

INSPECTION REPORT

STALBRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Stalbridge, Sturminster Newton

LEA area : Dorset

Unique reference number : 113899

Headteacher : Mr. T. S. Jameson

Reporting inspector : Mrs Elizabeth Camplin
3586

Dates of inspection : 19th – 21st November 2001

Inspection number : 193476

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant and Junior
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	4 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. C. A. Wiles
Date of previous inspection:	21 st – 23 rd April 1997

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Stalbridge Church of England Primary School is situated in the small town of Stalbridge, near Sturminster Newton, Dorset. Social and economic circumstances are broadly typical of rural communities nationally. The school caters for children from the local community, though 25 per cent of pupils live further afield, including places over the Somerset county boundary. The school is average in size for the primary phase having a total of 226 pupils, aged between four to eleven years. The reception class contains 33 children, 12 of whom attend part-time whilst 21 are full-time. The number of boys and girls on roll is almost equal. All pupils are white with English as their first language. Soon after children enter the reception class they are formally tested in early language, literacy, mathematical and social skills. The results are below the average scores achieved by rising five year olds in other Dorset schools in communication, language, and literacy and are average in mathematical, social and emotional development. Attainment on entry is broadly average overall. Two pupils have complex learning needs for which they have statements of special educational need. Additionally, 25 pupils receive support from outside agencies either for speech and communication difficulties or physical impairment. The percentage of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs is above the national average but the percentage known to qualify for free school meals is well below the national average. The school's performance in statutory assessment tests is compared with the eight per cent or lower of the country's primary schools with a similar entitlement to free meals.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Stalbridge is an outstandingly successful school. Pupils achieve very high standards in academic and personal development by the time they are eleven years of age. Very good teaching enables pupils to make considerable progress during their time in the school. The statutory curriculum is very well planned and organised and a recommendation for designation as a Beacon School is well deserved. The school is very ably led and managed by the headteacher and key staff. Governors support the school very well and ensure that it makes the most of financial, human and physical resources. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils achieve very high standards because teachers cater very well for boys and girls of all levels of attainment in almost all lessons.
- The statutory curriculum is of high quality and very imaginatively planned. The school is especially innovative in its use of information and communication technology (ICT) in all subjects.
- The school excels in managing pupils' social and moral development and ensures that personal development is very good. Pupils respond very positively to teachers' high expectations of them.
- The headteacher manages the school particularly well. He leads by example, yet works closely with the deputy headteacher and the whole staff team to support and develop pupils and adults.
- The governing body works very effectively in partnership with staff to evaluate the school's success and plan for its future educational direction.

What could be improved

- The approach to delivering the new Foundation Stage curriculum for children in the reception class could be developed further.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Very good progress has been made since the previous inspection in April 1997. In the past three years standards have risen at a rate above the national average for primary schools. The quality of teaching is better and curricular strengths have been consolidated, though there is still potential to enhance provision for children under the age of six. Recommendations to provide a balanced range of experiences in music and a daily act of collective worship have been fully implemented. Governors are now very effectively involved in the strategic management of the school. They play a full part in ensuring a high quality of education.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 6 based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
English	E	B	A	A
Mathematics	A	A*	A*	A*
Science	A	A*	A*	A*

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Standards achieved in statutory tests are excellent. Pupils in Year 6 perform so well that Stalbridge is in the top five per cent of schools when compared with all and similar schools nationally. The rate of improvement since 1999 has been good due mainly to a significant improvement in boys' writing, whilst girls have consistently maintained very high standards in all three subjects. The school sets challenging performance targets based on knowledge of pupils' prior attainment and then motivates pupils to strive hard to achieve them. Pupils in Year 2 also achieve highly, particularly in the statutory assessment tests in writing. Results have improved as rapidly as in Year 6, especially in mathematics. The quality of the work seen during the inspection was equally impressive. In both key stages, pupils of all levels of ability are achieving close to capacity in English, mathematics and science. They also do very well in ICT and foundation subjects such as art and history. Standards of work seen in reception were good in early reading, writing and number skills. Children below six years of age are making good progress in these areas of learning and their achievement is satisfactory overall. There is potential for standards to improve in creative development and in knowledge and understanding of the world.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils of all ages enjoy school and their interest in learning is high.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils behave very well in and around the school. They have earned a very good reputation for their conduct in the community.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils form excellent relationships. They respect and care for each other and are very mature and responsible by the time they transfer to secondary school.
Attendance	Attendance is well above the national average and contributes significantly to pupils' smooth continuity of learning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Reception	Years 1 – 2	Years 3 – 6
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	Very good	Very good

