

INSPECTION REPORT

MERRYFIELDS SCHOOL

Newcastle under Lyme

LEA area: Staffordshire

Unique reference number: 124519

Headteacher: Mrs Anne Bird

Registered Inspector: Ian Naylor

20906

Dates of inspection: 18 - 22 February 2002

Inspection number: 191576

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Maintained
School category:	Community special
Age range of pupils:	2 to 19 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Hoon Avenue Newcastle Under Lyme Staffordshire Staffordshire
Postcode:	ST5 9NY
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Mary Jones
Date of previous inspection:	January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
20906	Ian Naylor	<i>Registered inspector</i>	Physical education.	Teaching; Attainment and progress; Leadership and management.
9577	Elaine Parish	<i>Lay inspector</i>		Care; Parents; Attitudes and behaviour.
21061	Mike Whitehead	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science; Modern Foreign Language.	Care; Equal opportunities.
1224	Graham Todd	<i>Team inspector</i>	Information and communications technology; Religious education.	Curriculum.
21899	Gill Lawson	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Art.	Curriculum: Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
16038	Jill Bavin	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Foundation stage; Design and technology.	
10782	Henry Moreton	<i>Team inspector</i>	Humanities.	Leadership and management; Staffing accommodation, resources.
20457	Brian Fletcher	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics; Music.	Leadership and management; Efficiency.

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Merryfields is a maintained day community special school for boys and girls aged two to nineteen. There are 85 pupils on roll and each has a Statement of Special Educational Need. Attainment on entry is well below standards expected nationally. There are 63 pupils who have severe learning difficulties (SLD) and 22 with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). There is only one pupil of statutory school age of non-white ethnic background. Twenty-five pupils have free school meals. All pupils have very complex needs and many have challenging behaviour. Since the last inspection there has been an increase in the number of pupils who have autistic spectrum disorders (ASD); more pupils have medical conditions that affect their learning and there has been a change in the age profile of the school. Although levels of ability have changed significantly since the last inspection, the school successfully meets the needs of the growing numbers of pupils with autism and PMLD. There is now a greater number of pupils (55) aged 11 to 19, and this has resulted in fewer being admitted in the lower age range. This has a significant effect on the curriculum organisation of the school. There are eight children in the Foundation Stage, one of whom is nursery age and seven who are Reception age.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school. The successful leadership and management significantly contribute to the high quality of the learning environment, the very good teaching and learning and the very good achievement of pupils. The school provides very good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Teaching and learning are very good across the school, particularly in communication skills and information and communication technology (ICT).
- Pupils' achievements are very good.
- The leadership and management of the school are of a high quality.
- There are excellent relationships in the school.
- The curriculum opportunities meet the needs of all pupils very well.
- The school has a very caring and safe environment for pupils.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Curriculum planning for geography, history and modern foreign language.
- Accommodation for Post 16 students, and some toilet areas.
- Opportunities for pupils to spend parts of each week in local primary and secondary schools.

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

Since the last Inspection of March 1997 the school had made good improvement. The curriculum now meets the needs of all pupils, including those aged three to five (Foundation Stage) and students aged 14 to 19. Pupils' achievements are assessed more accurately and consistently. Teaching is measured and evaluated and this has improved its quality. Teachers with responsibility for subjects have job descriptions detailing their responsibilities. Schemes of work have been written for most key subject areas. The use of ICT by pupils has been significantly improved. The school's special education needs policy has been revised and the personal care needs of pupils are now identified and met. Pupils all have access to similar opportunities and activities. Teaching in English and mathematics has improved with the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Leadership is far more effective, and management across the school has strengthened.

STANDARDS

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

Progress in:	by Year R	by Year 6	by Year 14	Key	
speaking and listening	A	A	A	<i>very good</i>	A
reading	A	B	B	<i>good</i>	B
writing	A	B	B	<i>satisfactory</i>	C
mathematics	B	A	A	<i>unsatisfactory</i>	D
personal, social and health education	B	B	B	<i>poor</i>	E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	A	A	A		

*IEPs = Individual education plans.

The school has reached its target for all pupils to complete successfully eight out of ten of the targets in their IEPs. Achievement is good in English (very good in communication skills), very good in mathematics, science, physical education, religious education, and ICT. Achievement is good in personal, social health education (PSHE) and in all other subjects. Achievement in the Foundation Stage (Pupils aged two to end of Reception Year) is very good overall.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils delight in coming to school. They work very hard and participate to the best of their abilities in all activities. They are well motivated to succeed.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils understand and respond well to class and school rules. They behave very well in class, around the school and when out on visits.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between pupils and staff and one another are excellent. Most pupils make very good progress in their self-confidence and skills of independence.
Attendance	Good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1–6	Years 7–9	Years 10-13
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very good	Very 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.

Teaching is very good overall. There was no teaching that was less than good. Teaching in English, mathematics, science, ICT, physical education, religious education, is very good. It is good in the other subjects. Teaching is very good at meeting the needs of all pupils. Learning is very good overall. Very good teamwork by staff; high expectations, excellent planning and preparation; the variety of activities presented; high quality behaviour management; very good subject knowledge; good recording and assessment; good use of praise and encouragement; recognition of achievement; collaboration with physiotherapists and speech and language therapists, all make superb contributions to the quality of teaching and learning. The teaching of pupils with PMLD is particularly good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The range of learning opportunities is very relevant to the needs of all pupils. English, mathematics, science, ICT, physical education and religious education are very well planned.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Lessons and planned activities give a high level of support to each of these areas. Teachers feel that this development is central to their work and the school provides a nurturing climate where pupils can grow and flourish.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. The school is a warm caring community that firmly places children at the heart of everything it does. There are high quality policies and procedures for all areas of care, including child protection. These are regularly reviewed.

The headteacher and staff work very successfully with parents. Very good information is provided about general matters as well as about the academic and social progress of pupils. Many parents help out in school. Parents are consulted on a range of issues.

The provisions for literacy and numeracy are good. The curriculum for Foundation Stage children and that for Post 16 students is now of a good quality. The curriculum is very good at meeting the very complex range of needs of pupils and all pupils have access to the full range of opportunities and activities available. There are very good extra-curricular activities.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership of the headteacher, and that of senior staff, is very good. They give exceptional support and motivation to all staff. Management of the curriculum and the resources of the school are very good.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	All statutory requirements are met, and the governing body meets regularly to determine school policies and procedures. Governors give good support to the staff and pupils.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There are excellent processes in place to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning and of other areas of the school's performance.
The strategic use of resources	Spending is carefully controlled, with proper attention given to ensuring that goods and services purchased represent good value. There are effective financial and administrative procedures and an efficient school office.

A lack of basic facilities such as adequate toilet arrangements for some pupils and changing areas, particularly for older pupils, makes it difficult for staff to offer privacy and dignity to pupils and students at all times. Many aspects of accommodation are very good, for example the hydrotherapy pool, and the sensory garden.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The headteacher and staff are very good at what they do. The school provides good information for parents. School staff are very helpful and there is strong emphasis on caring and sharing. Children's achievements are well documented. Teachers and staff have high expectations of pupils. Parental complaints (very few) are dealt with fairly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few parents would like more work for their child to do at home or say that they do not understand what homework means for pupils with severe learning difficulties. A few parents think that after-school activities could be provided.

Inspectors agree with all the positive views of parents. Inspectors feel the school has a satisfactory homework policy that is shared with parents and homework is often given where it will help pupils' progress. Transport arrangements severely restrict activities that can be provided for pupils outside school times. The school has given parents information about clubs and groups in their local area that offer activities for pupils with learning disability.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Analysis of pupils' work, IEPs, annual reviews, reports, teachers' records and evidence from lessons observations shows that achievement is very good in the Foundation Stage and at each key stage. Progress over time is very good.
2. Achievement is very good in communication skills, very good in mathematics, science, physical education, religious education, and ICT. Achievement is good in reading, writing, PSHE and in all other subjects. This is a greatly improved situation since the previous inspection and pupils' progress is now more uniform over all the subjects of the curriculum.
3. Achievement in the Foundation Stage is very good in communication, language and literacy, personal, social and emotional development, and knowledge and understanding of the world. It is never less than good across all the other areas of learning.
4. The school has reached its whole-school target of pupils successfully completing eight out of ten of the targets in their IEPs. The headteacher and staff have set new targets for 2002-2003 that aim to increase this by five per cent. This is realistic and achievable.
5. Since the last inspection accreditation has been introduced through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network scheme (ASDAN). In 2000 five students aged 16 students gained credits in two sections of the ASDAN Transition Challenge Awards, Independent Living Skills and Personal Autonomy. In 2001 two students aged 19 each achieved credits in three out of the ASDAN Towards Independence Awards; Getting ready to go out; Starting Out, Swimming, Ceramics, and Horse Riding.
6. The school has successfully introduced the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and this has supported very good progress in communication and numeracy skills. There has been increased emphasis on literacy and numeracy across the subjects and this has significantly helped pupils' progress. The school has effective methods for promoting pupils' communication skills through using signing, pictures and symbols. This, together with the close collaboration with speech and language therapists, helps pupils to make very good progress in this area.
7. The school is currently exploring the use of P-Scales (measurement of pre-national curriculum attainment), but as yet has insufficient data with which to make judgements about pupils' progress over time against these scales.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

8. Pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour are strengths of the school and have a significant impact on the progress pupils make. The high standards reported at the last inspection have been further improved. Pupils thrive on the excellent relationships throughout the school and their personal development is carefully nurtured in all aspects of school life.

9. Pupils enjoy school. When they arrive in the morning, they show that they are happy to be in school. In the questionnaires 96 per cent of parents agreed that their children like coming to school. Pupils often display high levels of interest in the activities provided for them and are able to stay on task and concentrate well. Pupils with more complex needs respond well to tasks that use a sensory approach to stimulate and interest them.

