

INSPECTION REPORT

**St. Michael's Church of England Voluntary
Aided Primary School**

St. Alban's

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117451

Headteacher: Mr J Doran

Reporting inspector: Kath Beck
10090

Dates of inspection: 12th - 13th February 2001

Inspection number: 193804

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:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	4 to 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	St. Michael's Street, St. Alban's Hertfordshire AL3 4SJ
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Rev. T Beaumont
Date of previous inspection:	14 th January 1997

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St. Michael's is a small Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School with 154 children aged from four to eleven on roll, all of whom attend full-time. It is situated on the site of Roman Verulamium close to St. Alban's town centre and has two buildings on separate sites. These are known as 'Top School' and 'Bottom School'. Efforts are being made to improve building provision. However, the location of the school in an area of outstanding archaeological importance means there is a considerable constraint on planning and development. The school is popular in the locality and is over subscribed. The number on roll has increased over the last four years. A small number of children, lower than in most schools, is known to be eligible for free school meals. The number of children identified as having special educational needs is higher than in other schools, although few have significant difficulties. One third of the children in the current Year 5 have learning or behavioural difficulties. No child has a statement of special educational need. Four children are learning English as an additional language and this represents a higher percentage than in most schools. All are at an early stage of learning English. Children's attitudes to learning are particularly high on entry to school. Literacy and numeracy skills are very good. As this was a short inspection, the inspection concentrated on standards in English, mathematics and information and communication technology, equal opportunities and the Foundation Stage. Teaching was observed in all classes.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St. Michael's is a good school. The headteacher, staff and governors work together well to promote high standards. Standards are very high in English and mathematics at ages seven and eleven. There are also examples of very high standards in art. Standards are good in information and communication technology, but could be higher. There is still work to do to ensure some children with English as an additional language and those on the higher stages of the National Code of Practice for special educational needs, benefit fully from its provision. Teaching is good overall. Parents have a high regard for the school and the standards it achieves. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Very high standards in English and mathematics at age seven and eleven.
- Children's very good attitudes, behaviour and attendance.
- Very good provision for children's personal and social development.
- Good leadership which promotes and sustains high standards.
- Good teaching.

What could be improved

- The school should develop a detailed strategy to ensure that all the different groups of children benefit equally from its provision.
- The school should review its provision for children's cultural development, especially in the arts, to ensure that they gain a fuller appreciation of life in a multicultural society.
- Put in place a written curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage.
- Raise standards further in information and communication technology.
- The suitability of the accommodation, especially in 'Bottom School'.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Key issues from the previous inspection and developments since 1997 have been tackled satisfactorily. Standards, especially in Key Stage 2, have remained high in English, mathematics and science. The school's initial response to the last inspection was held back by a period of instability with regard to staffing. Since the appointment of the present headteacher there has been a determined and considered response. However, the delay meant that the teachers were trying to tackle the key issues alongside national initiatives in literacy and numeracy. At the same time, there were structural problems with 'Top School', which disrupted their day to day work. The National Curriculum has been fully implemented and there are schemes of work for all subjects. There is still work to do in completing a policy for teaching geography. Curriculum developments are monitored by subject co-ordinators. Bright children are making better progress with more children achieving the higher levels of the National

Curriculum¹. The quality of teaching and learning is checked regularly. Arrangements for appraisal through the new performance management policy have been fully implemented. Very good procedures check children's progress over time. However, information gained is not used well enough in some classes to plan work that meets the particular needs of children with English as an additional language or special educational needs. Too little has been done to improve children's appreciation of the diversity of other cultures. Initiatives linked to the Foundation Stage Curriculum, which were statutory from September 2000, have only just been introduced. The school has made good progress in strengthening its relationship with the community including a recent partnership with business and improving standards in information and communication technology.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools ²
	1998	1999	2000	2000
English	A*	A*	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