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

Teaching is very good overall. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the National Curriculum are considerable and their management of pupils is secure. Teaching methods are often inspirational, especially in literacy, numeracy and science lessons. As a result, all pupils, including those with special educational needs, are highly motivated and work hard. At both the infant and junior stages pupils produce an impressive quality and quantity of written work. They also respond thoughtfully in oral and practical activities in literacy, numeracy and other subjects, such as science, ICT, history and art. Just occasionally, methods designed to help infants with recording information confuse rather than help them. The needs of reception children are well met in early reading, writing, and mathematical development. Teaching methods at reception do not always succeed quite as well as intended in other areas of learning. Although children enjoy being together, with more imaginative teaching they could make better progress in creative skills and in knowledge and understanding of the world around them.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The statutory curriculum is of high quality. The range of opportunities for pupils to develop essential life skills is extensive and challenging.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The school caters very effectively for pupils with special educational needs and enables them to achieve highly in a wide range of skills.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	These aspects are given high priority. The school has outstanding practice in fostering pupils' social and moral development, whilst provision in spiritual and cultural development is also good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school takes good care of its pupils. It has very effective procedures for monitoring academic and personal progress and promoting good

	behaviour.
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There is an imaginative programme of extra-curricular opportunities available to pupils and the school makes the most of educational visits, and visitors, to enhance learning. The new curriculum for children of reception age is not yet as well planned as it could be.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher's strong leadership and management are central to the school's success. The deputy headteacher and teachers with curricular responsibilities support him very effectively.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors fulfil statutory responsibilities very well. They make the most of their wide-ranging skills and expertise.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school is particularly good at evaluating how well it is serving most pupils and in taking action to address areas of further development.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes skilled use of specific grants, the work force, accommodation and learning resources to raise educational standards.

The school is at the 'cutting-edge' of advances in new technology, and skilled at applying best value principles. Current and planned developments are well conceived and are being skilfully introduced. They include plans for improvements in play facilities for reception children. These plans require extending to raise the sound overall quality of Early Years education to the high quality provided in Key Stages 1 and 2.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents particularly value the quality of leadership and management. Parents are happy that children enjoy school. Parents believe children make rapid progress as a result of expert teaching. Parents feel pupils behave and work very well in response to the school's high expectations of them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some parents feel that the school could improve the way it caters for children in the reception class. Some parents are not fully satisfied with annual reports, opportunities for finding out about children's progress, or systems for setting homework. Some parents feel that teachers have too little time to talk to them informally.

Inspectors agree with the positive views expressed. They established that the school has listened to parents' concerns about homework and systems for reporting on children's progress. Plans are in hand to strengthen them. Inspectors agree that links between parents and teachers could be further developed, especially when children start their life at school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils achieve high standards because teachers cater very well for boys and girls of all levels of attainment in almost all lessons.

1. Standards of work are well above average in both key stages. The high quality of teaching and learning in many lessons makes it easy to understand why the school's results in national tests for seven and eleven year olds are so high, particularly in mathematics and science. It also explains why the local education authority is recommending the school for Beacon School status. Pupils of different levels of attainment receive so much skilled help and encouragement that they are highly motivated to make as much progress as they can during lessons. They achieve close to individual capability as a result.
2. From the first afternoon of the inspection it was clear how well school systems for assessing pupils' needs and progress work in practice. Two lessons were observed where children on the special educational needs register were being very ably supported and making very good progress with next steps in their individual learning plans. The special educational needs co-ordinator used a variety of games and resources to stimulate a young pupil with speech development difficulties to extend vocabulary and confidence to answer questions with a whole sentence. The class teacher in Year 6 planned equally effectively for a lower attaining group of boys to write about different pieces of equipment from a Victorian kitchen. He had fully briefed a support assistant about the lesson objectives to ensure that the group was well supported throughout the lesson. These boys were as keen as the rest of the class to discuss items such as butter pats and old pressing irons and then write about their discoveries. They made constructive use of the digital camera and a desktop publishing package to organise and present their work attractively. At the end of the lesson the teacher gave them an excellent opportunity to develop pride in effort and achievement. He encouraged them to show their work to the rest of the class because he knew they had worked hard to complete successfully several sentences or bullet points. The group read aloud confidently and sensibly explained several similarities and differences in Victorian and modern kitchen equipment. They had achieved as highly as the more able pupils.
3. One of the first things to strike an observer is the teachers' subject expertise and enthusiasm. It was evident in numeracy, literacy, science, history, art and ICT lessons. In infant and junior classes, teachers start by building effectively on prior learning by encouraging pupils to reflect back on what they have recently learnt. They then move rapidly on to prepare pupils well for what they are to learn that day. They are often particularly good at explaining new ideas, clarifying misconceptions, and engaging pupils in lively oral and mental work. They follow on to provide stimulating group, or individual, tasks linked to the lesson theme but organised at an appropriate level for pupils of different ability. This happened throughout the inspection but two exemplary lessons in Year 5 and Year 6 stand out from the rest.
4. In the Year 5 lesson, the teacher ensured that pupils gained a greater knowledge and understanding of shape by focusing well on the names and properties of triangles. The most able pupils investigated true and false statements about shapes and angles, whilst less confident pupils practised measuring and drawing isosceles, equilateral, right-angled and scalene triangles. By the end of the lesson all pupils could distinguish between all four kinds and knew that their angles added up to 180 degrees. Most could deduce that in an equilateral triangle all three angles are 60 degrees. In the Year 6 class,