10. Standards of behaviour in lessons, in assemblies and around the school are very good. Pupils with challenging behaviour are managed very well by staff and other pupils are not distracted from their tasks. Pupils follow the very good example set by their teachers in showing respect for each other and for everyone who works in the school. On visits out of school behaviour is usually exemplary. Pupils' behaviour is equally good at break-times when they play together well, with no signs of unruly or oppressive behaviour.

11. Relationships are excellent throughout the school. Pupils and staff get on very well and show genuine affection for each other. Such good relationships make pupils happy and secure and give them the confidence to join in activities. Many pupils take part in day-to-day routines by helping to take the register to the office, often with a member of staff observing from a safe distance. They show independence by selecting activities, whether in lessons or at play. Older students enjoy the opportunity to run the Friday cafe and to choose their own drinks and lunch on trips to the supermarket or to college. More able pupils help others in their class without prompting, for example, by helping them hang their coats up or by passing drinks around. On one occasion a student from the senior department was observed encouraging a classmate to catch a ball by helping him cup his hands. In lessons and assemblies pupils show kindness and appreciation by spontaneously clapping the good work of others.

12. Attendance is good. There is very little unauthorised absence. Most parents co-operate with the school by reporting absences promptly.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

13. Teaching is of a consistently very high standard. Of the 70 lessons observed, ten were excellent, 25 were very good and 35 were good. None were less than good. Teaching, therefore, is very good overall. This is an improvement on the good position reported at the previous inspection. Teaching is very good in English, mathematics, science, physical education, religious education, and ICT. Teaching is also very good in the Foundation Stage. Teaching meets the needs of all pupils very well. Teachers plan very carefully and thoroughly. They use their extensive knowledge of pupils, gleaned from pupils' records, IEPs and statements, extremely effectively when preparing lessons, so that activities are relevant, challenging and matched to pupils' individual needs. They make clear what pupils will learn and communicate this well to the pupils. Teaching of pupils with PMLD is very good and often excellent.

14. An excellent lesson in English with higher attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 had a high quality approach to teaching literacy skills. Very good questioning by teachers helped to reinforce previous learning. There were high expectations by the teacher of pupils' recall of the class story that they were reading and of participation in a question and answer session. This illustrated that they had made good progress in their knowledge and understanding from the previous lesson of the use of alternative words with similar meanings. The lesson held the interest of pupils and they clearly enjoyed the session, were enthusiastic about their responses and consequently behaviour was extremely good. All staff worked seamlessly to support pupils' learning. As a final part of the lesson, the teacher asked the pupils to recall the things they had been reading and discussing, which they did very successfully.

15. The result of these consistently high standards in teaching is that learning by pupils across the school is also of a high quality. Pupils are given every opportunity to build on their success and extend achievement further and to make very good progress over time.

16. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and apply this very well. They understand the requirements of the National Curriculum and of the school's own curriculum and tailor these elements together in their teaching to expertly meet the needs of pupils.

17. Higher attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 made excellent progress in a science lesson because the excellent teaching built on the learning they experienced in the previous lesson. The lesson was about testing different objects to see if pupil predictions about what they were made of and the properties they had were correct. Pupils received excellent support from the teacher and learning support assistant; there was an excellent rapport between staff and pupils, expectations were high and planning and resources were very good. There was a tremendous atmosphere of anticipation in the lesson and pupils were encouraged to investigate for themselves and to discuss with one other their discoveries. The teacher gave pupils responsibility and expected them to take it. As a result of the very high quality of teaching, pupils recognised the difference between magnetic and non-magnetic substances and made outstanding progress in their learning.

18. Teamwork is very good between all staff. They work harmoniously to create a good learning environment. Teachers delegate well to learning support assistants who take responsibility for elements of teaching as well as giving excellent support to pupils' individual care needs. Staff work collaboratively and liaise well with other professionals such as physiotherapists so that a team approach is created which utilises the skills of all staff to the best advantage.

19. In a remarkable lesson in swimming for students with PMLD aged 14 to 19, teaching was excellent. The partnership between teacher, learning support assistant and three volunteer helpers was excellent. Between them they created an exciting range of activities to encourage and make students feel secure in the water. The teacher used pictures or symbols and signing to very good effect when giving instructions to students about the activities. This increased their awareness of what they were expected to do and gave them reassurance. The level of planning and use of resources was superb. The teacher's personal role in encouraging students, directing staff and volunteers was exemplary. Students made excellent progress and learned to put their face in the water and blow bubbles, and to float on their front and back.

20. Teachers and learning support assistants manage the behaviour of pupils well. They are well trained to deal with challenging behaviour and skilled at re-directing inappropriate behaviour so that disruptions to lessons and to learning are minimised.

21. Teachers use day-to-day recording and assessment strategies effectively. Learning support assistants are often used to collect and write down information about pupil's achievements and progress. Very good use is also made of digital photography by staff to capture pupil's achievements as they happen. Teachers generally make good use of this information in their planning for future lessons. There is also very good use of pupil self-evaluation in many lessons.

22. All staff have very high expectations of pupil involvement and participation in lessons. Lessons are frequently imaginative and resources are used well. Lessons often have an element of fun and pupils enjoy taking part. It is not unusual for there to be a 'buzz' of activity in lessons, with pupils highly motivated to succeed in the task they are set. Relationships between staff and pupils are of a high order.

23. In a mathematics lesson for lower attaining pupils aged 14 to 16, pupils listened well to a tape recording and joined in enthusiastically with the counting and clapping songs. The teacher used a very good array of objects such as socks and gloves for the pupils to count in twos. The excellent planning, relationships and knowledge of pupils' needs, together with a very individual teaching style that used tone of voice and facial expression to convey meaning, captured the imagination of pupils and held their interest. Potentially disruptive behaviour by one pupil was redirected effortlessly and the pupil re-engaged in the activity successfully.

24. An excellent lesson at the Foundation Stage with children aged three to five at the start of a school day had carefully chosen activities to promote child initiated play. These included toys, music and computer programs. There were high expectations by staff that children participate and play alongside one another. The teacher's very good knowledge of the children's needs meant that skilful interventions were made to keep them focussed on the activities and to give each child opportunities to communicate with adults and with other children.

25. Homework is set well by teachers to extend pupils' learning. Some homework is outlined to pupils and parents in the home-school books or via IEPs and has an expectation that parents will work with school staff to encourage their child's learning at home in basic social and communication skills.

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

26. There has been a good improvement in the quality of the curriculum since the last inspection. In particular, the last report was critical of the Foundation Stage and Post 16 curriculum. These have both improved significantly. There has been very good improvement in the development of ICT. It is used effectively in all subjects of the curriculum.

27. The curriculum is carefully planned to ensure that pupils' educational and communication needs are well met. The quality and range of learning opportunities for all pupils are good throughout the school. The deputy headteacher co-ordinates curriculum development very well and ensures that the planning complies with National Curriculum requirements. Subject co-ordinators submit a development plan annually and report to the governing body. This gives very good support to planning and management of the curriculum.

28. All statutory requirements are in place, including the teaching of sex education, which was a weakness at the time of the last inspection. The pupils experience the full range of the National Curriculum, plus religious education, PSHE and sex education.

29. Teachers have received training in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and are implementing them well. There are good quality schemes of work in English, mathematics, science, ICT, religious education, physical education and PSHE. Schemes of work for other subjects such as art, design and technology, humanities, music and a modern foreign language are not yet complete. However, the school development plan shows the intention to finish these by the end of this year.

30. The curriculum for pupils in Years 10 and 11 is good and focuses effectively on preparing them for the ASDAN Transition Challenge, whilst the Post 16 students follow the ASDAN course Towards Independence. The school has very good links to the local careers service which provides a good programme of careers education from Year 10. Good support is given to pupils during the transition from school at age 19.

31. The curriculum at the Foundation Stage for children from two to five years is good. It is carefully planned and prepares children well for the transition to the lower school department. Teachers and support assistants are well aware of the priorities to bring children's behaviour under control and to promote their communication and social skills in order that they learn effectively. The curriculum quite rightly reflects this emphasis, while also providing a good range of activities and experiences linked to the recommended areas of learning for children of this age. This represents very good improvement since the last inspection. Members of the Foundation Stage team appreciate the importance of child-initiated play. The school has worked very hard to develop systems for planning to meet the individual needs of all children while also planning to provide the recommended 'Areas of Learning' for children of this age. Additionally, the school has developed very clear strategies for dealing with disruptive behaviour and has considerably enhanced the accommodation and supply of suitable resources, and significantly increased the use of information technology to help children's communication.

32. Since the last inspection, more opportunities have been taken to include pupils with PMLD within other classes and groups. The partnership with local schools has resulted in opportunities for pupils to mix with pupils from mainstream schools. For example, the local high school orchestra has played at a Merryfields assembly and pupils from the high school help at lunchtimes. Some Key Stage 4 and Post 16 students benefit from visiting a local college of further education on a regular basis and mixing socially with other students there. In the past children from the Foundation Stage class have spent time visiting a local nursery. However, despite the best efforts of the school, few pupils have the opportunity to experience the curriculum in mainstream schools.

33. The school regards the PSHE programme as a vital element in nurturing the pupils' social and personal development. The provision for PSHE within the curriculum is good and, consequently, pupils are encouraged to grow in maturity and responsibility. However, there is a need for regular weekly lessons for PSHE in all classes.

34. The extra-curricular activities are very good. There is a wide range of activities available for pupils. Examples of these are music, drama, art, theatre, residential visits, sporting competitions with other special schools and fund-raising events such as sponsor days. There are very good connections with local businesses; the pupils following the ASDAN course are well known by local shopkeepers. The school has very good relationships with partner institutions; these effectively support both curriculum opportunities for pupils as well as professional development for teachers.

35. The school makes very good provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) of pupils. Teachers feel that this development is central to their work and the school provides a nurturing learning environment where pupils can grow and flourish.

