

INSPECTION REPORT

PORTAL HOUSE SCHOOL

St. Margaret's at Cliffe, Dover

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number:119062

Headteacher: Mr L Sage

Reporting inspector: Mrs Mary Last

Dates of inspection: 13th-17th March 2000

Inspection number: 191672

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Special

School category: Community Special

Age range of pupils: 6 -11

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Portal House School
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St. Margaret's at Cliffe
Dover, Kent

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs E Talbot

Date of previous inspection: 3 February 1997

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Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mrs M Last	Registered inspector	English Music	The characteristics and effectiveness of the school What the school should do to improve further Teaching and learning
Mr M Lyons	Lay inspector	Equal opportunities Special educational needs	Pupils' welfare, health and safety Partnership with parents and carers
Mr B Emery	Team inspector	Mathematics Physical education	Leadership and management
Mr T Hill	Team inspector	Information technology Art Modern foreign languages	The school's results and pupils' achievements Quality and range of opportunities for learning
Mrs M Cureton	Team inspector	Science Geography History Religious education	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Portal House is a day and residential special school for pupils aged five to eleven with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school is situated in the village of St. Margaret's at Cliffe, which is halfway between Dover and Deal. Portal House admits children from all areas of Kent. All pupils travel to and from school using transport provided by the local education authority. The school is designated to provide up to 44 places, for boys and girls. At the time of the inspection there were no girls and thirty-seven boys on roll at Key Stage 2. Pupils are divided into six classes according to age and ability levels. Twenty-six pupils attend on a daily basis. The local education authority makes the decision on which pupils may board. At the time of inspection, ten pupils were boarding for four nights each week and one for one night each week.

All pupils have statements of special educational need, identifying them as having emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many of the pupils also have a wide range of additional special educational needs, including general learning difficulties and specific learning difficulties. Ten of the pupils are 'looked-after' children, and twenty-seven are receiving ongoing support from Social Services and/or the Health Authority. Nine pupils are diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. On entry pupils' attainments are below those of pupils in mainstream schools; this is frequently due to their behavioural difficulties limiting their capacity to learn; some pupils have experienced long periods of absence from school before attending Portal House. Pupils are able to enter the school at any time during the school year, three such pupils were admitted during the current year and one has transferred to other schools. No pupils are from ethnic minorities or have English as an additional language.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Portal House is a good school and effective in its work and enabling pupils to make good progress. Pupils enjoy coming to school, have positive attitudes and behave well in lessons. Teachers and classroom assistants work well together to support and manage pupils' learning. Where pupils are still experiencing difficulties in taking responsibility for their behaviour, they receive good guidance and support from school and residential staff. The use of a reward system to acknowledge good work, behaviour and effort is an effective and positive factor in motivating pupils to try harder and do well. The pupils place great value upon the points they receive as a result of this strategy. The residential unit provides very good opportunities for pupils to develop their personal and social skills. The headteacher, senior management team and governors have all worked hard since the last inspection to raise standards in teaching and learning. Nevertheless the standards of reading and writing for some lower attaining pupils is low and extra help is not sufficiently and consistently provided for these pupils to enable them to improve their literacy skills. There are very few opportunities for pupils to study alongside their mainstream peers in local schools, an opportunity which would prepare the pupils more effectively for the next stages of education. Although the school provides a secure and supportive environment it does not routinely carry out a risk assessment of all the activities undertaken by pupils. The school has made substantial improvements since the last inspection particularly with regard to raising standards of teaching and learning. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching and learning are good; there were no unsatisfactory lessons during the inspection
- The staff manages and monitors challenging behaviour very well
- The accommodation, care and activities provided for pupils in the residential unit is very good
- There is very good leadership and management
- The senior management team, staff and governors share an outstanding commitment to the future success of the school and has excellent capacity to succeed
- The curriculum is good, particularly the use of information communications technology as an aid to pupils' learning

What could be improved

- Standards of reading and writing particularly for lower attaining pupils in Years 5 and 6 are unsatisfactory
- The school does not routinely carry out risk assessment
- Opportunities for pupils to study part-time in mainstream schools are insufficient

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made substantial improvement since the last inspection and is committed to raising standards further. At the last inspection teaching and progress were unsatisfactory in almost twenty per cent of lessons observed. During the current inspection teaching and progress were at least satisfactory in all lessons seen and in almost seventy per cent of lessons teaching was good or very good. This very significant improvement is a direct result of the support and training provided by the senior management team, for teachers and classroom assistants including training for the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. The teaching team has been enhanced by the appointment of several permanent teachers and there are now no temporary teachers as there were during the previous inspection. As a response to the last inspection, a new deputy headteacher has been appointed and successfully fulfilled the specific brief of strengthening and developing the curriculum. Individual education plans (IEPs) focus upon behavioral targets, which are emphasised in lessons and around the school. These strategies help pupils to modify and improve their behaviour by knowing their targets and trying to address them throughout the day. The school does not include academic targets for such subjects as Literacy and Numeracy in pupils' IEPs and this omission impedes some teachers' ability to identify individual learning needs, particularly for lower attaining pupils.

The school and care staff work in close cooperation and provide extremely high quality residential provision for the boys who board on a weekly or respite basis. The school has redrafted its admissions' policy so that pupils' support needs, in terms of therapy and other support, are made clear before admission. This improvement has helped the school to plan support services in advance. This term has seen the appointment of an experienced music coordinator and the school has current plans to develop the subject in response to the findings of the previous inspection report. Resources for music have already been increased and include a good range of instruments and there is now a scheme of work which effectively guides teachers' planning. Provision for the teaching and use of information communications technology (ICT) is very good and represents very substantial improvement since the last inspection. Pupils are skilled in their use of computers and the school environment is enhanced by many fine examples of word-processed writing, examples of spreadsheets and database and good use of graphical illustrations. One teacher has developed innovative methods of reinforcing pupils' reading skills with an outstanding series of ICT materials. The school has an excellent capacity to succeed and the staff is committed to its future improvement. There are very good systems to identify and deal with its own

weaknesses. The school has successfully addressed the key issues from the last inspection. However, despite good efforts it has yet to implement fully its strategies for monitoring the planning and teaching of all subjects. The good improvement that the school has achieved since the last inspection is a tribute to the strong leadership, excellent commitment and shared ethos of all the staff and the governing body.

STANDARDS

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

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

* *Individual education plans*

Throughout the school, all pupils make at least satisfactory gains in learning and in over sixty per cent of lessons progress is good. All pupils make good gains in speaking and listening and by the time they reach the age of eleven, they are confident and competent communicators. Most make good gains in learning both in lessons and over time. However, for a very few pupils, their progress and performance is limited by their inability to read and write as well as they might. There is no significant difference in pupils' achievements in other subjects except that in some specific activities with lessons, some pupils approach those expected of pupils of a similar age in mainstream school; these include information communication technology, swimming and some work in science particularly where pupils use ICT to record their work. Progress against targets set at Annual Review is satisfactory and for some pupils it is good. Overall standards represent a significant improvement since the last inspection.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils are keen and eager to come to school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour, with very few and well controlled exceptions is good both inside and outside the classroom.
Personal development and relationships	Personal development of the pupils is a central focus of the school's purpose and pupils make good progress in their social skills. Relationships are good.
Attendance	Attendance is good.