the teacher led a science lesson that provided pupils with an excellent opportunity to discover that friction is a force moving between objects and that a surface can affect the friction exerted. He devised practical experiments that allowed pupils to work collaboratively to plan a fair test, measure accurately, and explain their conclusions about physical phenomena such as gravitational attraction. All the pupils furthered their understanding that scientific facts and principles are based firmly upon reliable evidence. Attainment was very high in both the lessons described.

5. Very effective use is made of a variety of learning resources to foster pupils' confidence in the use of basic skills. The Year 6 history lesson about the Victorian kitchen was a prime example. Another was a lesson in the reception class when the teacher used family photographs to encourage the most able group of four and five year olds to think about the special features of different rooms in their homes. Children studied the photographs and as they did so extended their understanding of the variety of names used to describe rooms in a house. They found out, for example, that the living room might also be called a lounge, or a sitting or family room. Year 2 children thoroughly enjoyed a lesson about writing instructions for building a 'den' because the teacher used chairs to explain how material could be draped over them to make a protective shelter. She then encouraged children to share their own ideas for making them. The task really appealed to children of all abilities so that, by the next day, every child had produced a well-organised set of instructions for their own version of a shelter written to a good standard for their age.
6. Reviews of progress during lessons and a summary of learning at the end of lessons are also usually managed effectively. They contribute positively to pupils' understanding of how they learn best. Teachers are willing to admit when they have not provided as much help and guidance as intended. An ability to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses leads to an honest and open evaluation of teaching methods with their pupils. This prevents pupils feeling that they are to blame for slower than anticipated progress. It also helps pupils to discuss mistakes and admit when they need to practise more. This happened, for example, in a science lesson in Year 2 when there was a misunderstanding about the teacher's expectations for recording examples of natural and manufactured materials. The headings on a worksheet confused pupils. The teacher noticed and found an alternative way of recording that pupils found easier to understand. These pupils then quickly clarified their thinking. By the end of the lesson, they could confidently explain how materials taken from above ground, under the ground, or from animals, can be changed from the original state into different kinds of manufactured goods. The understanding demonstrated was easily above the expectation of the age group in the 'Materials and their properties' science attainment target.

The statutory curriculum is of high quality and very imaginatively planned. The school is especially innovative in its use of ICT in all subjects.

7. At the time of the previous inspection the school was in the process of identifying what pupils should learn in each subject, as they moved through the school, so that progress in learning could be ensured. A complete programme of work was in need of completion in science, geography, history, ICT and music. In the intervening four years the school has comprehensively accomplished this key task.
8. The curriculum is now rigorously planned so that pupils throughout the school can constantly reinforce and extend knowledge and understanding in every subject. The use of the National Literacy Strategy has consolidated planning in English. This is demonstrated through the school's response to the challenge to improve provision in

writing. It has enabled boys to raise significantly their achievement in writing tasks. Boys in Year 6 are much better at writing for a wide range of purposes, including reports, poetry and drama scripts, taking their cue from the teacher, who regularly provides examples for them. Such an example is a unit of work on Shakespeare's plays. After watching a video about Macbeth, pupils composed their own versions of the murder of Duncan. A group of less able boys was enthralled by role-play where they and the teacher acted out the scene together before successfully writing stage directions, short descriptions of the action, and the characters' lines. The most able pupils had sufficient grasp of the language of the period to extend their writing to include authentic dialogue for the characters in the play. The special educational needs co-ordinator supported three lower achieving pupils with the same script-writing activity. They too responded with enthusiasm and were inspired to produce high quality work that represented a big milestone in their attainment. One of these pupils wrote, for example, *A door opens. Macbeth creeps cautiously into the bedchamber. He looks anxiously around him. "Should I repay your kindness like this Duncan?" he whispered.*