36. In well planned assemblies pupils are given times for reflection and for prayer, and to celebrate their own and each others' achievement. In classroom displays, photographs, visits and lessons they learn about the world's natural beauty. For example, in art, pupils

learn to arrange and appreciate the beauty of still life compositions in natural materials. In music, they are encouraged to express their reactions and feelings after listening to a wide range of music and to compose their own work expressing similar feelings. Religious education lessons strongly support pupils' spiritual development.

37. The school rules and each teacher's expectations for good behaviour are very clear to the pupils. Pupils are taught right from wrong and encouraged from an early age to be tolerant of others, to share and to show self-control. Parents welcome the friendly atmosphere in the school and feel that the values that inform the everyday life of the school are successfully passed on to the pupils.

38. By use of frequent praise, example and encouragement from staff, pupils grow in self-esteem and self-awareness so that when they reach the senior part of the school they are mature and confident young adults. Inspectors particularly noticed this when pupils visited the local college on a link course.

39. Pupils have the opportunity to explore their own and other world cultures through their lessons. Religious education lessons also make a strong contribution to pupils' cultural and multicultural awareness. Pupils visit theatres and concerts and welcome visiting companies and performers. Pupils with PMLD particularly enjoy theatre companies who specialise in working with sensory media. Pupils are taken to museums, encouraged to write their own poetry and music, and visit places of worship. Visitors to the school, including artists in residence, enhance pupils' cultural development.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

40. The school is a very warm and caring community that places children firmly at the heart of everything it does. Everyone works together for the good of the pupils. Staff are unfailingly kind and pupils trust them completely. Pupils' high levels of confidence in this security and support helps them both to enjoy and get the most from their time in school. Staff are very conscious of the need to pay close attention to protecting pupils from harm and to promoting their health, safety and general well being. The good standards of care identified in the last inspection report have been built on and improved. They are now very good overall.

41. Very good induction procedures and regular training ensure that all staff have a very good awareness of child protection issues. The health and safety policy is effective and is reviewed regularly in meticulous detail. Fire drills are held regularly and there is excellent attention to safety in the school swimming pool. The arrangements made by staff for pupils' arrival and departure and getting them on and off transport, are good. There is very good liaison with outside support agencies and there is excellent support from the physiotherapist based in school.

42. Learning support assistants are patient and encouraging and make a very good contribution to the care pupils receive. There are very good admission and transition arrangements. Although there is not a full-time nurse, there are exemplary procedures to ensure pupils' continuing health care, with excellent practices for first aid and for administering medicines. Risk assessments are completed for each pupil and are reviewed regularly. All activities that take place offsite are subjected to a very thorough assessment of the risks involved.

43. Notwithstanding these very high standards of care, the school is unable to ensure the continuing dignity and privacy for some pupils because there are inadequate toilet and changing facilities. Provision throughout the school, and particularly in the middle department, is unsatisfactory. This was mentioned in the last inspection report.

44. The school has very good procedures to promote good behaviour and there is very little bullying. Most pupils and students understand the effects of their behaviour on others and they are helped by staff to ignore inappropriate behaviour of other pupils. Staff give pupils regular praise and encouragement and receive regular training which helps them to support and manage good behaviour. Individual behaviour plans, which are constantly reviewed to ensure their continued effectiveness, are set up for pupils with challenging behaviour.

45. There are very good procedures in place to support good attendance. The school makes clear to parents that they must inform the school if their child is absent. The school follows up pupil absences by phone call or letter. Careful checks are made on each pupil's pattern of attendance.

46. Teachers have a clear picture of pupils' strengths and weaknesses in their personal development and these are carefully recorded. Personal targets are included in pupils' IEPs. These targets are relevant to pupils' needs and are effective in promoting their independence and their personal and social development. The school takes very great care to acknowledge pupils' achievements, particularly when they have made an effort and tried hard. These are celebrated in regular assemblies. Achievement certificates are proudly displayed in the entrance foyer.

47. The school has a good assessment policy. This is an improvement since the last inspection. When pupils enter the school they are assessed carefully to determine their individual levels of attainment. Information obtained from the pupils' statements of special educational needs is used well to formulate targets on pupils' individual education and behaviour plans. The pupils' individual targets are addressed consistently by the teachers and support staff, and are effective in helping to raise pupils' levels of attainment and to eliminate any behavioural difficulties.

48. There is now a whole school approach to assessment, which is based on the P-Scales (measurement of Pre-National Curriculum attainment). This is a recent change to the assessment procedures and features clearly in the school development planning. The implementation of this system is being carefully monitored by the headteacher and her deputy, who ensure that staff are allocated sufficient time to plan and match targets to the individual needs of the pupils, as indicated by their assessment results. As yet this system has not produced enough information in all subjects to show trends or changes over time. Nor does the school analyse the information it has, in order to make comparisons between the attainment and progress of different groups of pupils in the school and ensure that there are no opportunities missed to meet their special needs or different situations.

49. Teachers collect information about pupils' standards of work in English, mathematics, science and PSHE. Across the remaining subjects assessment information is better collated in the middle school than in the lower school classes and the senior classes, where it is not as consistent. The school is aware of this and has plans to address it. Assessment procedures are good in the Foundation Stage and are used well by teachers and assistants at the end of each session.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

50. The school is very committed to building a close and effective partnership with parents. This makes a very good contribution to the life of the school and to the progress pupils make. The successful links with parents that were reported in the last inspection report have been maintained.

51. In the questionnaires and at the pre-inspection meeting parents registered very strong support for the school. Several parents interviewed by inspectors during the inspection gave further indications of support for everything the school does for their child. Ninety-three per cent of parents who replied to the questionnaire believe that the school works closely with them and they would feel comfortable approaching the school with questions or a problem. Parents are confident that their children are cared for well and 97 per cent believe they make as much progress as possible. Inspection evidence entirely supports parents' high levels of satisfaction with the way in which the school works in partnership with them.

52. The school has put considerable thought into the way it communicates with parents and the quality of information it provides for them is very good. For prospective parents there is an excellent induction package. This package and the prospectus are well presented and give a very clear picture of the school's aims and provision. There is a good range of letters keeping parents up to date with current topics and with school activities. Parents are well informed about their children's progress with regular meetings and a very informative annual report. Parents are given every opportunity to become involved in supporting their children's targets in their IEPs. The school values parents' views and actively seeks their opinions on such matters as improvements to transport arrangements and the sex education policy.

53. Parents are welcomed into school and several make a regular commitment to assist in activities such as swimming and horse riding. The school would find it difficult to maintain the swimming and horse riding activities if parents and volunteers' withdrew their help and support. All staff are considered helpful and approachable and respond very well to parents' phone calls. Several parents reported to inspectors that they particularly appreciated the school's willingness to listen and to support them over any problems they face.

54. The school provides home/school diaries for teachers and parents to share information and these are used very well in most classes. Parents particularly enjoy seeing digital photographs and videos of activities that give a very clear idea of what their child has achieved. Parents have already signed the home/school partnership agreement and the greater majority co-operate readily, for example, by supporting their children's targets at home and by reporting absences promptly. Parents demonstrate their interest in the school by attending open evenings, supporting school activities, and responding to questionnaires. An invitation to parents with children in the senior department to look at their project on the Vikings during the inspection week was very well supported, with 25 parents in attendance.

55. There is an active Friends' Association which contributes generously to school funds and which cements excellent relationships between parents and staff. Pupils have benefited from the funds raised on their behalf and by the quality of relationships forged between home and the school. Parents are very appreciative of the support given by the school to the Association's events and see this as practical evidence of the school's commitment to building a strong home/school partnership.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

56. The headteacher has worked industriously since the previous inspection to secure a

culture of improvement in the school and she provides very good leadership and motivation to all staff. She works in close harmony with the deputy headteacher and senior teacher, and between them they provide a strong senior management team that drives forward the development of the school towards meeting its aims. Leadership and management have improved since the previous inspection.

57. Teamwork is very apparent across all areas of the school's work and is a particular feature of the successful teaching. There are very good relationships between staff who work together to make a positive learning environment in which each pupil can enjoy equal access to all learning activities. The headteacher has instilled the concepts of mutual trust and professionalism between teachers and learning support assistants, and between the staff of the school and other professionals such as speech and language therapists and physiotherapists. All staff are committed to moving the school forward and the work completed after the last inspection has demonstrated that they have the capacity to succeed.

58. The headteacher has developed a very good management structure. Regularly reviewed and detailed job descriptions give staff clear indicators for their delegated responsibilities and roles within the school. The requirements for performance management are now fully in place. The members of the senior management team act as team leaders and they help teachers to set targets for their own teaching performance and for the learning and achievement of pupils. The senior management team makes careful observations of lessons and discusses with teachers the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching. This has helped teachers to improve their teaching with the result that this is now very good overall. Pupils' achievements have also increased as a result.

59. The headteacher gives regular reports to the governors about all aspects of school life and also makes sure that governors receive the latest information about local education authority (LEA) or Department for Education and Skills initiatives (DfES). In this way the governors are well informed about what happens in school.

60. The governing body has been somewhat weakened over the past few years by a number of changes of chairman. This has affected continuity. However, the new chairman is very enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the school and together with the rest of the governors is fully behind the headteacher and staff in their quest to raise standards and secure continuing improvements. Governors have sound procedures for their committees. They approve and review school policies and spending decisions and ensure that school procedures are implemented correctly. All statutory requirements are met. Governors give invaluable support to the staff and pupils.

61. The school development plan is very good. It sets out clearly the priorities for development and action to be taken over a period of two years in all areas of the school, the person or persons responsible for the actions and how the success of the action will be evaluated. Subject development plans contribute to whole school targets. The school development plan is submitted to the governing body each year for their approval. In order to satisfy themselves that the plans are being carried out properly, the governors have several methods for checking their success. Subject leaders give verbal reports at the governors' meeting about their subjects and the progress that pupils are making.