Pupils enjoy lessons and are eager to participate in all activities. By the time they reach Year 6 they have grown in maturity and self-confidence.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 5-11
Lessons seen overall	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 a strength of the school. The teachers' secure knowledge together with their effective use of a range of methods to inspire and motivate pupils results in pupils making good gains in learning. All lessons seen during the inspection were at least satisfactory and almost 70 per cent were good or very good. In the very best lessons teaching was dynamic and highly challenging to pupils which resulted in pupils working extremely hard to meet teachers' expectations. All staff are well trained to teach numeracy and literacy but the school does not provide sufficient opportunities for teachers to use these skills specifically to raise the reading and writing standards of a small minority of lower attaining pupils. With this exception, the teaching of English, mathematics, science and PSHE is good and meets the pupils' needs and interests. The high quality of teaching represents a significant improvement since the last inspection when teaching was unsatisfactory in almost twenty-five per cent of lessons observed.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school offers a good range of learning opportunities to the pupils, including French for Year 6 pupils. The curriculum is well balanced and relevant to the identified needs of the pupils. The provision for developing skills of reading and writing is not fully effective.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	There are no pupils with English as an additional language.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school makes good provision for pupils' spiritual and moral development with many opportunities for them to distinguish between right and wrong. Provision for social development is very good; opportunities for pupils to broaden their understanding of other cultures is limited but satisfactory overall given the school's very strong links with nearby French towns and a partner special school in St Pol.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school is very caring and sees that the pupils are well supervised in school and on visits and activities. Teachers assess pupils' academic and personal needs effectively. The residential provision is very good.

The school works well with parents and keeps them effectively informed about how their children are getting on, in the school and in the residential unit if their child boards.

Parents are very supportive of the school's provision and what it achieves with their children particularly in relation to improvements in behaviour and maturity.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher and senior management team, including the head of care and the governors, provide very good leadership. They give clear educational direction. Teamwork between teaching and care staff is very good; all are committed to raising standards and providing a safe, caring and supportive environment for all pupils. The school leadership is very good and the response to the last inspection has been very effective with a clear commitment to continued improvement.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The governing body is knowledgeable, well informed and supports the school very well. Governors play an active part in the life of the school and visit regularly.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Clear and very effective plans are in place to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning but have yet to be fully implemented in some curriculum subjects.
The strategic use of resources	The strategic use of resources is good.

The school is well staffed with teachers and residential staff to meet the needs of the pupils. The governors and senior management team work very well together to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is raised. The accommodation is well used and the school spends money wisely, seeking the best price for its supplies; the school provides satisfactory value for money.

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 approachability of the staff • The high levels of care and teaching • The progress made by their children • The pupils' improvements in behaviour • The high quality residential provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clarification of expectations regarding homework for day pupils • Parents all expressed concern about the future designation of the school

The findings of the inspection teams fully support the views of the parents. Inspectors agree that arrangements for homework are less clear for day pupils than for those in the residential setting. The governors and senior management team are striving to clarify developments regarding the future of the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Since the last inspection the population of the school has changed because there are currently no pupils at Key Stage 3 and there are only boys on roll. All pupils have emotional and behavioural difficulties, as identified in statements of special educational needs. Some have additional identified learning needs and others have additional communication difficulties. Comparison with national norms is, therefore, inappropriate and judgements regarding the pupils' achievements reflect what pupils know, understand and can do in relation to targets identified in lessons and on their individual education plans (IEPs). However, in some activities in science, information communication technology (ICT) and physical education and swimming, pupils' attainments sometimes come close to national expectations.
2. Satisfactory gains are made against IEP targets, which are written in terms of behavioural objectives. The school has decided to concentrate on these behavioural targets in IEPs and to address pupils' academic needs within lesson planning.
3. As a result of good teaching and improved concentration, at the end of the key stage, eight per cent of all pupils are achieving Level 4 and above in standardised National Curriculum tests in English. In mathematics fifty per cent are achieving Level 4 and in science eighty-three per cent of pupils are achieving Level 4. The high achievements in science and mathematics are the result of support by a reader and writer for the large majority of pupils during the tests, illustrating that when pupils understand the questions and task they are able to improve their scores.
4. The achievements of pupils throughout the school are good overall. This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection when progress was judged to be unsatisfactory in almost twenty-five per cent of lessons. The improvement is directly related to the good and very good teaching seen during the inspection. It is also related to the very significant improvements in the acquisition and use of information communication technology (ICT) in the majority of subject areas. Classes are organised by age and ability which helps teaching and learning. The leadership and management of the school is more focused on learning. The impact of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies is being felt in all subject areas. However, a small but significant number of lower attaining pupils do not make sufficient progress in reading and writing to support their work in other areas of the curriculum. This situation has arisen mainly because pupils are taught in their own classes for the literacy strategy although this is a very effective method for most pupils and helps them to make good progress. The school has recognised this difficulty and has included strategies for improving standards in the next academic year. Parents are generally pleased by the gains made by pupils.
5. Pupils achieve well in relation to their prior learning and their abilities especially taking into account the difficulties they have previously experienced in concentration and motivation as a result of their emotional and behavioural difficulties. Their achievements in lessons of English, mathematics, science, religious education, physical education and art are good overall. Pupils' achievements in ICT are very good. They are supported by the good knowledge and understanding of ICT, shared by teachers and learning support assistants. This is a very significant improvement since the last inspection, when standards in ICT were judged to be poor. In the humanities, design and technology and music achievements are satisfactory. It was

only possible to see one lesson of personal, social and health education but it was clear from the lesson and from pupils' demeanour and maturity that they make very good progress. Although only one lesson of French was seen during this inspection, that lesson was outstanding.

6. In Year 3 pupils make satisfactory gains in lessons overall. In Years 4, 5 and 6 the pupils make good gains in learning as their behaviour improves and they settle into the school. This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection, when progress in learning was judged to be satisfactory overall in English and mathematics, with progress in some lessons being unsatisfactory. Pupils with additional special educational needs make the same good progress in learning as other pupils.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

7. Attitudes are good. Pupils are keen and eager to come to school. They are interested and become involved in all lessons, but show particular enthusiasm for lessons which provide a practical basis for learning such as constructing puppets, design and technology and experiments in science.
8. There is a good, consistently applied behaviour policy on which pupils are fully consulted. This applies both in the school and in the residential setting. Pupils have very clear individual behavioural targets to work towards. The school has a well-founded points system to reinforce good behaviour, and this is rigorously applied at all times, and well reinforced in the weekly praise assembly. As a result, pupils know how to behave and are calm and confident in their demeanour in classrooms and around the school. There are very few exceptions to this good standard of behaviour. Behaviour in breaks and at lunch times is also good. Pupils choose to participate in a range of well-supervised activities. The school has developed good and constructive relationships with parents. All pupils are valued and supported by all the teachers and staff at the school.
9. Pupils' personal development is a major focus of the work of the school. Pupils are encouraged to be responsible for themselves and their actions. In the residential setting, pupils have responsibility for such things as setting and clearing tables and helping to change the beds. They take personal responsibility with such things as being polite, eating without offending others, putting away their own clothes and cleaning their shoes properly. All pupils in the residential setting have behavioural targets to help them to live amiably with others. The school council meets regularly, providing good opportunities for pupils to prepare for meetings, discuss issues, and feed back decisions to the rest of the pupils. Two of the boarding pupils are members of 'Project Watch' which influences the way in which National Children's Homes Action for Children monitors residential care. Behaviour in class is characterised by the willingness of pupils to take an active part in all lessons.
10. Pupils develop good constructive relationships with staff as part of the learning process. They have good opportunities for group and pair work in lessons, and so learn how to collaborate and help each other. Pupils take responsibility for others. Many help the less skilled to use computers in the classroom. They support each other in organised games. In the residential setting, older pupils teach the younger ones to play chess and voluntarily help others to follow the established routines of communal living.
11. Pupils do not always have a ready knowledge of the impact their behaviour has on others, but the impact of poor behaviour is explained to them fully, by teachers in the

school and care staff in the residential setting. Pupils' failure to reach their behavioural targets is pointed out to them, and generally, pupils are able to discuss their behaviour, reflect on its consequences and change their ways as a response to rational argument. Pupils are good listeners, and show satisfactory levels of tolerance when other people's opinions differ from their own.