9. Breadth, range and continuity in mathematics, and a close match with the National Numeracy Strategy, are similarly identifiable. A good example is this term's work on shape and measure. At the beginning of November, for example, work about bonfire-night provided Year 2 pupils with an ideal opportunity to extend their knowledge of two-dimensional shapes as well as their knowledge of an historical event and art and design skills. They successfully drew a variety of shapes, including hexagons and octagons, to produce a strikingly colourful wall mural of exploding and tessellated shapes. Pupils could identify the special characteristics of each, indicating confidence and understanding well above the expectation for their age.
10. Another example of stimulating plans to enable children to understand the practical use of number calculations is the work completed during a recent 'real-life problems' solving week. Every class took 'money counts' as its theme and pupils were given tasks of gradually increasing complexity. These were cleverly designed to teach pupils to make decisions in a meaningful context. In the reception class, children set up a puppet theatre and made tickets with an entrance charge on them. They pretended to buy and sell the tickets, thereby learning to recognise low value coins. In Year 1, pupils set up a café and practised adding up the total cost of the meals they pretended to serve up to the value of £1. They were encouraged to record their findings. Pupils in Year 2 planned shopping lists using catalogues to find out how much things cost and decided on things they found affordable. They worked in sums up to and beyond £1. Years 3 and 4 also planned healthy menus, totalled the cost of meals, and calculated change from higher set sums. Year 5 pupils, who had just been on a residential visit to a local study centre, collected data about the things they bought with their spending money and recorded the findings on graphs. They calculated what proportion of their budget was spent on gifts and sweets. Year 6 compared a Victorian weekly shopping bill with a modern one to work out percentage costs, and how to stay within a fixed budget. They used their knowledge of the metric system and of multiplication to show their working out, though did not go as far as to convert calculations into the old imperial currency. Some are already capable of doing this.

11. Opportunities to compose and listen to music of different kinds have been given a much higher profile. The new scheme of work has good resources and many ideas for extending skills. The co-ordinator, a music specialist, has ensured that colleagues have developed the confidence to teach music well. Special events and educational visits are also appropriately planned to enrich the music curriculum. The school production of 'Bugsy' at Easter increased pupils' appreciation of modern theatre music. A visit from a street dancer taught them more about Afro-Caribbean influence and later in the year the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra is booked to visit the school to extend pupils' knowledge of the classics. The school has its own orchestra that is popular with junior pupils and it has developed a reputation for high standards. This reputation is deserved, as an inspector discovered when watching the orchestra rehearse for a Christmas concert at the local high school.
12. The school has introduced a wealth of opportunities for pupils to use ICT across the curriculum. A digital camera, video recorders, interactive whiteboards and television have made a big impact and increased pupils' appreciation of the usefulness of modern technology. The use of the whiteboard in a numeracy lesson for reception children helped, for example, to consolidate their ability to match numbers and sets of objects and to operate a mouse. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 use the computer suite regularly. They frequently find things out from databases, videos and television programmes and then present information in different ways. Pictures and writing about 'special things', prominently displayed in a corridor, are very good examples of these outcomes.
13. Teachers use computers and the whiteboard regularly to ensure pupils with special educational needs in motor co-ordination, writing and spelling, are fully included in classroom tasks. Such pupils in Year 6, for example, gain significantly by being able to keep up with their peers in researching information in history, composing scripts in English, and collecting, collating and investigating data in geography and mathematics. In Year 5, lower attaining pupils worked competently on the computer to draw and measure different kinds of triangles accurately. As a class, Year 5 pupils were seen working on a class newspaper. Examples of completed pages already on display show the high standard achieved in desktop publishing. Pupils in Year 4 also used a graphics' package competently. They produced colourful images using symmetry and reflective effects to represent repeating Islamic style patterns.
14. Pupils also use ICT very effectively to communicate with other schools. Junior pupils take responsibility for a website that is crammed with all kinds of information about the school. They exchange emails with high school pupils including some ex-pupils from Stalbridge. Year 5 and Year 6 pupils are even paired with pupils in Year 7 and participate in video-conferencing to foster collaboration in literacy and numeracy activities. A group of six pupils from Year 5 were observed, for example, engaged in valuable dialogue with their partners, competently evaluating descriptions of characters in stories each had written. They challenged the accuracy of each other's spelling and explained what they admired most in their writing. The session was particularly useful for encouraging pupils to be succinct and speak with greater clarity.
15. It is very clear that the school fully meets its objective to provide a stimulating and broad curriculum that equips pupils for the rapidly changing world in which they live.