62. Governors have delegated responsibilities for certain activities. For example, there is a governor responsible for literacy. They make regular visits to classrooms to check for themselves that policy is being carried out. With the support of the headteacher the governors also undertake lesson observations and discuss with teachers their views on the teaching they have seen.

63. The headteacher has involved the school in a self-review of its own performance. This has been most effective in getting the staff and governors to understand the schools' strengths and weaknesses. Work has been undertaken in conjunction with partner mainstream schools. The headteacher also liaises closely with other similar local special schools. This has enabled the school to compare itself with other similar schools, and to keep abreast of the latest developments in special educational needs provision. An example of the success of this is seen in the current development of the P-Scales in the school. A relatively weaker area, but satisfactory overall, is the arrangement for pupils to integrate to and from local primary and secondary schools. Despite the effort and contacts that the headteacher has made, integration of pupils into other schools is still only a trickle and not as much as the school considers might be beneficial to their needs.

64. The governing body and the headteacher, since the last inspection, have continued to manage the school budget efficiently. By judicious and prudent spending, extra teachers have been employed to cater for smaller groups in mathematics and English in the middle and senior phases. The focus of the school development plan for the past three years has been the extension of provision for Foundation Stage and for Post 16 students. The governors and the headteacher consider most carefully all spending options and are well placed to make good financial decisions. Financial records are detailed, accessible and accurate. Spending is continuously monitored by the headteacher and by the administrative officer. The governors' finance committee meets regularly to review expenditure and to plan for the future on the basis of well-ordered financial reports.

65. Day to day financial control is good. The administrative officer is meticulous in maintaining records of expenditure using an information technology finance program. The most recent audit of the school's accounts by the LEA finance department found that, overall, the finances are properly managed, and the school is responding promptly to the minor recommendations made. In the school office, good use is made of new technology to support financial and office management.

66. The headteacher and governors have identified in the school development plan the problems of accommodation. They have worked assiduously to secure improvements across a range of defects. However, despite repeated requests, they have not yet succeeded in persuading the LEA of the need for improvements to some toilet areas and the provision of suitable facilities, such as shower rooms, for students post-16.

67. Staffing is satisfactory and there is an appropriate number of qualified teachers. Many teachers and learning support assistants are very experienced. Most learning support assistants are qualified and others are currently taking relevant qualifications. Provision for the induction of staff to the school is very good. Opportunities for in-service training are also very good and are very closely related to the priorities in the school development plan. Learning support assistants make a valuable contribution to the life and work of the school.

68. Overall, there is a satisfactory range of accommodation. There are some good features, such as the hydrotherapy pool and the sensory garden, but as was reported at the last inspection, the lack of specialist accommodation for 16 to 19 year olds is having an adverse effect on provision. Many of the classrooms for older pupils and students are too small to fully support the curriculum, in particular to develop their leisure and social activities. There is insufficient storage space for essential equipment such as wheelchairs, and

therefore these clutter up corridors. Office space is cramped and there is little meeting space for the many professional visitors to use in their work with individual pupils. Some aspects of the pupils' toilet areas are poor, especially those affecting access and privacy. Improvements have been made to the play areas and to the classroom for the youngest pupils since the last report. The school environment is pleasant and well used to support learning and play.

69. Learning resources are good overall and are well managed. They have improved since the last inspection, especially in ICT. The range and quality of books is adequate to support the English curriculum, although there is only a very small library area.

70. There are appropriate action plans in place to identify priorities and indicate how funds will be allocated and how success will be evaluated. Additional funds from central government are used well to support developments in the school. In all aspects of expenditure, a careful check is made to ensure that the schools' purchases of goods and services give good value money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

71. In their Action Plan, governors and staff should address the following to promote standards further:

- Draw up schemes of work in modern foreign language, history and geography. **
- The governors and senior staff should continue the dialogue with the LEA to secure improvements to basic facilities.
- Senior staff should follow up the preparatory work already undertaken and increase opportunities for pupils of all ages to spend time for relevant parts of their curriculum within mainstream schools.

** *The school has identified this as an issue.*

72. The following minor points should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- Ensure the consistent measurement of pupils' progress, particularly the monitoring of the progress of different groups of pupils, by extending the use of P scales in assessing pupils' achievement.
- Introduce weekly lessons for all classes in personal and social education.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	70
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	52

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	10	25	35	0	0	0	0
Percentage	14	36	50	0	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 one percentage point.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	85
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	25

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	3
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	4

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	76
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	1	1
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:

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	12.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	7
Average class size	7

Education support staff:

Total number of education support staff	21
Total aggregate hours worked per week	623

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	836,196.00
Total expenditure	822,344.00
Expenditure per pupil	10280.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	15660.00
Balance carried forward to next year	29512.00

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	2.5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	2.4
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Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out
Number of questionnaires returned

86
42

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	74	19	5	0	2
My child is making good progress in school.	71	26	0	2	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	41	54	5	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	39	34	11	5	11
The teaching is good.	81	17	0	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	81	17	2	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	86	7	2	5	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	76	21	0	2	0
The school works closely with parents.	83	10	2	2	2
The school is well led and managed.	79	14	0	2	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	81	17	0	2	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	67	14	5	5	10

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

73. Most children who join the Foundation Stage class have had some previous experience of working outside their home. However, in spite of this most children arrive with very challenging behaviour and significant communication difficulties. Some children are very mobile. However, a small group of children have physical disabilities that impair their mobility. These children are more passive than their more mobile peers in their attitudes to learning.

74. The Foundation Stage is well managed. The school works closely and effectively with parents and carers to smooth the transition from children's pre-school experience to school. There is a gradual introduction to the environment through a programme of visits. Staff are highly successful in establishing consistent routines and expectations and they manage inappropriate behaviour extremely well.

75. Teaching is very good. Throughout the day each activity makes a very good contribution to individual children's development in communication and social skills, early literacy and ICT skills. Most activities also make a good contribution to children's mathematical understanding. Achievement is therefore very good overall. This constitutes significant improvement since the last inspection. This is because members of staff have maintained the strengths observed at the time of the previous inspection, in relationships and in providing varied activities, while developing those areas that were identified for improvement.

Communication, language and literacy

76. The quality of teaching of this area of learning is very good overall. Staff recognise the need to teach communication skills throughout every activity and through every interaction, and they do so very effectively. They plan suitable, specific and individual targets for each child which means that throughout the day they have a very clear focus for the development of each child. In the one lesson seen where communication was the prime, planned focus, teaching was very good.

77. Children's achievement is very good. All members of staff are highly skilled at forging relationships with the children and in helping all the children to want to learn. They make very good use of photographs and symbols so that children understand what is happening. This eases their anxieties, enabling them to learn more effectively. Staff make very good use of ICT to provide the more passive children with a means of linking communication and activity. For example, one child pressed a switch to activate a pre-recorded message saying 'good bye' to another child.

78. Staff use a structured, commercial communication system with those children who are able to attach meaning to photographs and symbols. These children have made impressive gains in their understanding and use of these symbols since the system was introduced to them. This is because the pictures are used consistently in teaching and at social times, such as snack time. Members of staff make attractive 'class books' containing photographs, symbols and words that record activities that children have shared and enjoyed, such as a

book about the 'Building Site' they have seen or 'A Visit to the Station' they have made. These successfully helped children to take an interest in books and to learn how books work. Children demonstrated their knowledge, understanding and skills on a visit to a local community library. They shared a book with an adult and turned the book the right way up before turning the pages from front to back.

79. Members of staff have made tremendous progress in encouraging all children to make marks on paper. Additionally children refined their use of strength and their co-ordination and control of small movements through assembling construction equipment, pushing toy cars or threading shapes, in a variety of activities. These activities directly helped their early writing skills.

Mathematical development

80. This area of learning is taught well overall and consequently all children make good progress in mathematical development and achievement is good. The quality of teaching in the one lesson that was seen with a primarily mathematical focus was very good. The exceptionally good teamwork between staff and a volunteer meant that each child learned well. In this lesson, very good use was made of a musical number 'rap' to encourage children to listen closely, and so they increasingly enjoyed participating in clapping '1' or '2' claps.

81. Staff reinforce vocabulary about number, shape and size throughout various activities with children. They provide good opportunities for children to develop a secure understanding of number and quantity by linking the vocabulary with practical activity, such as counting four sweets onto four points on a card. This means that the most vocal children used the words 'one' and 'two' appropriately in response to an adult's question. Those children with more complex difficulties handled, manipulated and explored a variety of shapes. Consequently, all children developed their mathematical ideas well.

Personal, social and emotional development

82. Teaching in this area of learning is very good overall. This is because staff have excellent relationships with the children, and the team is highly effective in managing children's challenging behaviour. This makes an enormous contribution to the children's desire to learn and achievement is very good. Staff adapt their speech and use signs, pictures and symbols and so that children quickly understand how they are expected to behave. The consistent and highly effective use of a yellow smiley face at the end of each session also enabled children to develop an impressive understanding of their own achievements and to celebrate them.

83. Staff also recognise the necessity to extend children's social and independence skills throughout the day. During the inspection, as a direct consequence of the very clear teaching she received, one child took the class attendance register to the office on her own for the first time. She demonstrated justifiable pride in her achievement. Staff maintain a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated activity and recognise the value of play to balance the high level of direct teaching that they provide.

84. Staff have good expectations of children's independence in feeding themselves and in dressing and undressing for movement sessions. They usually ensure that children have plenty of time to do as much as possible independently. This means that, for example,

children with mobility problems and complex needs identified their own coat at the end of the day, and reached up to take it on their own. The extent to which staff enable children to experience and express a range of feelings, such as interest, excitement and wonder is impressive.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

85. Teaching of this area of learning is very good overall and promotes high levels of achievement. Staff take meticulous care to start and finish every lesson with familiar routines that help children to understand what is to happen next. They make very good use of photographs and symbols to develop children's understanding of the passing of time. Children showed a reduction in challenging behaviour that is born of anxiety and confusion. They accepted a change of activity without distress and anticipated what was about to happen. For example, in the mini-bus on route to the library children recalled previous visits with the help of photographs and adults' questions and comments. They then walked into the library happily and shared books with adults very productively.