12. Pupils work in an atmosphere largely free of bullying and intimidation due to the high level of expectations and supervision provided for pupils at all times and the skill of all staff in dealing with behavioural difficulties. Persistent intimidation seen in one class was consistently dealt with by moving the perpetrator and re-integrating him successfully after counselling.
13. There has been one fixed exclusion since the last inspection to allow for additional support for a pupil to be put in place. This pupil was rapidly and successfully re-integrated into the school. Attendance is good and properly monitored. There are effective procedures for ensuring that all pupils come to school unless there is a good reason for their absence. Class registers are accurately and reliably taken before both morning and afternoon sessions.
14. Since the last inspection, pupils' behaviour has improved. Only two lessons seen were characterised by verbal abuse and aggression, and this was effectively and speedily dealt with. Pupils' listening skills have improved, and they are now generally able to sustain concentration throughout lessons. Pupils' capacity for personal study still requires development, however.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

15. Teaching is a strength of the school. It is good across all year groups and enables all pupils to make good gains in learning. During the week of the inspection teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons seen and there was no significant difference between the teaching of pupils in different year groups. It was good in forty per cent of lessons and very good in almost thirty per cent. This represents a very significant improvement since the last inspection when teaching was less than satisfactory in twenty per cent of lessons observed. All pupils make equal progress with the exception of a small minority of lower attaining pupils in Years 5 and 6 who experience reading and writing difficulties. These pupils' progress is impeded because teaching is not organised in such a way as to provide them with the focused, specialist input they need even though teachers are equipped with the necessary skills to provide such tuition.
16. Teaching is good in English, mathematics, science, art, and physical education. In these subjects teachers plan carefully with a good range of activities and methods to stimulate and interest the pupils. Many, such as science and art, include the opportunities for practical activities which enable the pupils to demonstrate their understanding by experiment or demonstration. For example, in science pupils are provided with good opportunities for working independently using reference materials such as Encarta and reference books. In a good English lesson pupils deepened their understanding of traditional and modern texts by listening to the dramatic way the teacher read the story. She then challenged the pupils to specify the particular vocabulary which identified the text as modern or traditional writing. In a very good mathematics lesson a very structured, step-by-step approach by the teacher helped pupils to interpret information from graphs by learning how to refer to intermediate points. Teaching in physical education is characterised by very good coaching skills in games and swimming.

17. Teaching is very good in information communications technology. Teachers make very good use of the computers available and the displays in the school illustrate the skills pupils have developed in word processing, data handling and graphic design, all of which are a tribute to very effective and knowledgeable teaching. Outstanding resources have been developed using software designed for presenting overhead transparencies to large audiences; this helps pupils reinforce their knowledge of text as the teacher has paraphrased excerpts from chosen books and presented them to pupils in a colourful and innovative way which is truly awe inspiring. Although it is not a requirement of the National Curriculum French is taught to Year 6 pupils and was outstanding in the single lesson observed. Teaching is satisfactory in religious education, the humanities and music. In these lessons teaching sometimes lacks pace and excitement and as a result pupils' enthusiasm and effort is limited because they are not totally motivated by the activities. For example, in a music lesson on dynamics pupils understood the meaning of 'forte' and 'piano' very quickly but opportunities to extend and apply this knowledge in a creative context were not provided.
18. Teachers are secure in their knowledge of the National Curriculum requirements and the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies have been effectively implemented and teachers have grown in confidence in their teaching of skills concerning words and numbers, and their use by pupils in all lessons. As a result, the impact of this sustained and structured work is having a positive effect upon pupils' learning and attitudes. They behave well in lessons and are interested in stories printed in 'big books' for all to see, learning how language works, and developing their skills in calculation and analysis.
19. In the most effective teaching, for example in information communication technology lessons teachers use assessment procedures which clearly identify pupils' gains in learning; this is frequently achieved in an informal and friendly manner with teacher and pupil benefiting from the discussion. Self-assessment is beginning to be effective in lessons and has a positive impact on pupils' self-esteem. Several pupils' record files include self-assessment sheets indicating what they have covered and the skills they have achieved. For example in science pupils have evaluated their success in experimenting on the different properties of opaque, translucent and transparent materials. The conclusions to lessons are frequently used to recap on what has been learnt and to reinforce the literacy or numeracy element. For example, in a science lesson the teacher ensured that pupils could remember the word 'electro-magnet' and could identify its uses - one pupil referring to a text book where an electro-magnet was shown being used to remove a steel splinter from a patient's eye. The teacher also made an effective link to previous work in a mathematics lesson when a pupil referred to 'less than' and 'more than' in relation to the coils on the magnet he had made.
20. Teachers' and classroom assistants' management of difficult behaviour is good. In the best examples they remind pupils of their IEP targets and, with more competent pupils, expect them to say what their behaviour targets are and how well they are achieving them. This is particularly effective with pupils in Year 6 who are able to remember their targets word-for-word and to make a mature and objective judgement on their achievements or otherwise. The link between teaching, target setting and the points scheme is very clear and culminates in a valued awards assembly at the end of each week. The way in which teachers and care staff work effectively together to acknowledge pupils' achievement and efforts in this way is a strength and makes a positive contribution to pupils' personal, social and health education. This is at the forefront of the school's work and teachers are rigorous in promoting pupils' social skills and good relationships prominently in PSHE lessons and whenever

opportunities arise in social activities or around the school. Teachers set relevant tasks for homework which pupils complete at home or within the residential setting. The strong and supportive management provided by teachers results in confident pupils by the end of Key Stage 2.

21. The work of classroom assistants is highly valued by teachers and pupils alike. They are skilled in learning support methods and use their time effectively to keep pupils working well, support activities in lessons and make a significant contribution to the management of challenging behaviour. The teamwork between teachers and classroom assistants is very good.
22. Teachers set realistic targets for the development of pupils' behaviour and these feature strongly in pupils' individual educational plans, in lesson plans and in teachers' records. However, the school has recently decided not to include academic targets for subjects such as English, maths and science in pupils' IEPs. This results in a lack of consistency in the way teachers challenge and address pupils' individual learning needs. Not all teachers identify the individual steps of learning for each pupil although all have an in-depth knowledge of their pupils and focus upon their needs effectively on an informal basis. Schemes of work and planning methods are effective in ensuring pupils' progress, especially in relation to higher attaining pupils. Some pupils who experience difficulties with reading and writing need clearly defined individual educational targets for these areas. Whilst teachers' overall planning is good, the lack of this specific focus impedes these pupils' learning.
23. Despite this minor weakness the school has achieved a high quality standard of teaching which reflects the interest and commitment shown by staff to raising standards since the last inspection.