The school excels in managing pupils' social and moral development and ensures that personal development is very good. Pupils respond very positively to teachers' high expectations of them.

16. Before the start of the inspection parents were keen to express their satisfaction with relationships between pupils and adults in the school. They attributed the friendly family atmosphere and close working relationships to the team-building skills of the headteacher. He clearly commands their respect and admiration for the quality of his leadership. Parents are impressed by the way all adults conduct themselves and set a very good example to pupils of how to work together. They were quick to point out that older pupils are considerate of younger ones and do their best to help them. They praised the school's reward systems, including the certificates of achievement, that do much to motivate pupils to try hard to achieve at their best, and behave well. They were very aware of the school's expectations for punctuality and proud of the school's record for sustaining levels of attendance above the national average rates.
17. During the inspection, the team soon confirmed the accuracy of parents' views about the school's ethos, its high expectations, and pupils' pride in their school. Pupils provided many examples of things they like about Stalbridge. They were particularly appreciative of teaching methods and access to interesting and enjoyable lessons. Pupils clearly share a sense of community and collective responsibility and are able to explain how it is successfully developed, from their perspective. They feel the school's approach to managing behaviour and punishment is fair and consistently implemented. Junior pupils drew inspectors' attention to the value of the house system and the sense of belonging it encourages. House captains and vice-captains are elected by their peers and take their leadership roles seriously. Similarly, elected members of the School Council are highly positive about the way it functions and contributes to school decisions that affect them. They have had a major input into caring for the environment and in determining the range of extra-curricular activities. They even manage a small budget to purchase games and materials for use during wet playtimes and in the 'out of school hours' clubs. Infants are impressed with achievement award assemblies, especially when their or a friend's work is selected for special mention.
18. The school's citizenship, health and safety education programmes are important features of provision. Work is planned as thoroughly as that for National Curriculum subjects. Pupils are taught to appreciate the culture and consider the living conditions of people in different parts of the world. One strategy is to provide daily opportunities for older juniors to read newspapers and then discuss events that interest them. This recently led pupils to organise a 'shoe box' sale in which they raised well over £100 for children in Romania. Pupils are also participating in 'The Healthy Schools Award' project, and currently concentrating on finding ways to protect the school environment and conserve energy. They are monitoring a scheme intent on saving electricity and aim to find out whether costs are reduced. Parents and pupils value the visit each year from the 'Life Education Van'. Its use is effective in raising awareness of the dangers and hazards children may encounter and have to deal with.
19. The school is one of a group of local schools and their shared initiatives, such as the 'out of school hours' learning programme on Wednesday evenings, open up opportunities for pupils to widen their social and academic horizons. They communicate in all kinds of ways, and join together for many sporting, cultural and social events throughout the year. Video and Internet links help to motivate children and sustain friendships with pupils of similar age whom they meet on educational visits and who eventually transfer to the same high school. These day and residential visits play an important part in fostering pupils' personal development. An enthusiastic group of Year 5 pupils, for example, had

an excellent recall of their stay at a residential centre. They spoke of pleasurable experiences such as pond dipping and making observational drawings of Corfe Castle. They were keen to point out how much they had learned about caring for the environment and looking after themselves. They were able to explain how they felt about leaving home for the first time and how the experience had helped them to mature and become more 'grown up'.

20. Lower attaining pupils, and those on the register of special educational needs, benefit enormously from the many steps the school takes to help them to feel good and make good progress. An adult literacy and numeracy project provides regular opportunities for four and five year olds to work with a parent on practical tasks, such as board and card games. These lessons also reassure participating parents that they have a useful part to play in children's education. 'Booster' group sessions, such as the intensive 'reading recovery' programme for pupils in Year 6, have led to a small group of boys and girls making very good progress in reading and writing skills. More able pupils are not exempt from special support either. From the start of next term the headteacher is planning to resume his role as leader of extension groups in mathematics. In the past this has helped some pupils to develop a fascination for mathematics and to reach a level 6 standard in statutory tests.
21. All these examples show that the headteacher, staff and governors successfully encourage children to live and work happily together in a caring environment. Pupils meet the school's aims for them to: develop responsible attitudes and Christian values; achieve high standards of behaviour; respond to and appreciate the needs of others; and, develop a spirit of enquiry and an appreciation of the environment and the natural world. The school stands out as a place where everyone shares and understands the meaning of 'working together'.