86. Children's achievement is very good. Each child has an individual target in relation to ICT, which constitutes excellent planning by teachers for this element of this area of learning. These plans are very detailed and make a significant contribution to children's very good progress in their use of computers.

87. Staff plan a very good variety of activities that help children to understand that materials such as ice cubes change when they are warmed, and dry materials such as corn flour change when mixed with water. During the inspection a morning 'welcome' session made a significant contribution to children's knowledge and understanding of the world and teaching was very good. The teacher's very good use of wind chimes and balloons in the outside learning area enabled children to gain in their understanding of windy and sunny weather.

Physical development

88. Teaching to support physical development is good overall. Achievement is good. In a movement lesson for the more mobile children teaching was good. Staff used good strategies for reminding children of their expectations and managed behaviour extremely carefully. A movement lesson for less mobile children led by the physiotherapist demonstrated excellent use of a specialist in the school. The lesson was outstanding because of extremely high expectations of children that were supported by very sensitive help and guidance. Consequently, children demonstrated a high level of trust in the adults working with them and so made tremendous gains in meeting personal challenges, such as accepting a swing or a slide in a blanket.

89. The lessons make a valuable contribution to other areas of learning. For example, they help children's communication skills and their understanding of mathematical ideas because adults use words such as 'up' and 'down' alongside the appropriate movement. The good variety of activities that children enjoyed throughout the day made a good contribution to the development of their control of small physical movements and their suitable use of strength.

Creative development

90. The teaching of creative development is good overall and children therefore make good progress in exploring colour, texture and shape throughout the day in almost every activity. Achievement is good. One lesson was seen with a primarily art focus and one with a specific music focus. In both lessons the quality of teaching was good. The lessons were well planned to sustain children's interest and all adults had good expectations of children's active participation. Members of staff made very good use of music throughout the day to harness children's attention and helped them move from one activity to another with a sense of security.

91. Staff provide very good opportunities for children to learn through their senses. For example, children touched and tasted milkshake powder and smelt it before sprinkling it in a bowl and whisking it. Staff provided good opportunities for children to use 'small world' equipment, such as small figures of people, and also to use dressing up clothes to develop children's imaginations.

ENGLISH

92. There has been good improvement in English since the last inspection. Pupils' achievement in all areas has improved and they make good progress throughout the school. New, detailed planning to ensure effective coverage of the National Curriculum and to meet the needs of all levels of ability supports teaching well. The successful introduction and effective implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) with subsequent training and increased resources have had a positive impact on teaching and learning.

93. Achievement is very good in speaking and listening and in communication skills throughout the school. Teachers and learning support assistants work hard to provide all possible means to enable individual needs to be met. They use sensory cues, signs and symbols at the correct level and pace for each individual and have introduced the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECs) which has been highly successful in developing communication for pupils with autism.

94. Overall, achievement in English is good. Most pupils enter the school with very limited communication skills. By Year 2, they indicated their needs through sound, gesture, signs, symbols, and the use of switches. The progress of these pupils is good by the time they reach Year 6, when measured against their individual achievements on entry to the school. Pupils with PMLD make good progress. By Year 6, they concentrated and listened for longer periods, indicated their choices and understanding by vocalisation, eye pointing, smiles, or gesture. They continued to make progress and by Year 13 they listened to stories and demonstrated a good understanding of what was being said to them. They took part in events in school with visiting theatre companies and in visits in the local community where they practiced their language skills.

95. Higher achieving pupils learn to use speech clearly and suitably as they progress through the school. By Year 9, they read simple texts with confidence, formed letters correctly and put together simple sentences. Older students grew in self-confidence and self-esteem as they took part in college visits. They used their language skills appropriately in many different situations.

96. All pupils have language targets on their IEPs. Teachers give very careful consideration to the most suitable methods for individual pupils. Pupils are keen to express themselves and were aided in this by teachers' skilful questioning and prompts that explored pupils' understanding. Many pupils spoke confidently and clearly and used a relatively wide-

ranging vocabulary. By Year 13, higher achieving students expressed themselves very clearly and demonstrated their understanding of the conventions of discussion and conversation. For example, every Friday they ran a school café, during which they took customers' orders and organising the refreshments. Students acted as hosts, welcomed visitors and conversed in a mature and sensible manner.

97. Teachers help pupils learn to read in a highly structured systematic way and consequently pupils' achievement is good across the school. Lessons are well planned and teaching teams work hard to adapt materials and resources to ensure the effective implementation of the NLS. Pupils in Year 6 listened attentively to the 'big books' used in whole-class reading sessions. They delighted in the imaginative use of resources and participated well in shared reading because teachers made stories exciting and accessible by lively presentation and useful illustrations. Pupils reading "Whatever next" enjoyed the rhythm of the lines and the sound effects that went with the story. They recognised and responded to familiar parts of the story and prepared enthusiastically to 'go to the moon' following in the main characters' footsteps. They were thrilled with the use of lights and materials to simulate different planets, and excited by the star ship Galaxy's instructions to them. By the end of the lesson, higher attaining pupils remembered the main parts of the story, finished simple rhymes, and sequenced the words of a 3-word sentence. Pupils with PMLD of all ages listened well to stories that were read to them. Higher attaining pupils knew how to handle books, established a sight vocabulary, recognised the main characters, and developed firm favourites.

98. Higher attaining pupils in Year 9 deepened their knowledge of poetry and thoroughly enjoyed poems by their favourite poets and authors. For example, "The three little pigs" by Roald Dahl. They enjoyed the humour of the poem and recognised the ways it differed to the well-known fairy tale. The poem helped pupils to develop their vocabulary and to share their words with the other pupils. Lessons are very well planned with attractive resources and have a realistic level of challenge. Pupils are usually strongly motivated. Higher attaining pupils in Year 9 discussed with sensitivity and good understanding "Operation Cromwell", a story based in the Second World War.

99. Teachers develop pupils' reading skills well throughout the school through the direct teaching of letter sounds, word construction, and simple sentence structures. Some pupils read words and pictures from books through the use of enlarged texts or sensory cues. Teachers use commercial computer programs and digital photography to make words, pictures, sensory cues, and symbols to bring books to life for pupils with complex needs.

100. Some higher attaining pupils in the senior part of the school were increasingly able to read with understanding and to read unfamiliar words. They predicted what might happen next in a story and discussed different characters. They identified author, title, contents, and index.

101. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills. From a very low starting point, most of pupils make good progress in pre-writing and writing skills and achieve well. By Year 6, higher attaining pupils developed some pencil control and appropriate pincer grip and some traced and wrote over single letters. Pupils also used symbols to aid their understanding in communication books. Lower attaining pupils made good progress in using their hands to hold and explore objects, learned to pick up and hold writing tools and retained their hold for longer periods of time.

102. In Year 9 pupils copied their name and traced over lines and letters to make words. Some higher attaining pupils completed simple sentences and wrote extended pieces of text. By Year 11, a few pupils attempted more independent writing and to write accurately in a neat script. With some support pupils used computers well to prepare and present their work.

103. Overall, teaching is very good. The best lessons were characterised by dynamic, challenging teaching. Relationships between adults and pupils are excellent and pupils were highly motivated, eager to learn and achievement was high. All teachers have worked hard to implement the NLS and have good subject knowledge. Resources and activities are matched to individual pupil needs and this helps to maximise progress towards targets in IEPs.

104. Teachers include a wide range of activities in their lessons and pupils are motivated and behave well. Consequently pupils learn well. All pupils enjoyed lessons and listened with enthusiasm to stories and poetry. Teachers work closely with learning support assistants. Pupils' attitudes to work were very positive. Pupils generally settled well to their work and sustained concentration. Higher achieving pupils listened to each other carefully, took turns and were proud of their work. They worked well on their own and with other pupils. Pupils with PMLD and those with complex needs responded well in lessons through eye pointing, signs, gestures and the use of augmentative aids to communication.

105. Teachers are confident users of ICT and use computers well to support pupils' learning in English.

106. The strong focus in the school on communication and literacy enables pupils to use their skills in all subject areas. For example, many lessons include an emphasis on keywords, and teachers try to get pupils to use them. Some subjects, for example, religious education, use 'big books' and include tasks in reading and writing that reinforce literacy targets. Displays celebrate the work of pupils, often including 'Writing with Symbols' and further develop pupils' literacy skills.

107. The co-ordinator manages the subject well and monitors the quality of teaching and learning. She has managed the development of literacy throughout the school effectively. Teachers use systematic assessment procedures well to monitor pupils' attainment and progress. This is well established for the middle school and a priority for the department that has been recognised, is to extend this to cover the senior pupils.

MATHEMATICS

108. The good standards evident at the last inspection have been maintained. Since then, the National Numeracy Strategy has been successfully introduced. The Post -16 curriculum has improved since the last inspection and there are now more opportunities for community based mathematical activities.

109. Achievement for all age groups is very good and pupils make very good progress throughout the school. Wherever possible, they apply what they know to everyday living. For example, pupils aged 15 and above run an in-school café. Menus are priced and the correct change is given. This type of experience helps pupils to understand the practical benefit of their learning and increases motivation.

110. By Year 6, most pupils counted up to five and back again. Higher attaining pupils counted the people on a bus, up to 10, and stated, for example, how many were left when two got off. Pupils recognised 1p and 2p coins and combined them to make purchases from the classroom shop. Some pupils found the total cost of several items. Pupils made paper

bags for their purchases and counted sides and edges. Pupils recognised and named the square and the rectangle. Pupils reinforced their number skills by singing simple number rhymes. Lower attaining pupils developed their awareness of number and shape. Teachers encouraged them to pursue moving objects visually and to develop an awareness that objects still exist when out of sight.