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

24. The school has developed a broad and balanced curriculum that offers a good range of well-planned learning opportunities for the pupils and meets statutory requirements. The use of information communication technology (ICT) is growing rapidly and pupils use it well as an aid to learning in many curriculum areas such as mathematics, science and English. This represents a highly effective response to the last inspection report. The use of presentation software in English is also an innovative development of ICT, which is beginning to make a positive impact on levels of literacy amongst pupils. The school makes good use of the National Numeracy Strategy, which it has introduced this year; this supports pupils, work with numbers and money, for example, during visits out of school and improves pupils' numeracy skills.
25. Through exchange visits with a French special school, the well-planned French language programme offers a rich cultural experience to the pupils. Using e-mail and postal links the pupils improve their language in practical ways, and raises the pupils' awareness of their own language and other cultures. The residential setting enriches the curriculum for those who board, by way of planned leisure activities and support for the school curriculum through homework times and further use of computers in the unit. The use of a visiting poet as part of the school 'book day' and the use of visiting supermarket representatives to talk about waste recycling further strengthens aspects of the PSHE and English curriculum.
26. Planning for extra-curricular activities is inevitably weak due to the effects of transport arrangements. However, planning contains an additional weakness that is linked to

the inadequate provision made for social links with the community and curriculum links with local schools. The links with a school in France, one in Germany and one now being forged with a school in Poland, clearly add interest to the curriculum and pupils' learning experiences. However, those with local mainstream schools are few and do not reflect a commitment to providing pupils with the experience of working part-time in mainstream schools, either in preparation for returning to mainstream education or simply for the experience. The school has not yet developed sufficiently strong links with the local community, which would enable it to be seen as fully active within it. It does, however, make use of the local church and shopping area from time to time, and the local vicar is a regular and welcome presence in the school; his contributions to assemblies and religious education help pupils understand and reflect on Christianity and its place in some people's lives. The annual school fete is also well supported by the community. There are well-planned and successful sporting links with local special and mainstream schools, during the inspection pupils played a football match against a nearby school.

27. All pupils are able to play a full part in the curriculum and every effort is made to ensure that those with additional special needs are fully supported in their learning. Boarding pupils also play a full part in the very good provision planned by the care staff such as organised games, trips to local amenities such as the library or to nearby towns to spend their pocket money.
28. There is good provision for the pupils' personal, social and health education. School and class assembly times have a key role in this provision and are very effective in raising the standards of behaviour and expectations of attainment across the curriculum. The individual education plans (IEPs), contain targets which help pupils improve their behaviour. For example, they target some pupils' attention spans, providing a timed target to be achieved when sitting at the desk during lessons. Other targets are concerned with pupils' relationships with their peers and identify ways in which they might relate better to each other or improve their behaviour in class or at play. These plans are not reviewed with sufficient frequency to ensure accurate monitoring of gains made and this is a result of inconsistency of practice between teachers. The role of the co-ordinators is not fully effective in this respect. Currently there are no clear educational targets in these plans and this weakens the impact of them on the progress of pupils' learning overall. The residential provision for personal, social and health education is very effective and very well managed.
29. The provision for the spiritual and moral development of the pupils is good. The provision for their social development is very good and well embedded in the life of the school. The provision for their cultural development is satisfactory overall. The visits to and written links with European schools are strengths within that provision. However, there is insufficient evidence of planning for life in a multicultural society, although religious education does enable pupils to study world faiths, with an appropriate emphasis on Christianity. The staff provide very positive role models that enable pupils to distinguish between right and wrong. An assembly on the theme of 'truth' offered a very good example of a moral focus. It enabled the pupils to raise their awareness of the importance of honesty, whilst dealing sensitively with the issue of loyalty to those we love. The orderly and well-planned lunch and break times make very good provision for the pupils' social development. The residential setting provides very effectively for the personal and social development of boarding pupils.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

30. The school provides good support for its pupils within a caring environment. Staff work well together to provide for the pupils' welfare and, because of the range of

activities and high expectations placed upon them, pupils' progress in personal development and maturity is good. A spirit of harmony and happiness pervades the school and, because it is a happy environment, attendance is good and pupils enjoy coming to school.

31. The residential setting is very good and a strength of the school. The accommodation is spacious enabling each pupil to have sufficient private space. Residential provision is enhanced by a considerable number of after school and evening activities such as visits to the local leisure and bowling centres. School and residential staff liaise well together, sharing their knowledge and understanding of the pupils. There is an effective system for rewarding good behaviour in the school and this is a strong incentive for pupils to improve their behaviour. Pupils collect points as recognition of their effort and achievement and these are awarded weekly when the whole school celebrates the pupils' success in a weekly 'praise' assembly. It is clear that pupils grow in self-esteem and confidence due to the recognition of their achievements.
32. Child protection procedures are good. Formal child protection responsibilities are shared by two trained members of the staff and all adults understand and implement the school's agreed procedures. Several members of the school and care staff are qualified first-aiders. The school has good relationships with many supporting agencies such as social workers, therapists and National Children's Home Action for Children (NCH), which helps them to meet the individual and personal needs of the pupils. Work with NCH provides an additional opportunity for pupils to discuss and share anxieties and problems.
33. The school's procedures for monitoring and promoting pupils' academic progress are satisfactory overall. They are good in mathematics, science and information communication technology. They are good in English with the exception of monitoring a few lower attaining pupils' achievements in literacy at Years 5 and 6. These good quality procedures enable pupils' progress to be identified and their future work in lessons planned to help them progress through the National Curriculum. The school also has satisfactory procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress both in classes and in the residential unit and they use these well to plan future work and activities. However, there are very few opportunities for more mature and higher attaining pupils to attend mainstream schools on a part-time basis, whether it be in preparation for the next stages of their education or simply to experience education in a mainstream school.
34. The school has a comprehensive health and safety policy and meets the statutory requirements of the Children Act. However, the school does not routinely carry out a risk assessment of its activities in and around the school although there were no specific hazards identified during the inspection.
35. The school has significantly improved the way it cares for its pupils since the last inspection by upgrading facilities in the residential setting so that pupils' bed spaces are more comfortable, and re-organising class groups to make best use of the school and residential accommodation. The few minor issues raised in the last inspection have been successfully rectified. The good care that the school provides for its pupils has a positive impact on their development and education.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

36. The school has effective links with parents. The school provides parents with a good range of information about their children's progress. The provision of weekly reports is a strength; they comment on behaviour and progress in school and in the

residential unit for those who board. These reports are valued by parents. Pupils who board complete their homework during timetabled sessions on two nights of the week but homework is less consistently completed by day pupils. Parents' evenings are held in the autumn term and well attended. At these meetings parents are able to discuss their children's reports which are provided at the end of the summer term. The reports are comprehensive and give parents detailed information on their children's progress. Parents' views are also taken fully into account at the annual reviews and they may make suggestions towards targets in the pupils' individual education plans. This effective system helps parents understand what they can do at home to support their children's learning and improve their behaviour.

37. Most parents have signed a home/school agreement and are supportive of the work of the school. The day care manager, together with the headteacher, is the first point of contact for parents. They share a comprehensive knowledge of the pupils, answering queries quickly and efficiently. Home/school books are used well to aid communication between parents, teachers and care staff. The 'parents as partners' group is proving useful in improving liaison between parents and the school. However, due to the very large catchment area, most parents live some considerable distance from the school and their involvement in the work of the school is inevitably limited.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

38. The headteacher, senior management team and governors provide very good leadership and have an excellent commitment to raising standards in the school. This is one of the main reasons why the school has improved since the time of the last inspection. At that time the leadership and management of the school was described as having weaknesses. This is no longer the case. The school now shares an absolute commitment to improvement and has excellent capacity to succeed.
39. The senior management team (the headteacher, the deputy head and the head of care) and the governors have a clear set of aims and values which provide a clear educational direction to the school. The quality of the teamwork between teaching, care and support staff is excellent and this leads to a shared commitment to raising standards and ensuring the provision of a safe, caring and supportive environment where all pupils and adults are valued. The very positive ethos, which the good leadership promotes, is a strength of the school.
40. The leadership of the school has responded very positively to the findings of the last inspection. The appointment of a deputy head with responsibility for curriculum development and monitoring has improved the quality of learning for all pupils. The current two year school improvement plan (SIP) has been constructed with the full involvement of the governing body and it identifies a range of key issues such as the long-term development of the school. Timescales identified within the SIP are realistic and although the future role of the school is uncertain the leadership of the school is well placed to ensure that the quality of education provided is of high quality.
41. Good arrangements are in place for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. The school policy document is in place which commits the school to a range of internal and external monitoring activities. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and governors observe teaching, and feedback is provided to all staff being monitored. All subjects have curriculum co-ordinators in place who carry out their duties effectively, although only the co-ordinators of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, have been able to monitor the quality of teaching

and learning in their particular subjects. However, the school's planning includes opportunities for all subjects to be monitored during the coming year.