The headteacher manages the school particularly well. He leads by example, yet works closely with the deputy headteacher and the whole staff team to support and develop pupils and adults.

22. The headteacher is a very experienced and effective leader and manager and is absolutely committed to making Stalbridge a school that parents and the community can be proud of. He constantly strives to improve its facilities, resources and working conditions for the benefit of pupils and the staff team. Everything he does is in the interest of the pupils and of enabling them to attain as highly as possible, academically and personally. He is proud of the school's achievements but at the same time is not complacent. Much of the school's success stems from his innovative ideas. He has a clear vision for school improvement and an ability to work closely with staff and governors to pursue the school's shared aims. These are effectively laid out in the Prospectus. Furthermore, the School Development Plan shows how the school will take action to meet these aims and priorities for improvement. The success of the school's action is constantly being reviewed and evaluated. The headteacher and his colleagues also respond positively to recommendations from external audits of provision, such as the key issues arising from the previous inspection report. National initiatives and projects are embraced with enthusiasm and energy when the headteacher, staff and governors are convinced of their potential benefits.
23. Fostering consistently good teaching is at the heart of the headteacher's vision. He leads by example, grasping as many opportunities as he can to work with pupils and alongside staff to support their professional development. He has traditionally helped to teach mathematics and ICT lessons in junior classes and is now extending his direct experience of teaching younger pupils by sharing responsibility for teaching reception children. Pupils enjoy talking to him and sharing their successes and problems. They

appreciate his interest in their welfare and progress. Parents and governors are the first to acknowledge how well he knows pupils and understands how to help them mature into well-rounded young citizens.

24. The headteacher knows how important it is to see at first hand what is happening in the classroom and has for several years developed a programme of lesson observation and feedback to encourage and spread good practice. The teaching team has wholeheartedly accepted new regulations for performance management. Teachers believe that they can all benefit from its implementation and are not threatened by it. All agree that the school's professional development days and programme of in-service training are well matched to key priorities in the School Development Plan. They make a qualitative difference to teachers' expertise and competence. For example, the drive to raise standards in ICT has been particularly well supported by National Grid for Learning training opportunities. Better use of ICT equipment has also helped to reduce the burden of bureaucracy on staff and enhanced school administrative systems such as monitoring absence and writing annual progress reports.
25. The headteacher and his team have very thorough systems for measuring pupils' levels of attainment and assessing needs. They are skilled at analysing assessment results and at tracking individual progress. They use the information to set appropriate future performance targets and measure the value added by the school. The headteacher is careful to identify how well different groups of pupils perform in tests and is quick to spot relative weaknesses. In 1999, for example, he recognised that boys obtained less favourable results in writing compared with boys nationally and with girls in the class. He set clear objectives to raise standards, such as the further use of daily newspapers, to strengthen boys' interest in writing and increase their confidence to do as well as the girls. The inspection team found that underachievement by boys is being successfully eliminated as a result of the school's action.
26. The senior management team and middle managers are expected, and encouraged, to take their share of the load in monitoring teaching and the quality of planning. Delegation of responsibility is equitably organised and conscientiously managed. Teachers are very aware of strengths and development areas in their subjects and during the inspection were able to discuss many examples of initiatives they had led or are leading. These examples included details about improvements in provision for music, support for pupils with special educational needs, and the impact of the new computer suite and design and technology facilities on the quality of teaching and learning.
27. The deputy headteacher works very effectively in partnership with the headteacher. She too is very experienced and has skills and qualities that complement his. She is a valuable sounding board on whom he can bounce ideas. The headteacher listens to her cautious and reflective reactions and those of the co-ordinator in the infant department, the third member of the senior management team. Their combined efforts result in secure recommendations to put before the staff and governing body. Examples include the school admissions policy, class organisation, and the deployment of staff. All staff, including those who work in the office, those who supervise at playtimes, and those who support in the classroom, voice satisfaction with the way they are consulted and included in debate. They clearly share a strong feeling of collective responsibility and job satisfaction.
28. Overall, it is the high quality of leadership and management that has enabled the school to improve so much in recent years. Progress has been so rapid that the school has now enabled pupils to maximise their potential and has joined the ranks of the five per cent of schools nationally that obtain the highest statutory test results in Year 6.