111. By Year 9, most pupils had satisfactory understanding of place value and added and subtracted single digit numbers. Higher attaining pupils developed strategies for finding the difference, for example, between 21 and 12. Most pupils recognised simple patterns in

numbers and used words such as odd and even correctly. The most able identified odd and even numbers from 2 to 50.

112. In oral work, individual pupils counted on and back from a given number. Nearly all pupils found counting back from a given number difficult but with significant prompts from the teacher they achieved it. Pupils learned about shapes and how they fit together. They began to use language to describe position, size and quantity. Pupils matched numbers with objects and counted out the correct number of dinky toys up to five. They rolled dice, called out the numbers and identified the pieces needed to complete a puzzle. Pupils with PMLD responded well to number songs. They developed an awareness of self and others in the group and made a tactile or visual response to numbered photographs, which, with the teachers' help, they arranged in numerical order.

113. By Year 13, students made good progress in acquiring the basic skills of number, shape, and measurement. They used their skills in the local community in an everyday setting that helped to prepare them for life after school. For example, pupils studying Italian food learned how to use a range of kitchen measures, such as the spoon, cup and scales. They named and numbered the ingredients to make a pizza and said whether they like it or not.

114. Students devised their own cookery book, matched symbols to ingredients, chose a recipe for inclusion and used information technology to complement and record achievement. In the classroom, students expressed a preference for a burger or a pizza and recorded class preferences on a simple bar chart. This led to an animated discussion about which was best.

115. Students used a calculator to solve multiplication problems, worked out the answers to written problems and used a number line to add and subtract to 15. Students worked co-operatively with a range of objects for handling, counting and matching. They evaluated their own performance at the end of the session. Students matched photographs to toy animals, sorted sets of shapes by colour and sorted and counted beanbags.

116. Teaching throughout the school is very good and more consistent than at the previous inspection. All lessons have very good features; none was less than good and one excellent lesson was observed. In this lesson, pupils were managed very well and continually encouraged to take an active part. Excellent resources were very well used to stimulate and sustain interest. The lesson was very well planned to suit the needs of all pupils. It challenged them to do their best and at the end they signalled their enjoyment by a broad smile and a 'thumbs up'.

117. Teaching focuses on pupils' individual needs and this is the key to the pupils' very good progress. Teachers know pupils very well and relationships are excellent. This creates an environment in which pupils feel safe and secure. Pupils know what is expected

of them in work and behaviour and, with very few exceptions, responded eagerly to sensitive and thoughtful teaching. Teachers assess pupils' progress very well and therefore know exactly where the next lesson should begin. This helps the continuity of learning and enhances progress.

118. Pupils develop self-esteem as they begin to understand more. Teachers use computer programs well to confirm and reinforce learning. Practice in ICT skills gives pupils access to future independent learning.

119. Learning support assistants give invaluable help in the classroom and help to generate the positive atmosphere that pervades all lessons. All adults listen well to what the pupils say or gesture and there is productive use of praise and encouragement. Wherever possible, homework is set and if the teachers forget, the pupils ask for it.

120. Mathematics is very well organised and energetically led by a committed teacher, who has introduced many positive changes since the last inspection. The scheme of work, based on the National Numeracy Strategy, ensures good continuity of learning, particularly in the middle years.

SCIENCE

121. The quality of teaching is very good for all pupils up to Year 9 and excellent for pupils from Years 9 to 13. This has had a good impact upon the achievement and learning by pupils. There has been good improvement since the last inspection when the teaching was judged to be satisfactory and good or better in over half the lessons.

122. By Year 6, some pupils with PMLD have learned to recognise the different parts of the body. They identified and pointed to head, feet, hands and legs. Much of the learning is achieved through the medium of dance and music, which pupils enjoy greatly. Higher attaining pupils knew that sound travels and is the result of something vibrating quickly. They took part in experiments to show that the skin of a drum vibrates to produce the sound and that sound travels a long way.

123. By the end of Year 9, higher attaining pupils investigated the properties of magnets and the materials that they attract. They categorised materials as magnetic and non-magnetic. Teachers expected pupils to make some hypotheses about the properties of different materials, to record their hypotheses and compare them with the results of their experiments. Pupils gained a clear understanding of the differences between magnetic and non-magnetic objects. Pupils made good progress as they practised their speaking skills. Wherever possible, they tried to answer the teacher's questions using full sentences. The more able pupils in these groups used a digital camera to record the work that they had. In this way, the teachers and pupils had an immediate record of their achievements.

124. By Year 13 students had a clear understanding of the difference between reversible and irreversible changes. They gained in their understanding of chemical terms and knew the difference between liquid and solid states. Students also learned to use the Internet and retrieved information about the work that they were doing. Students used the computers in the classroom to record their work, to edit their writing and to create very good presentations. Students produced talking books, which described the work they have done during a series of lessons. In these ways it is clear that teachers make very good use of ICT to help the pupils learn, understand and enjoy their work in science.

125. The quality of teaching is very good throughout the school. The teachers use many different techniques to help the pupils to learn well, and these are very successful. Teachers of the younger pupils in the school are very careful to make sure that the words they use are clearly understood by the pupils and that the questions they ask are pitched at such a level that pupils are able to answer them correctly. The teachers have very clearly established routines that the pupils understand and follow carefully. Lessons are divided into different activities, which helps to keep the pupils well motivated. The teachers and teaching assistants work extremely well together and share the responsibilities within the classroom.

126. Teachers make very good use of ICT to help all pupils to learn effectively and to make the lessons more appealing. The teacher uses a computer microscope, which projects images on to the computer screen that can then be saved and printed. This is highly motivating and the pupils clearly show their excitement and enthusiasm.

127. The teaching and support staff spend a great deal of time and effort in praising the pupils for the good work that they have done. This has a very positive impact on the attitudes of the pupils. The learning support assistants work in unison with the teachers and make sure that all pupils are able to take a full part in the lessons and respond to the teachers' questions. In one lesson in the middle school, the teacher changed the activities that had been planned in order to meet the changing needs of the pupils. Pupils were becoming distressed by the activities that were focusing on a fast movement and fast rhythms. The teacher played slow music and dimmed the lights to create an atmosphere of calm and quiet. This change proved to be very effective and it is very clear that the pupils not only understood, but also appreciated greatly the difference between loud and fast and slow and quiet.

128. In all science lessons pupils behaved well. Pupils were highly motivated and are very keen to answer any questions that are posed by the teachers or assistants. There is excellent management of behaviour by staff. Learning is very good. Pupils were interested in their work and could be seen working independently, exercising a great deal of self-control and initiative when presented with challenging tasks. The relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent, and as a result pupils make very good progress. Teaching contributes greatly to pupils' spiritual, moral and social development.

129. Science is very well led and managed. The science co-ordinator has completed a very thorough audit of all resources and has a very clear overall picture of the science provision within the school. There is a good range of resources available to all teachers; they are of good quality and easily accessible to all teachers. There is also a good selection of computer software available to help with the teaching of science. Accommodation for teaching science in Years 6 to 11 is unsatisfactory. There is no special area in the school that is equipped as a laboratory with provision for carrying out experiments and investigations in a controlled environment.

ART AND DESIGN

130. There has been good improvement in art since the last inspection. The subject co-ordinator has evaluated and monitored teaching and learning and gathered a portfolio of useful evidence of pupils' progress. The quality and quantity of resources are now good. Full schemes of work and assessment systems are being developed.

131. Pupils' achievements are good. Most pupils enter the school with poor manipulative skills and very limited experience in art. As they move up through the school, skilled teaching, clear recognition of each pupil's special needs, and a widening range of exposure to colour, design and techniques, enables many pupils to make good gains in their skills, knowledge and understanding. The subject also makes a strong contribution to pupils' SMSC development in giving pupils the opportunities to experience a range of cultures, artists and media. For example, pupils learned to make Rangoli patterns for the celebration of Diwali, and costumes and flags for the celebration of Mardi Gras. They experienced Aboriginal art and decorated totem poles.

132. By Year 6, pupils used a range of techniques to apply paint to paper and materials. They used sponge sticks, and brushes to mix and apply paint. Many knew the names of primary colours and made their colour choices carefully. Pupils recognised patterns and repeats in objects in the environment. Higher attaining pupils used a wider range of materials and implements, for example crayons, pencils, paint and chalk, to make pictures. Pupils with PMLD showed preferences and choices of colour and shape and with support used finger paints to make marks on paper. Some pupils who were reluctant to touch or experience paint made very good progress in tolerating the feel and texture of the materials used and gradually enjoyed the experience.

133. Teachers give pupils good opportunities to observe nature and natural resources and consequently, by the end of Year 9, higher attaining pupils learned to observe the detailed markings and features of still life objects, which they recorded in their sketch books and reproduced in paintings and still life sculptures.

134. Skills and techniques are taught well and pupils learned to make print blocks and mixed their own paints. They learned to work in other media, such as clay and papier-mâché. For example, pupils from different classes worked with a visiting artist on the 'millennium experience' where they produced part of a themed wall of clay tiles. Pupils recognised how pattern and texture contribute to the composition of pictures and paintings and used this in developing collages. They used a wide mixture of textures and materials. Lower attaining pupils learnt to combine textures and colours and produced exciting collages and, with support, large 3-dimensional sculptures.

135. By Year 14, students considered more than one dimension and this extended their range of work. Teachers use the work of famous artists to inspire pupils and this is seen in the way pupils used a variety of techniques in their sketchbooks and portfolios to replicate some of the designs and textures seen in famous paintings. Students looked at the effect of light and shade in photography and used a variety of methods to scan and manipulate images. With some support from staff, students with PMLD carefully selected and arranged natural materials for still life compositions, which they then scanned, manipulated on the computer screen, and printed.