42. The governing body fulfils all of its statutory duties. Governors are committed to the success of the school and are currently very active in securing a more certain future for the school. Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and of those areas requiring developments and through practical involvement in the formulation of the SIP they have helped to shape the direction of the school.
43. There are good arrangements in place for the induction of all new staff. Professional development opportunities are available for all staff and the take-up of courses is good. Staff visit other schools and are thus aware of the other developments both in special education and in the mainstream. Overall standards in the school along with the commitment to continuous monitoring and improvement indicates that the school could be an effective provider of initial teacher training.
44. The school makes very good use of the resources available. Financial planning and control are very good. The headteacher and the governors carefully monitor the school budget and the headteacher, assisted by the administrative assistant, effectively manages day-to-day financial control. The governing body is fully involved in all major financial decision making and has good arrangements to monitor the effects of spending decisions. It ensures best value is obtained when securing new equipment or services. The efficient management of the day-to-day administration of the school by the headteacher and the administrative assistant means that teachers and care staff have little or no involvement in this aspect of school life and this enables them to focus on their respective roles. Any budget surpluses are small and are fully accounted for. External auditing of the school's financial arrangements have regularly been assessed as satisfactory. Resources in all subjects are at least satisfactory and often good and are used very well to promote pupils' learning.
45. The school makes good use of computers both in classrooms and in the management and administrations of the school. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are committed to the use of new technology and the school makes full use of a range of ICT applications including video and digital cameras and notebooks.
46. The school makes good use of additional funding and grants, for example funding for school effectiveness and the European Education Project has been used effectively in raising standards and widening the curriculum so that pupils learn a great deal about life in Europe.
47. The school is generously staffed with teachers and has a suitable number of care and support staff to look after the pupils efficiently. Responsibilities for all staff are clearly specified in job descriptions and match their experience or qualifications. Staff have a good understanding of their role and of the senior management team's expectations of them. They are well deployed; the nature of the pupils' needs means that effective supervision is essential and the organisation of this aspect is very effective; being efficient in ensuring the pupils' safety but not overbearing. For example, at peak times members of staff are always involved with the pupils, supervising activities or joining in games of football. A strong feature of the school is the powerful teamwork ethic, which pervades all it does; teachers, care staff and support staff work well together and appreciate each other's efforts. Staff morale is high although the uncertainty about the school's future role is not helpful in this respect.

48. The accommodation of the school is adequate for its present purpose. The quality of the accommodation is good, it is well maintained and attractive and is enhanced by good displays of pupils' work. All external doors have security devices fitted and this has improved pupils' safety since the last inspection. Specialist areas for art, physical education and design and technology are used well, good library spaces encourage pupils' literacy skills and interest and external facilities, for example a sports field and adventure playground, are also used well.
49. As at the time of the last inspection the school roll continues to fluctuate as the LEA make placements according to need and this means that the cost per pupil can be very high. However, given the improvements made since the last inspection, the good quality teaching and learning, the good quality pupil management and the very good leadership and management of the school, value for money is now satisfactory. This represents an improvement since the last inspection when the school was judged to give unsatisfactory value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

50. In order to improve the existing good standards and further improve the quality of education provided, the governors, headteacher and staff should:
- Provide more specific teaching of reading and writing particularly for the lower attaining pupils in Years 5 and 6 by ensuring their particular needs are met during the literacy hour.
 - Provide pupils at the school with regular opportunities to attend mainstream schools on a part time basis, either as a preparation for their return to mainstream education or for them to gain confidence in working in larger classes.
 - Ensure that arrangements are fully in place to carry out regular risk assessment covering all aspects of school life.

The governors, headteacher and staff should also attend to these additional, but nevertheless important, issues:

- Include academic targets in individual educational plans.
- Ensure teachers' lesson planning consistently includes details of how all pupils will be challenged by the work presented and what each will learn as a result.
- Increase pupils' links with the local community by promoting the work of the school more effectively in the village and surrounding areas.
- Integrate music more fully into pupils' curricular experience.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	50
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	46

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4	24	40	31	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	37
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	N/a

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	8
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.46

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	.3

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1998	8	0	8

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	1	2	4
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	1	2	4
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	8	17	33
	National	N/a	N/a	N/a

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	1	1	4
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	1	1	4
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	8	8	33
	National	N/a	N/a	N/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	35
Any other minority ethnic group	

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White		
Other minority ethnic groups	None	

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y2 – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	5
Average class size	5

Education support staff: Y2 – Y6

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	248

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	636041.89
Total expenditure	611641.21
Expenditure per pupil	15291.03
Balance brought forward from previous year	12542.00
Balance carried forward to next year	36942.68

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

37

Number of questionnaires returned

18

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	65	29	6	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	71	24	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	41	41	0	0	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	41	18	12	12
The teaching is good.	65	18	0	0	18
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	76	12	12	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	88	6	6	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	71	24	0	0	6
The school works closely with parents.	65	18	18	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	71	18	6	0	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	71	29	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	71	12	0	0	0

Other issues raised by parents

Parents were very supportive of the work of the school but concerned about rumours of reorganisation. All spoke highly of the progress their children had made and the high quality care and support provided. Some parents of day pupils were unsure about expectations regarding homework.

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

ENGLISH

51. Overall attainment by the end of Key Stage 2 is below the national average. However, pupils' achievements are good overall in English in relation to their abilities and previous attainment. In lessons, they make good gains in learning. By the time they reach the end of the key stage they are competent in speaking and listening and offer their ideas and answers with confidence. However, despite this good progress, pupils' attainments overall are below national expectations due to the impact of their learning and behavioural difficulties. In 1989 eight per cent of pupils attained Level 4 in National Curriculum tests. Some lower attaining pupils have insufficient skills in reading and writing to support their work in other subjects of the curriculum. They therefore have difficulty in completing written work without adult help.
52. Pupils' achievements in reading vary across the school from non-readers to more than a quarter of the pupils who are competent and confident readers and, by the end of Year 6, in line with national expectations. Such pupils are able to use their reading and writing skills effectively in all subjects; for example, they read and complete worksheets with confidence in mathematics and follow a sequence of instructions in science and design and technology. However, the school does not provide sufficient additional opportunities for lower-attaining pupils to receive focused, specialist teaching in reading and writing. This results in a small minority of older pupils in Years 5 and 6 being unable to read and during the inspection at least one of these pupils identified himself as a non-reader.
53. The youngest pupils in Year 3 understand that words link together to create written text. They can identify the main requirements for caring for a pet. They can order pictures into a relevant sequence to make their own books about pets with a written commentary. For some this commentary consists of single individual labels, copied from an adult's model, whilst higher attaining pupils understand the need to use capital letters and full stops to construct sentences describing their pets' likes and dislikes. By the end of the key stage higher attaining pupils understand how to use the full range of punctuation and can replace missing punctuation marks in a piece of text.
54. The school encourages pupils to make effective use of their writing within other situations, for example one higher attaining pupil attended a football match with a nearby school in the role of 'reporter'. He watched the match and wrote a full account of its successful outcome for inclusion in the next school newsletter. This represented a good opportunity for this pupil to use his writing skills in a practical manner.
55. Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory in a quarter of lessons and good in the remainder. They show a genuine interest in stories and writing and try hard to do well. For example Year 5 pupils enjoy a dramatic reading of 'Beauty and the Beast' and reflect on the differences between the traditional and modern versions, thinking carefully about the examples they give of modern usage before raising their hands to answer. Pupils work co-operatively together: for example, the lower attaining pupils in Year 5 try hard to identify the words they have on their cards in a word Lotto game and help one another if they are in danger of missing a chance to cover a word. Pupils concentrate well in studying literature, for example they work hard to understand how H G Wells uses a slow-motion technique to build up the tension in 'War of the Worlds'.