The governing body works very effectively in partnership with staff to evaluate the school's success and plan for its future educational direction.

29. The previous inspection report acknowledged the increasingly active part governors played in the life of the school. It also advocated developing the role of the governing body so that governors could be more closely involved in making decisions and monitoring the work of the school. The partnership between governors, headteacher and staff is now firmly established. Since 1997, the governing body has undertaken a training programme and become completely familiar with their statutory duties. They are ably led by the chair of governors and manage their responsibilities very effectively. They have set up three working committees to take on clearly defined roles. The membership of each takes advantage of individual expertise and interests and this adds to their efficiency. Each committee meets at least once a term and all three have their fingers on the pulse. They discuss the management of everything to do with human resources, and financial and premises management, and maintain oversight of the curriculum and the standards achieved by pupils. They report back to the full governing body and make recommendations for changes of policy and direction when strategically necessary or desirable.
30. An example of the governing body's contribution to future planning was the decision to accept the headteacher's recommendation for a change next September in the order of the criteria in the school's admission policy. This was in response to a need to reconcile the growing demand locally for places with a commitment to keep the size of the infant classes to no more than 30 children. Another was when governors consulted with staff about class organisation. They needed teachers' views about a choice between large classes for one single age group or mixed-aged classes with smaller numbers. They backed the teachers' desire to keep single age groups but also listened to parents' concerns about large classes and the possible impact on the quality of teaching. To reduce this risk they considerably increased the number of education support assistants they employ to work alongside teachers. This strategy has worked well. Pupils have benefited from additional personal support and standards have continued to rise.
31. Governors resolutely back the headteacher in his efforts to radically improve accommodation and the school grounds. They were closely involved in designing the new facilities for design and technology and the computer suite and are now keen to find out the value added by this extension of learning opportunities for pupils. They have ambitious plans to extend the school building to create another classroom and to improve the outdoor play area for reception children. They have undertaken feasibility studies on these proposals and are confident of their ability to achieve them in the foreseeable future. Their record of success in obtaining additional funds, such as those for the family literacy and numeracy classes, and the 'out of school hours' learning initiatives, is very good. This creates the confidence that governors have the capacity to succeed in new ventures that should lead to an improvement in the school's facilities.
32. Since the previous inspection governors have strengthened communication with parents. They encourage parent governors to keep in touch with the families they represent. They go to great lengths to make the annual report informative and the annual meeting interesting. They are justifiably pleased with the number of parents they now attract to the annual meeting. Parents attend primarily to discuss the school's policies and practices and to find out more about how they can support their children's education. Governors take their views seriously. They are determined to sustain and develop the partnership between home and school and to ensure parents feel well informed and consulted.

33. During the inspection governors were able to provide convincing evidence of their very good understanding of best value principles. They work hard to maintain a close working relationship with the headteacher, the staff team and the community they serve. They enable pupils to achieve very high standards and are providing very good value for money.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The approach to delivering the new Foundation Stage curriculum for children in the reception class could be developed further.

34. Parents are very positive and clear about the school's many strengths. Overall, only a few suggestions for improvement were brought to the attention of inspectors. They were mainly confined to areas covered in the Home/School Agreement and are matters that the school is aware of and plans to review jointly with parents during the school year. Not all parents may be aware of this. The concerns that still require further consideration are those raised predominantly by a small minority of parents of reception children.
35. Overall, the school has a successful record for keeping parents well informed about the way the statutory and broader curriculum are planned and managed. The Prospectus provides a very good summary of provision in each subject, for pupils' personal development, and of opportunities for extra-curricular activities. The school has not, however, included information for parents about the distinct aims and principles of the new Foundation Stage of learning for children under six years of age. There is some misunderstanding amongst a small group of parents about how the school plans to develop children's independence and ability to take responsibility. Some have anxieties about procedures in the morning and when children are released from school and need to be reassured that their child is secure, safe and happy at all times of the day. The governing body does not have a link governor for Early Years and this is an omission worth reviewing. Now is an ideal time for staff and governors to find additional ways of sharing and explaining the 'stepping stones' towards the early learning goals most children are expected to reach by the end of the reception year.
36. Teaching methods are not always planned sufficiently well to extend children's learning. In a discussion about homes, for example, children were not given quite enough encouragement to answer questions in full sentences or to expand on the detail of some of their observations. During another lesson the 12 children who attend part-time clearly enjoyed the freedom of being outside on a fine morning. They benefited from being allowed to explore a new and exciting environment. They enjoyed the opportunity to try out the large adventure frame and the pleasurable experience of kicking through fallen leaves. They enthusiastically collected leaves to bring back to the classroom to subsequently make pictures of autumn trees. This session had sound outcomes in helping pupils' social, emotional and personal development but was not as successful for extending their knowledge of the names of different kinds of trees, of seasonal change, or of techniques for creating their own pictures. Additionally, when children were involved in free-choice play activities, there were times when adults did not intervene to extend their language or creativity. Chances were missed to identify signs of good and slow progress and identify future teaching points.
37. An additional complication that the school has had to manage recently is the increase in the numbers of children being admitted at the starting age and, indeed, in other age groups too. The number of four year olds rose in September to over 30 pupils. The headteacher's timely short-term solution was to personally assist the class teacher during the morning sessions until the end of the autumn term. This measure has had the