136. Teaching and learning are consistently good. Teachers' enthusiasm and confidence inspires pupils. Teachers give good demonstrations and provide a range of interesting and colourful tools and materials. Therefore, by Year 6 most pupils used a range of resources effectively. Pupils worked hard, concentrated well and behaviour was very good.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

137. Pupils make good progress as they did at the time of the last inspection. There has been satisfactory improvement in teachers' planning and assessment for the subject since the last inspection. Teaching is very good. The subject co-ordinator has made a satisfactory start to developing this subject and is aware of the need to broaden the range of pupils' experiences with a greater variety of materials and tools.

138. Scrutiny of teachers' plans and assessment records as well as photographic evidence of pupils' work indicates that teachers' plan effectively for projects of increasing complexity as pupils move through the school and this ensures that pupils achieve well. Each project is planned to ensure that it makes a good contribution to pupils' work in literacy, numeracy, ICT and science. For example, pupils' mathematical knowledge, understanding and skills were used when pupils handled different sized and shaped material and when they measured materials.

139. By Year 6, pupils' achievement is good. Pupils made biscuits by following a recipe and expressed preferences for different types. They made good use of the cooker, a digital camera and computer to record their results. They took packaging for biscuits apart and used this experience well to guide them when making boxes for their biscuits. Photographic evidence indicates that teachers use imaginative strategies to help pupils understand the purpose of packaging, such as dropping biscuits that are not packaged to see if they break.

140. By Year 9, achievement is good. Pupils have developed better social and communication skills and they used these to work together effectively to produce a display. Teachers' records indicate that most pupils achieve well in this exercise, with a good degree of independence. Pupils tried various tools or materials for attaching their display to the wall. Their choice of a stapler was an informed choice, born of their experience and their evaluation of other methods. Pupils with PMLD are included well and they extended their tactile and sensory experiences.

141. By the end of Years 11 and 13, student's achievement is good. Skills are developed well through the ASDAN courses. Older students achieved well as they worked on modules leading to the '*Towards Independence*' award. For example, students used a recipe with several ingredients to make 'Danish meatballs'. Fabric was used to design and make German flags. Ideas were recorded about their preferences using symbols denoting, 'like', 'don't like' and 'try'. This activity made a good contribution to pupils' social and cultural development.

142. There are good opportunities for students to develop their speaking and listening skills when they describe their work. Students used digital symbols to record the sequence of a process they were using. This is a very good use of information technology to support their literacy work, while consolidating their understanding of design and technology.

143. The positive impact of this subject and the way in which it harnesses students' wider skills is exemplified in the weekly café that they provided. This is a valuable experience for them; they clearly enjoyed working in it and took justifiable pride in this work.

GEOGRAPHY

144. Pupils' achievements and progress are satisfactory. Standards have been maintained since the previous inspection, and the school has made satisfactory improvements in geography overall. The subject is managed satisfactorily. The curriculum reflects national guidelines for the subject, but longer term planning is incomplete.

145. By Year 9, pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of weather and its effects on the environment. They measured temperature accurately, making links to weather forecasts. Pupils studied different parts of the world, including Europe, and used an atlas with increasing confidence to locate cities and regions. For example, pupils knew where Denmark was in comparison to the United Kingdom. They made links with physical features and regions. During a visit in the local area they looked at the different types of buildings. They studied aspects of the pottery industry and identified factors that have brought about change to the industry over time.

146. Teaching is consistently good. Teachers have a sound knowledge of the subject. Facts are taught systematically, and pupils develop their understanding of the world around them. Teacher's planning is good and builds suitably upon what the pupils have learned previously. The learning support assistants make a significant contribution to pupils' learning. The lesson content often creates an interesting and lively debate, for example, when challenging the pupils' understanding of the differences between a clean and a polluted environment. Pupils enjoyed this work and benefited from the many opportunities given to them to put forward their point of view. The higher attaining pupils did this well, and gave reasons for their views. The use of information technology by pupils is good. Staff use digital photographic evidence well to demonstrate pupils' achievements. The subject's contribution to literacy and numeracy is satisfactory.

HISTORY

147. Pupils' achievements and progress are satisfactory. Since the last inspection standards have been sustained and there have been satisfactory improvements in the subject overall. The subject is managed satisfactorily and there are suitable plans to develop history in the future, including a longer-term curriculum framework.

148. It was not possible to observe any lessons due to the way in which the subject is timetabled, but evidence from discussions with staff and analysis of pupils' work, and teachers' records shows that by Year 9 pupils sequenced events of the past with increased accuracy. They had a secure understanding of some of the important events of the last 1000 years, such as the impact of the Vikings. They compared similarities and differences between the past and present, and noted changes over time. For example, they had some understanding of what it was like to have been an evacuee during the Second World War and to have experienced rationing and the use of a gas mask. Pupils developed an understanding and awareness of local history through visiting local museums and pottery factories. They took part in enquiries and research into their immediate surroundings, including the local 'garden world' which added interest and relevance to the subject.

149. The curriculum is satisfactory, and enriched by visits to places of interest. Pupils enjoyed these opportunities, and clearly gained from the experiences. They were able to reflect on their own progress in history. The quality of displays enhances learning. Suitable use is made of ICT and the subject makes a satisfactory contribution to the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

150. Since the last inspection, the use of ICT has improved significantly and it is now very good. There is now a very good policy and scheme of work. The training of staff has been very successful, and as they have grown in confidence their skills have improved. This has

resulted in computers and other technological aids to communication being used effectively in all subjects to enhance pupils' learning. Many have a target for ICT in their IEPs. Pupils' achievement and progress is now good by the end of Year 6 and very good by the end of Years 11 and 13.

151. During the inspection, inspectors observed some very good examples of ICT being used to support learning. By the age of seven, in mathematics, pupils used a computer program to manipulate shapes and fit them into envelopes. Others with PMLD pressed a 'Big Mack' switch to communicate with staff in the 'Hello' sessions. Many instances were seen, where teachers were using writing with symbols very effectively to help pupils with their reading writing and spelling.

152. By the age of 9, pupils with PMLD learned about cause and effect. They discovered that if they pressed a touch pad or switch it causes something to happen; for example, turning on a tape recording of music or causing a toy car to move around the room. Very good attention and support by all staff was given to pupils with PMLD in the lessons observed; this helped them to achieve to the best of their ability. A scrutiny of pupils' records

shows how one pupil has made significant progress and has learned to respond to the teacher by pressing the touch pad at the first verbal prom

153. In a science lesson, 11-year-old pupils were enthralled when the teacher used a projector to display images of the changing state of materials that they had helped to prepare. Pupils had recorded the different stages of their work using a digital camera. On seeing the pictures one pupil said, 'They are ace' and he was quite correct. Later in the lesson, with the help of the teacher, they used the Internet and visited a web site that supported the work they were doing. This was a very good example of how teachers have developed their skills and are providing exciting learning opportunities for pupils. In another class, very good teaching helped pupils to develop their ICT knowledge and skills. With the help of the teacher, pupils used scanned images and added sound to the pictures to make a talking book about a Hans Christian Anderson's story. The pupils proudly showed off their achievements and used a touch screen to turn the pages.

154. In some classes multimedia presentations are effectively used to support learning. A good example of this was the follow up to a swimming session with Post 16 students when the teacher referred to their targets. Very good teaching helped the students to assess their personal and social development and their strengths and weaknesses in the swimming session.

155. The co-ordination of ICT is very good. The co-ordinator has worked hard to develop ICT throughout the school. Mainly due to his efforts, staff are now very confident, enthusiastic and keen to apply their new skills. Both teachers and learning support assistants are using ICT daily. Communication devices for PMLD pupils have improved since the last inspection, but the school is aware that they need to keep up with developing technology for these pupils.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

156. Pupils in Years 7 to 13 are taught modern foreign languages. The curriculum focuses mainly on the teaching of French and Spanish with some additional language experience in German and Danish. The school is resourceful in its use of staff and sometimes parents to

give pupils this very good variety of experience. During the inspection it was possible to observe only one French lesson for pupils ranging from Year 7 to Year 9. Teaching was good and led to good learning and achievement. In the absence of a designated co-ordinator for the subject, the headteacher manages the subject well.

157. Teaching focuses mainly on the skills of speaking and listening to the languages. This focus enables pupils to enjoy the work and be proud to communicate at a simple level with others when they are abroad on holiday as well as when they are in the confines of the classroom. From the analysis of pupils' work and the photographs of their activities during lessons it is clear that they learn through conversation and role-play. By the end of Year 13, pupils and students greeted each other in French, made simple requests and counted to ten. Pupils and students also knew the days of the week, months of the year and named parts of the body, described colours and ordered food and drink. They used simple vocabulary and named correctly a variety of different common foods including bread, cheese, banana, chicken, tea, coffee and water. They also spoke about each other and replied briefly to questions about their names. Pupils used simple sentences or short phrases. Learning is good. Pupils clearly enjoy lessons immensely, they were excited by the work, very keen to answer questions, and also very willing to take turns when necessary.

158. Teaching focuses on life styles and cultures of people from different countries. For example, pupils and students enjoy learning about the food from France, Germany and Spain. They prepare foreign dishes during their work in food technology, which helps to develop a deeper understanding of the lives of people from different cultures. The staff makes good use of ICT.

MUSIC

159. The good quality of musical activities reported at the previous inspection has been maintained. Achievement in music is good throughout the school in relation to pupils' ages and abilities. Pupils make good progress and enjoy a wide range of musical experiences. Pupils contribute fully to music making and are eager to take part.

160. By Year 6, pupils knew about the music of many different countries, including India, China and South America. They heard the differences in rhythm and tempo and knew that music has the capacity to set a mood and an atmosphere. In one lesson, pupils played percussion instruments in time with recorded South American music. Some pupils named the instruments correctly and all appreciated the difference between loud and soft and quick and slow. Pupils sang as they played and created a party atmosphere. The teacher reminded them of their own 'Mardi Gras' celebration of the previous day, when in religious education, they had marched in the corridors singing and playing.