56. Teaching is good overall. It is satisfactory in a quarter of lessons, good in half and very good in a quarter. In the very best teaching staff are very secure in their knowledge of how to develop pupils' basic skills and use a wide range of activities and strategies to help pupils understand and enjoy literature. In a lesson on 'The Hobbit' the use of simplified language ensured pupils understood the plot of the book. Classroom assistants provide good, subtle support to pupils making very good use of questions such as 'how?' and 'why?' to encourage pupils to think more deeply about their use of direct speech when writing a script for a play. Higher attaining pupils are very effectively challenged by the teacher's use of more sophisticated language such as when she comments, 'You haven't captured the man's sense of terror' when helping a pupil evaluate his writing.
57. Where teaching is satisfactory, teachers plan activities which match pupils' overall abilities but miss opportunities to challenge pupils' thinking. For example to encourage them to hypothesise about other ways they could have tackled their writing, how a plot in a book could have been different or what the author might have been thinking during his writing. Occasionally they do not ensure that all pupils take a full part in discussions.
58. Teachers' and classroom assistants' management of pupils' behaviour is good; they use the school points system very effectively to acknowledge achievement and effort thereby encouraging pupils to strive harder. Pupils appreciate the award of these points and, consequently, their behaviour is improved.
59. Teachers make good use of resources to stimulate and maintained pupils' attention and motivation during lessons. These resources range from books, videos and overhead projectors to the use of the library and occasional theatre visits. An innovative and outstanding strength is the excellent use of adapted software designed for presentations, to reinforce pupils' knowledge of target vocabulary within their reading scheme. This most attractive and effective presentation truly inspires those pupils who can read, to re-read the text over and over again due to its excellent use of colour and sound.
60. The school has successfully implemented the guidance on the National Literacy Strategy, which it has successfully adapted to meet the needs of all the pupils. An exception is the organisation of one or two groups where a few older, lower attaining pupils require more structured attention to improve their literacy. Classroom assistants and teachers work well together in the delivery of this initiative and group work is very well organised to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of English. Teachers are secure in their planning and implementation of the literacy hour and it has improved the quality of teaching and learning, most certainly engaging pupils in activities with enthusiasm and perseverance.
61. The curriculum for English is very good; it is broad, balanced and relevant to the needs of the pupils with the exception of reading and writing tuition for lower attaining pupils. Assessment procedures are very good and the school is still refining its procedures for recording pupils' small steps of learning through the early stages of the National Curriculum. The data currently being identified is helping the school to see exactly how individual pupils or groups of pupils are progressing. The development of portfolios containing samples of pupils' work across all ability levels, is a very significant strength. The co-ordinator fulfils her role very well, she monitors and observes teaching, planning, assessment, also supports and guides teachers throughout the school.

62. The quality of teaching, the pupils' gains in learning and overall achievement has significantly improved since the last inspection when a significant amount of teaching and progress was judged to be less than satisfactory. This improvement is largely due to the commitment of the English co-ordinator and senior management team in developing the subject. The school has recognised the need to extend its strategy for developing reading and writing skills for lower attaining pupils.

MATHEMATICS

63. Overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is below the national average. However, pupils' achievements are good and standards in mathematics are in line with pupils' current abilities and pupils make good progress as they move through the school. Pupils perform best in number work. By the end of the key stage they have a good understanding of basic computations and can use numbers effectively in social settings, for example shopping. In Year 6 pupils can construct and interpret a diagram which sorts data, use fractions and solve simple problems involving, for example, ratios and proportions. Younger pupils are familiar with the 24-hour clock and have good understanding of shape and space. In Year 3, pupils are able to interpret data, for example in researching the ownership of pets they produced a pictogram. Standards in mathematics across the school are improving, as teachers become more familiar and comfortable with the National Numeracy Strategy. In the best lessons, the strategy is seen to very good effect and pupils' learning in mathematics skills, knowledge and understanding is progressing very well and the use of mathematical language and vocabulary is in regular use.
64. Since the last inspection pupils' response and attitudes in mathematics lessons has improved considerably; overall their attitudes and behaviour in lessons are now good which represents an improvement since the last inspection when a significant amount of pupils' behaviour was unsatisfactory. They show interest in the subject, persevere with tasks they find difficult and talk willingly and sensibly about their work.
65. The improvement in pupils' attitudes towards mathematics and their continued good progress in learning is a direct result of the good quality teaching they experience. The teaching seen during the inspection in mathematics lessons was never less than satisfactory and was good in sixty per cent of lessons, and very good in twenty per cent. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection when one in four lessons was unsatisfactory.
66. Pupils' numeracy skills are reinforced in lessons across the curriculum. For example in physical education where they count movements, in science when they use mathematical skills in calculating the results of experiments and in ICT when, for example, pupils analyse their data on the computer and print and display very good quality tables and graphs. All teachers have a sound knowledge of mathematics and numeracy and this enables them to teach successfully either in specified mathematics lessons or in promoting pupils' numeracy skills in other National Curriculum subjects. Teachers' planning is thorough, takes account of pupils' behavioural needs and is based on good knowledge of pupils' strengths and weaknesses.
67. Although pupils IEPs do not include mathematics targets, nevertheless nearly all teachers have a very clear understanding of the pupils' level of capability and this ensures pupils are always challenged to undertake work which is matched to their levels of understanding. Teachers' use of assessment in mathematics is satisfactory; the scheme of work in use provides good assessment opportunities at the end of

each unit of work including an opportunity for pupils to be involved in their own assessments.

68. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour very well; they are firm but supportive and pupils know the boundaries that teachers set. Teachers insist on high standards and challenge pupils who do not conform to the rules of the class. Teachers make very good use of classroom support assistants; teamwork in lessons is very effectual.
69. The subject is led effectively by a co-ordinator who has set priorities for the development of the subject and has been instrumental in monitoring the teaching of colleagues, selecting schemes of work and resources. Classrooms used for teaching mathematics are bright and attractive; mathematics displays are good and resources for teaching the subject are adequate.

SCIENCE

70. Overall attainment by the end of Key Stage 2 is below the national average, however, in relation to their abilities, pupils' achievement in science is good. By the end of their time at school, and with the help of an adult 'reader', most pupils reach standards that are expected nationally. Progress across all aspects of the subject is consistently good.
71. By the end of the key stage, pupils understand that all living things need a source of energy, and that all living things are dependant on one another. They know that animals are particularly suited to the habitat in which they are found. In one lesson pupils made a visual record of the school pond and plotted the creatures they found on a simple map. They confidently and accurately took samples of the water, ascertained its temperature and examined droplets under a microscope. They were able to record their findings, and use these to consolidate their knowledge of the life cycle of the frog. Pupils, with help, are able to devise a test to decide on a material which would best insulate a bottle of hot or cold water, observing and measuring carefully what they see. They understand the concept of friction, and know that it can be helpful and unhelpful, in the functioning of the bicycle, for example. They name and understand the properties of electromagnets. In one lesson in Year 6, pupils, with help, devised an experiment to see if a length of copper wire affected electromagnetic properties. As a result of their study of physical processes, pupils have a good knowledge of the solar system. Pupils work independently to calculate scaled diameters and distances, using authentic statistics. All have some notion of the vast scale of the universe and the earth's place within it.
72. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are well promoted and help them to learn. All pupils can read key vocabulary but sometimes their reading is not good enough to widen and deepen their understanding of scientific concepts. Pupils can keep a simple record of their observations, but only a few can write up an experiment adequately and correctly by the end of the key stage. Because of these comparatively low standards in reading and writing, pupils have questions read to them in the national achievement tests, and others to write for them. This in no way diminishes their understanding of the subject.
73. Since the last inspection, there has been a very good level of improvement. The proportion of pupils achieving the national expectation in the tests at the end of the key stage has improved fourfold. The subject is co-ordinated very well. Standards have improved because teachers have improved in confidence and competence due to whole-school training and the high quality of help consistently on offer to them.

