There are some very good pupil reviews at the end of a topic or unit of work, and teachers use very positive and interactive feedback so that pupils are clear about what is good about what they have said or done.

48. Day-to-day assessment opportunities are used very well and pupils' records of achievements detail their academic and other successes. They are used productively by staff to recall past experiences and to reflect on them. Some staff keep audio records for speaking and listening, though this practice is not used consistently across the school to track progress.

49. Reports to parents are generally very good, and every attempt is made to include parents in their child's annual review; the school tries very hard not to hold the annual review without parents. Occasionally, the very explicit statements made for English, mathematics and science are not replicated for the other subjects, which say more about what pupils have experienced rather than what they know, understand and can do.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

50. In terms of the excellent outcomes and achievements of the school there are no significant areas for improvement. Minor issues identified in the text above should be considered for inclusion in the school's action plan for improvement.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

51. The following are minor issues for improvement:

- Introduce more formal ways of monitoring the quality of teaching;
- Ensure that all individual pupils' targets are SMART and are reviewed and updated termly;
- Make clear to pupils what they are to learn in lessons are what they will learn next;
- Extend the use of symbols to all pupils who could benefit from these to aid their literacy;
- Inform parents before a work topic begins, and tell them what pupils are expected to learn, so that they are in a better position to help their children at home;
- Ensure that all parts of school reports to parents say clearly what pupils know, understand and can do.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	44
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	21

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
9	52	37	2	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

	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	78
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	22

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	3
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	1

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1

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 (percentage of pupils)

	<i>Level W</i>	<i>Level 1</i>	<i>Level 2</i>	<i>Level 3</i>
English	78	11	11	0
Mathematics	67	33	0	0
Science	78	22	0	0

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 (percentage of pupils)

	<i>Level W</i>	<i>Level 1</i>	<i>Level 2</i>	<i>Level 3</i>
English	24	65	12	0
Mathematics	29	59	12	0
Science	24	76	0	0

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	74
Any other minority ethnic group	1

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-Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	10
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	2.7
Average class size	7.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	322

Financial information

Financial year	1998/1999
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	£
Total income	678235.00
Total expenditure	669183.00
Expenditure per pupil	8262.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	39534.00
Balance carried forward to next year	48586.00*

* this is forecasted to reduce to £13000 at the end of the financial year 2000

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	83
Number of questionnaires returned	46

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	78	20	2	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	67	33	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	57	33	2	0	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	37	42	14	0	7
The teaching is good.	89	11	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	54	30	15	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	80	20	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	76	24	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	56	40	4	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	91	9	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	74	26	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	63	21	0	2	14