advantage of enabling the headteacher and the children to get to know each other quickly. When the headteacher has been involved in other management tasks he has deployed other members of staff to take his place and this has resulted in most children learning very quickly to adapt to a range of adults. It has also given the headteacher more insight into how well the school provides for reception children's needs and how it can improve during the year ahead. This term's experience has confirmed that the decision to change class organisation in reception and Year 1 in spring 2002 is sensible.

38. The School Development Plan contains a summary of Dorset's Education Plan. It includes an objective to raise attainment in the Early Years, especially in areas of learning that promote the development of numeracy and literacy skills. Practice in these areas of learning at Stalbridge is already sound or better and there has been no reason for the school to single these out as priority areas in its own development plan. The only aspect of provision currently identified for action is to provide a designated play area for reception children. The expected outcomes are the enhancement of play and study facilities for these children. The implications for teaching and learning are not, however, defined and criteria for measuring the impact on standards of achievement, and cost effectiveness of the expenditure, are lacking.
39. Overall, the inspection confirmed how very effectively the school manages change when improvement targets and action towards them are fully identified in the School Development Plan. The team has highlighted provision in the new Foundation Stage as the only priority area for review and development that is not sufficiently explained in the present plan.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

40. To further improve the delivery of the new Foundation Stage curriculum for children in the reception class the school should :
 - A. Enhance the quality of information provided about teaching methods so that parents gain a better understanding of how home and school can work together to support children's learning;
 - B. Improve the quality of planning for lessons designed to extend children's knowledge and understanding of the world around them and their creative development;
 - C. Identify the expected benefits of plans for improvement at the Foundation Stage and the part governors will play in evaluating their success.

(paragraphs 34 - 39)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	22
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	19

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	2	8	9	3	0	0	0
Percentage	9	36	41	14	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	220
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	82

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	25
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	16

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.6

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3

National comparative data	5.6
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National comparative data	0.5
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Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 (Year 2)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2001	13	20

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	13	13	13
	Girls	20	20	20
	Total	33	33	33
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (91)	100 (91)	100 (88)
	National	84 (83)	86 (84)	91 (90)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	13	13	13
	Girls	20	20	20
	Total	33	33	33
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (88)	100 (91)	100 (94)
	National	85 (84)	89 (88)	89 (88)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2001	16	17

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	15	15	16
	Girls	16	16	16
	Total	31	31	32
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	94 (84)	94 (95)	97 (92)
	National	75 (75)	71 (72)	87 (85)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	13	14	16
	Girls	17	15	17
	Total	30	29	33
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	91 (73)	88 (89)	100 (100)
	National	72 (70)	74 (72)	82 (79)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	192
Any other minority ethnic group	0

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	8.30
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	26.50
Average class size	31.42

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	158

Financial information

Financial year	2000
	£
Total income	448322
Total expenditure	455628
Expenditure per pupil	2044
Balance brought forward from previous year	22633
Balance carried forward to next year	15327

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	1.50
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	2.00
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	226
Number of questionnaires returned	135

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	68	30	1	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	59	30	4	1	6
Behaviour in the school is good.	47	46	3	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	39	36	10	4	10
The teaching is good.	60	34	3	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	47	18	4	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	56	35	4	1	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	30	1	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	30	49	12	2	6
The school is well led and managed.	59	37	1	1	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	53	39	1	1	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	53	27	5	4	10

Other issues raised by parents

One parent felt that the importance of school uniform is underemphasised.
Two parents expressed concerns about the size of classes.