The curriculum is very good and clearly reflects the requirements of the National Curriculum. Schemes of work are well designed to challenge and support pupils of all abilities, allowing all to make the greatest progress of which they are capable. Resources have been increased and are now very good, and fully support the scheme of work. Computers are now a notable and strong feature of provision. Assessment of pupils and the recording of their work are consistent and helpful. As a result teachers can readily ascertain the different abilities of all pupils, and so plan lessons with activities that enable pupils to do well.

74. The quality of teaching is at least satisfactory, forty per cent is good and nearly thirty per cent very good. When teaching is very good, teachers have a confident knowledge of the subject, which allows them to explain simply and clearly. They challenge the pupils to find ways of testing materials using the right information to devise them. The use of well illustrated books and videos inspire pupils in their study of the planets. Methods are interesting and appropriate and include practical activities such as making an electromagnet and pond dipping. As a result, pupils' interest and imagination is stimulated and they concentrate well. Management of behaviour in these lessons appears effortless and pupils make consistently good progress. All teaching was at least satisfactory and in the latter lessons, pupils do not always have enough opportunities to take an active part in proceedings, and their attention is apt to wander. Pupils continue to make good progress over time, however.
75. The subject co-ordinator monitors and evaluates both the standard of teaching and the work produced by the pupils thoroughly and consistently. This high quality co-ordination is fundamental to the high achievement of the pupils in the subject.

ART

76. Despite pupils' attainments being below national expectations, their progress in relation to their abilities is good throughout the key stage. In Year 4 they make satisfactory progress in a polystyrene tile design based on the linear work of Bridget Riley. By Year 5 the pupils make good progress in a printing exercise, interpreting the 'accidental' effects as a landscape or sky scene. Evidence from work seen in portfolios and on display, shows good progress through a range of styles and techniques. These range from portraits, puppets and Aztec masks to colourful work derived from Van Gogh and Paul Klee, and the action painting technique of Jackson Pollock.
77. Teaching is good. All teachers take lessons of art in three specialist rooms, which allow ample space for the varied work, though insufficient space to store it. Learning support assistants give effective support to classes and to individuals who may need it. They work well with the class teachers. Lesson planning is very good, allowing time for the preparation and clearing of rooms, as well as for some discussion and evaluation of work at the end of the lessons. These review sessions are not always fully effective, as the pupils have not yet learned to give and accept praise and criticism in a sensible and considerate way but they try hard to contribute.
78. Pupils enjoy their lesson of art and concentrate well on the set tasks. Their behaviour in lessons is generally good, with the few disruptions quickly and effectively dealt with by staff. They applaud each other's efforts and are proud to show their work to visitors. They take good care of artwork displayed widely around the school and have sent their festive greetings cards to the link schools in France and Germany. The

display of artwork in classrooms and public areas makes a good contribution to the overall presentation of the school.

79. The use of computers in art is developing with interesting ideas stemming from the use of digital photographs manipulated in a 'paint' software programme. There are insufficient visits made to art galleries and collections, and observational studies are not used effectively to develop the essential basic skills of line, tone, colour and perspective.
80. The recently appointed co-ordinator is re-writing the art policy. The co-ordinator's role is clearer than at the last inspection. The school is well placed to develop art to a position of strength on the curriculum. The subject does not yet make a fully effective contribution to the development of pupils' spiritual and social development. The school is able to offer a good experience of modelling, casting and constructing to the pupils, ensuring that there is balance and breadth in the curriculum.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

81. Due to timetabling arrangement only one design and technology lesson was observed during the course of the inspection. However, scrutiny of pupils' work in displays and discussions with pupils and staff, suggests that whilst standards of attainment are below national expectations, pupils' progress in their learning in this subject are satisfactory. Pupils work in a range of materials and have the opportunity to work with resistant materials in the small workshop equipped with benches and tools. In their class bases they work with reclaimed materials, textiles and they prepare and cook food. The main focus of design and technology activities is in making, although appropriate focus is usually given to design issues. Pupils enjoy lessons and appreciate the opportunity to make things. Resources and subject documentation are good and the subject co-ordinator provides good leadership.

GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

82. History and geography are taught as separate subjects in the school. They are separately co-ordinated. Due to timetabling arrangements only one lesson in history and three lessons in geography were seen during the inspection and the results assessed as humanities. Pupils' work was scrutinised, and staff and pupils were interviewed in addition to the lessons seen. Progress is satisfactory in both subjects.
83. By the end of their time at the school, pupils, in their study of history, have some knowledge of the ancient Greeks, and good knowledge of ancient Egypt. In geography, they have studied a local river and learned such names as 'flood plain' and 'estuary'. They locate the River Amazon on a map of the world, and describe its course from its source to the sea, identifying the countries it passes through by using an atlas. They label squares on small maps to use as co-ordinates. Pupils have a good knowledge of the points of the compass. They identify attractive and unattractive environments. Pupils say how men and women affect their environment. They understand that environments can be changed, and make good suggestions for improving some aspects of the school site. Since the last inspection standards of learning in both subjects have held firm.
84. Teaching is at least satisfactory in both subjects, and it was good in half the lessons seen. In the good lessons, pupils are actively involved. For example, they visited a supermarket to find out where exotic fruits grow and extended their knowledge of

other countries as they found the sources of imported fruit on the map. In one history lesson, pupils were able to taste a range of food similar to that which would have been eaten by ancient Greeks, and this inspired their further study of a civilisation very different from their own. Behaviour in these lessons is good and pupils concentrate well. Where lessons are less practical, pupils are prepared to concentrate but tend to drift off task. Pupils' reading and writing skills do not fully support their learning in either subject.

85. The curriculum and assessment of pupils' work is satisfactory in both history and geography. The co-ordination of the subjects is satisfactory but the monitoring of teaching has not yet begun although teachers' planning is regularly reviewed by the co-ordinators. There is good planned input to pupils' cultural development in both subjects.

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

86. Despite their overall abilities, pupils make very good gains in learning in ICT by the time they reach the end of the key stage. Some are close to national expectations for their age. The use of information communication technology (ICT) is successfully embedded in the majority of school subjects and is supported by the use of computer stations in the residential unit. As a result of skilled and supportive teaching, the majority of pupils are able to access the software programs independently. Higher attaining pupils are able to download digital camera pictures, store and retrieve them for simple manipulation and printing. They are able to copy or compose simple texts in the wordprocessing programme, re-size fonts, delete and use capitals and punctuation. The skills they develop through word-processing support the literacy and numeracy initiatives in the school. Many illustrate independent work, emphasising the importance teachers have placed on encouraging pupils to work with minimum supervision wherever possible.
87. Teaching is very good overall with one excellent lesson. Lessons are well planned and very well paced, enabling pupils to make very good progress in all lessons and very good progress in learning how to use their ICT skills to present and enhance their work in other subjects. All class teachers and learning support assistants are trained in ICT and each teacher is responsible for planning lessons for their class. Assessment procedures are very effective and include good opportunities for pupils to evaluate and assess their own work; this helps pupils make some decisions about what they need to revise or skills they need to develop. Teachers make very good use of the laptop and PC resources available to them. This enables wholeclass teaching and presentation to be very effectively used in lessons. Money from the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) initiative is being well used to develop ICT across the curriculum. There are current plans for a full Internet connection and e-mailing opportunities to be offered in every classroom in the near future.
88. Pupils enjoy using the computers and are able to use them in a responsible way, with little support needed from adults. Following a visit to Canterbury cathedral, which the pupils recorded on video and digital camera, they planned a presentation of their experience using the computer resources available to them.
89. The computer links being established between Portal House and European schools linked through the Comenius Project, are very effective in supporting subjects such as history, geography, science, French and English. The English department has developed an excellent approach to reading by the innovative use of presentation

software to help pupils' understanding and enjoyment of the school's reading scheme.