161. By Year 9, pupils knew that composers write music and they became familiar with the different styles of, for example, Chopin and Mozart. Pupils listened to a piece of classical music and were told by the teacher they were to become composers themselves. Pupils worked in groups to compose a simple melody and selected the instruments upon which they wished to play it. On completion, it was recorded and invited comments were invited from the class.

162. Pupils were excited by what the work and were generous in their praise of others' performances. Lower attaining pupils learned how to experience quiet and were completely still for the first few moments of the lesson. They listened well to different kinds of classical music and responded vocally or with facial expressions. Teachers helped pupils to play percussion instruments in time to the music.

163. By Year 13, pupils were familiar with a wide range of popular and classical music. Pupils were confident enough to say what they liked. Pupils knew the names of common wind, brass and string instruments and were beginning to understand the differences in the way they are played. In one lesson pupils listened to their favourite music and had the opportunity to say how it made them feel, whether happy or sad, excited or calm. Pupils expressed preferences well and illustrated them on a simple bar chart. Staff encouraged lower attaining pupils to press a switch-pad to start and stop the music and to register their response to music by facial expression or gesture.

164. The quality of teaching is good or better. Lessons are well planned. The individual needs of pupils are well catered for. Teachers ensure that pupils enjoy music through participation at all levels. The contributions that pupils make are appreciated and praised. Consequently, pupils feel valued and progress is good. Teachers have high expectations and do not set limits on pupils' attainment. Relationships are very good and bring out the best in the pupils who are eager to take part and to demonstrate what they know. Teachers and learning support assistants work closely together to provide music lessons that are stimulating, challenging and enjoyable. Pupil behaviour is well managed.

165. The subject is well led. Since the last inspection, a good range of percussion instruments has been added to existing stock and a wide variety of recorded music has been purchased. Resources are good and are used very effectively to support learning. Although the scheme of work is not yet complete in every detail, good lesson planning and assessment ensures continuity and progression in the music curriculum. The curriculum is extended in a variety of ways. Pupils listen to live music performed by the county's peripatetic teachers. A group of pupils are working with visiting musicians to prepare for a performance later this year. School concerts take place every second year and pupils regularly take part in the local schools' carol concert. Music is used to good effect in subjects such as history and religious education, and makes a strong contribution to social and cultural development.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

166. Physical education is very well planned and taught. Pupils are offered a wide range of opportunities and challenges to extend their physical capabilities and widen their social skills. Achievement is very good overall, and pupils often make excellent progress at all ages. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

167. By Year 6, in gymnastics, higher attaining pupils understood the need for a 'warm-up'. They followed simple commands, showed different body shapes, and used different parts of the body to travel across apparatus. They showed dexterity in negotiating obstacles involving climbing, balancing, crawling and hopping. They successfully completed a sequence of activities remembering what they have to do next.

168. By Year 9, in swimming, higher attaining pupils completed exercises in preparation for taking LEA awards in basic swimming skills. Pupils refined their leg-kick for back and front crawl. They swam distances of up to twenty-five metres to improve their stamina and practiced for distance swimming awards.

169. By Year 11 and Year 14, in swimming, higher attaining students refined their stroke technique for front crawl and back crawl and practiced them using buoyancy aids, gradually improving their position in the water. They concentrated on getting their heads back in the water, legs straight and pointing their toes. They jumped into the water safely. Students by Year 14 had gained an impressive number of swimming awards and certificates. In dance lessons in the school hall, students mirrored and copied movements and planned a series of

simple dance steps. They made their movements match the mood of the music. Students understood the link between the dance lesson and their work in history on the Vikings. With adult support, PMLD students simulated Vikings sailing in their ships, hoisting sails, and rowing the boat.

170. By Year 14 students with PMLD made excellent progress in swimming. They showed confidence in the water, put their face in the water, blew bubbles and floated on their back and their front. With support, they walked forwards and backwards and retrieved objects.

171. Teaching is very good overall and of consistently high quality. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and high expectations of pupil participation, effort and behaviour. Planning is superb and activities are very relevant to pupils' needs and interests. There is very careful recording of pupils' achievements. The success of teaching, however, lies principally in the teamwork with learning support assistants, and physiotherapists. This enables the physical and emotional needs of pupils to be met. Teachers also use voluntary helpers effectively to give one-to-one support to those pupils who require it.

172. Very good and often excellent learning is a product of the very good teaching. Pupils worked hard and concentrated well during lessons. They waited patiently, took turns and co-operated fully with staff. They were willing participants in lessons and usually enthusiastic to take part in activities showing enjoyment in what they did. Higher attaining pupils understood what they had to do to succeed in tasks. Many evaluated, in a simple way, their own success and that of others at the end of lessons. They showed increased confidence and improved in their social skills, for example, when visiting the local swimming pool. Behaviour was always at least good and often exemplary.

173. The subject is well managed and led and makes a very good contribution to pupils' social and moral development. The curriculum is extremely well planned with careful attention to the specific needs of all pupils. Assessment and recording of attainment is very thorough, with very good use made of digital photographs. Information is used well to support each pupil's next step of learning.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

174. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Religious education is very well managed. The co-ordinator has introduced a good scheme of work based upon the Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus and the new national guidelines. The subject is well led. This has had a positive impact on teaching and the very good achievement and progress of pupils. Pupils' achievement and progress is good by end of Year 6 and year 9, and very good at the end of Years 11 and 13.

175. Teaching and learning is very good overall. By the age of six, pupils are starting to learn about other faiths and religious festivals. In a very good lesson, probing questioning by the teacher resulted in one pupil remembering that Mardi Gras is celebrated in Rio de Janeiro and that Rio is near America. 'Isn't this exciting?' said one pupil as the learning support assistant and teacher made popcorn to help celebrate Mardi Gras.

176. By age 11 pupils with PMLD made excellent progress because of the excellent teaching. An example of this was seen in a lesson where the teacher used two puppets called *Buzz* and *Dottie* to teach them about different greetings such as shaking hands and hugging. The teacher and learning support assistants ensured that each pupil received good individual attention and recorded every small achievement; for example, a smile, or their responses to music and song. In the main part of the lesson, the pupils experienced feeling artefacts such as a cross, candle and Bible. The highest attaining pupil in the group tracked

the light of the candle with her eyes and helped to blow it out. Others were aware that something special was happening. One responded to the smell of burning wax by changing his facial expression and moving his head to one side.

177. Achievement by higher attaining pupils by age 11 is very good. For example, in a lesson pupils learned about baptism. The teacher questioned them very well to find out what they had remembered from previous lessons. They showed by their replies that they knew a baptism took place in a Christian church. Most recognised artefacts used in a baptism, for example, the font; using water to draw the sign of a cross on the baby's head; and a baptism candle. Pupils knew that Jesus died on the cross and that the Bible gives stories about Jesus. All were very excited and looking forward to going to the church the following week to witness a real baptism. The teacher used video film extremely well, to point out and reinforce the Christening ceremony and develop pupils' knowledge of key features in a church such as the stained glass windows and the font.

178. No lessons were observed in the senior school, but an analysis of pupils' work, shows that the subject is taught very well through modules of work related to places of worship. A good example of this recorded by students was the visit to a synagogue in Hanley.

179. Teaching in religious education lessons links well with other subjects. The use of ICT is very effectively used; for example, writing using symbols, clip art, worksheets, the use of taped music, video film and the recording of achievement with digital photographs. Religious education lessons contribute strongly to the moral, social and cultural development within the school

Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE)

180. Pupils' personal development is promoted well throughout the school because it is implicit in all its work. As a result, pupils are very well prepared for their next stage of education. A great deal has been done by the co-ordinator to improve the subject since the previous inspection and the subject is well led.

181. The development of pupils' personal and social skills is a strong feature across the school and is very good overall in improving the pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development. The school routines are highly supportive in this area. In moving around the school pupils are expected to conduct themselves in an orderly manner and display a sense of respect. Lunchtimes are sociable occasions as pupils learn the social skills of mealtimes. This is a valuable learning opportunity, as well as providing a calm atmosphere before pupils begin the afternoon session. These day-to-day routines bring a sense of structure for the pupils, bringing further order into their lives.

182. There is a whole school planned programme for teaching personal, social and health education. There are a few lessons where specific topics and aspects are suitably covered. However, not all classes have regular separate lessons on PSHE so that it is difficult for teachers to be able to evaluate pupil's progress in a systematic way.

183. Teaching was good in both the lessons seen and during other times during the school day. For example, before going on a visit to a local museum, some of the youngest pupils, barely controlling their excitement, took turns and waited quietly for each other and their transport. The adults who work with them provide very good personal examples of the respect to be shown to all. There are effective individual behaviour plan for pupils with challenging behaviour and staff follow these consistently. Pupils and staff acknowledge

different emotions and pupils are taught how to deal with them in a range of school activities and lessons. For example, in an English lesson where older pupils were discussing lies and the consequences of deceit, pupils and staff exchanged personal experiences of lying and being lied to, and the consequences.

184. Teachers celebrate the success and achievement of their pupils at many levels throughout the school and pupils have good opportunities to work together in lessons in pairs, in groups and in teams. The school has inclusive teaching for all and so pupils move through the school with their peer groups and pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties are given expert support.

185. The school has introduced several pre-work experience activities, for example the 'Friday Café'. Here older students and pupils, with support from staff, run a café, take orders, cook and serve food with great style, collect the correct money and wash up.

186. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) supports pupils' personal development well and pupils learn to become more independent and make clear and wise choices. Parents have commented on the increasing confidence and more suitable behaviour of their children in many new environments. The school fosters good relationships between pupils by setting up buddy schemes and ways in which pupils can befriend and support each other. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) also contributes successfully to pupils' cultural development.

187. Older pupils have the chance to take part in residential trips to outdoor centres such as the Stanley Head Centre in Staffordshire and a similar centre in Anglesey. There they join other schools to take part in outdoor pursuits and also have the opportunity to develop social skills by living in a small community, away from home. They also take part with peers from the local high school in the Staffordshire Challenge which combines outdoor activities with problem solving tasks.