90. There has been a very substantial improvement in ICT since the last inspection when it was judged to be unsatisfactory overall. Following a major investment in resources and training, it is now one of the strongest subjects in the school and meets statutory requirements in full. Staff are growing in confidence and acknowledge that the computer is an important tool for learning. Its use is having a very effective impact across the curriculum.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE

91. Although it is not a requirement of the National Curriculum the school teaches French to Year 6 pupils. Portal House is the nearest British school to France and has very strong links with the country and with a special school at St Pol. The opportunity to learn French is therefore a useful addition to pupils' skills for residential and day visits.
92. It was only possible to see one lesson of French during the inspection but that lesson was outstanding. Pupils entered the room reluctant to say 'Bonjour' in front of a visitor and ended the session by identifying their likes and dislikes; one declaiming with passion 'Je n'aime pas la nation'. A strong emphasis on pronunciation by the teacher resulted in all pupils working very hard at their French accents, which were inevitably challenging; for example most had difficulty with the sound of 'oi' as in 'noire' but with determination and encouragement from the teacher all improved noticeably during the lesson. They beamed with pride at the teacher's comment, 'C'est formidable!'
93. Scrutiny of displays and teacher records shows that pupils' work is consistently of this high standard and that the work is put to good use in writing to French penpals and in learning the key vocabulary of school life.
94. This extremely impressive progress in both spoken French and in regaining their self confidence is the direct result of the excellent role model provided by the teacher and the expectation that every pupil would speak up with competence. The subject provides pupils with a good foundation for formal study of the language at Key Stage 3.

MUSIC

95. Pupils' achievements overall are below national expectations but within lessons are satisfactory within a narrow range of activities. Three lessons were seen with Years 5 and 3 during the inspection. Teaching and learning were satisfactory in two and very good in one. In satisfactory lessons the activities planned are at a level matched to the pupils' needs, but opportunities were missed to enable pupils to develop their creative skills. For example, they watched a video on 'fast' and 'slow' tempi and discussed the meanings of the word and which they preferred. However, opportunities to put this knowledge into practice and to play fast and slow music were then limited. Similarly in a lesson on dynamics, pupils' understood the use of 'forte' piano and the symbols for getting louder and softer very quickly. But when they sang a lively song at the end of the lesson the teacher's planning did not include opportunities for them to link this understanding to their performance. By contrast, in a very well planned music lesson, activities were very well planned with opportunities for pupils to work in pairs with minimum supervision so that they could explore the

characteristics of their chosen instruments. They played and developed patterns with different tempi and dynamics by discussion and agreement with their partners. The lesson then culminated in a performance by each pair in turn, the others listening with interest and respect.

96. Pupils behave well in lessons; they are very enthusiastic about playing instruments but soon become frustrated when they have little opportunity to play their instruments creatively. However, they manage their feelings well, understand when to play and when to stop and listen to the teacher and each other with respect.
97. Teaching is satisfactory, it is tightly structured and follows a well-established scheme of work. An assessment scheme is in place but not yet fully used consistently to identify pupil skills and individual pupil progress is therefore difficult to determine. However, the school has appointed a specialist subject coordinator this term with the skills and experience to develop the subject further and the school has recognised the need to integrate musical activities into the full life of the school. There are limited opportunities for music to make a significant contribution to pupils' social and cultural development such as using music for reflection in assemblies. The new coordinator has had little opportunity to implement such plans since his appointment at the beginning of the term.
98. Despite the difficulties, there has been a satisfactory improvement in the subject since the last inspection when teaching, progress and the quality and range of resources were judged to be unsatisfactory.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

99. Standards in attainment in physical education are in line with national expectations and by the end of Year 6 standards are particularly good in swimming and in games. Pupils are confident in the swimming pool and are developing good strokes, while non-swimmers make good progress and very soon learn good techniques. In games pupils compete well, understand rules and tactics and know to accept both winning and losing gracefully. In inter-school matches, pupils perform successfully and behave correctly. In gymnastics younger pupils at Year 4 are developing a good sense of balance and exploring different ways to develop poise and the use of space.
100. Pupils' behaviour in physical education lessons is good; they enjoy the subject, listen well to staff who often join in with activities, for example playing football or in the swimming pool. Pupils have a sense of fair play, they help each other, for example in gymnastics, and they appreciate the importance of safety rules. The good standard of work in PE results in good progress in learning. Pupils' skills and performance levels increase as they become more confident and mature and their understanding of health-related fitness develops as they undertake more challenging activities, for example in outdoor adventure activities.
101. Teaching is good overall, and is never less than satisfactory; it is good or very good in eighty per cent of lessons. The good standards of achievement and learning in physical education are a direct result of the skilled and enthusiastic teaching which occurs in most physical education lessons. The co-ordinator is a subject specialist with very good knowledge and understanding. A member of the care staff who is a qualified swimming instructor teaches swimming, and other staff have sound subject knowledge and expertise. Lessons are well planned, activities are challenging and lessons are conducted at a good pace to which pupils' response is good. Resources and facilities for physical education are very good including a gym, sports field and a

hard-play area, and equipment levels are good. The subject co-ordinator leads the subject well, assessment arrangements that plot pupils' skill levels are in place and pupils enter for and obtain nationally recognised swimming awards.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

102. By the end of Key Stage 2 and their time at school, pupils have a good grasp of the main features of Judaism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity. They know the Jewish and Christian stories of the creation of the earth. They understand the significance to Moslems of the five pillars of Islam. They have at least the basic understanding of the founding of the Sikh religion, and understand the use of symbols. They realise that important tenets of the Sikh religion are related to the Judeo-Christian commandments. Pupils know the stories of major Christian saints, prophets and martyrs. They know the sequence of events in the Christian Holy Week and have some conception of the cruelty of the crucifixion and miracle of the resurrection.
103. Whilst below national expectations, pupils' achievements are satisfactory in relation to their abilities and prior achievements, as they were at the time of the last inspection. Local community resources continue to be used to good effect. During the week of the inspection, the local vicar made a good contribution to pupils' learning. Plans have been made to visit his church. Pupils made a successful visit to Canterbury Cathedral.
104. Teaching is never less than satisfactory and in two lessons it is good. Pupils make good progress in the subject. Teaching and learning is best when pupils are challenged and inspired. Pupils learned well during a visit to Canterbury Cathedral, for example, where the building proved inspirational to them. They dressed up in mediaeval garments, toured the building and learned of the great spiritual significance of Thomas à Beckett to medieval Christians. Pupils made good gains in learning in another lesson when they were inspired and interested in being shown the authentic vessels for celebrating the Eucharist and tried on authentic ecclesiastical garments. In this lesson they made particularly good progress in understanding religious symbolism. By the end of the lesson, for example, they fully understood why, in the Church of England, the colour of priest's vestments reflects the mood of the congregation on key occasions in the Christian year. In another lesson, pupils made only satisfactory progress. Although a striking collection of eggs was shown to them, they failed fully to make the connection between eggs for Easter, new life, and the resurrection.
105. The religious education curriculum is good and fully reflects national requirements. The subject makes a good, planned contribution to pupils' spiritual and cultural development.