Children's achievement when they first start school is very good and therefore it is expected that they will do very well at age eleven, especially in reaching the higher levels of the National Curriculum. In 2000, at age eleven, the school's performance in all core³ subjects was very high in comparison with all schools. Standards in English were particularly high and the school was placed within the top 5% of schools nationally. Over the past four years, the trend for improvement in the number of children reaching the expected standard has been better than in many other schools. Children do better in English and science, with more than two thirds of children reaching higher than expected standards. In mathematics, while 90% reached level 4 or above, just under half reached the higher standard. Overall, mathematics results are close to those achieved in 1997, while in English and science they are much higher. The school has consistently set challenging targets for children's performance, and these have been met. Results of National Tests at age seven in 2000 were very high with 100% of the children reaching national standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Lesson observations and scrutiny of work of children in the current Year 2 and Year 6, indicates standards are very high in English and mathematics. There are examples of very high standards in art. Standards are good in aspects of information and communication technology. Children aged five exceed the early learning goals in personal, social and emotional development, communications, language and literacy and mathematics⁴.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good attitudes enable children to achieve high standards.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good behaviour means children can learn in a quiet atmosphere.
Personal development and	Relationships are very good. Children's personal development is good.

¹ Children aged 11 are expected to reach level 4. Level 5 is the higher than expected standard.

² Schools with children with less than 8% free school meals.

³ Core subjects are English, mathematics and science.

⁴ Expected standards for children aged five.

relationships	They work well together in small groups and older children take on responsibilities around the school in a sensible way.
Attendance	Very good attendance significantly enhances children's achievement.

Throughout the school children listen attentively, sustain their concentration and complete substantial amounts of work, often in a very short amount of time. They use their advanced literacy skills very well to enhance their learning across the curriculum. Poetry and writing are especially thoughtful and expressive as children draw on their extensive and varied vocabulary. Children take pride in presenting their work neatly to a high standard, especially artwork. In information and communication technology, children are confident and not afraid to try out new ideas. Children in the Foundation Stage have especially good attitudes to learning and willingly try out their developing reading and writing skills independently. Personal development has improved since the last inspection as children have more opportunities to use their initiative in their work and within the school community. Older children look after the younger ones very well. The recent introduction of a school council has done much to help children contribute to the decision making process within the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years	aged 7-11 years
18 Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	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.

In lessons observed, two were very good, twelve were good and four were satisfactory. The very good teaching occurred in science in Year 3 and English in Year 5. The daily literacy and numeracy lessons are taught well throughout the school. Children are encouraged to use their very good literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum, especially in homework. In the best lessons, teachers plan and cater very well for children with special educational needs and English as an additional language. This is not always consistent throughout the school. For a very limited time each week, a specialist language assistant supports children with English as an additional language well in lessons. However, some teachers' planning does not take sufficient account of the precise needs of these children and so they do not complete as much work as they should. Teachers have high expectations of what children can do. Lessons challenge children's intellectual effort. Bright children especially complete substantial amounts of work in the time available. In the Foundation Stage, teachers build well on children's enthusiasm for learning and provide good opportunities for them to apply their developing skills in literacy and numeracy.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good throughout the school. A broad and interesting curriculum leads to the systematic acquisition of knowledge and skills in all subjects. In the Foundation Stage the strength in the curriculum comes about because of the current good quality of teaching.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Children are supported well by learning support assistants. However, in some classes teachers take too little account of targets set out in children's individual education plans. This means work is not always planned to their particular needs.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. Children are supported well when assisted by a specialist language assistant, but generally children do not have sufficiently precise learning programmes against which their progress can be checked.
Provision for pupils'	Very good provision for children's social development. Good provision for

personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	spiritual and moral development. Cultural development is satisfactory, but the school is aware that the children do not learn enough about life in a multicultural society.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Children's health and welfare is catered for well. The academic performance of most children is monitored very well. There is still work to do in monitoring those with English as an additional language and those with particular special educational needs.

The Foundation Stage curriculum is successful in promoting children's independence, social, literacy and numeracy skills. As yet there is no written curriculum for this age group. In Key Stage 1 and 2, children follow national guidance in all subjects. A residential trip for older children, links with St. Alban's School, visiting theatre groups, artist in residence and music and sports clubs add to the breadth of the curriculum for children especially at the end of Key Stage 2. Generally, children do not learn enough about life in other cultures. The school's procedures to check the academic progress of the children have improved since the last inspection.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. There is a keen emphasis on sustaining high standards of achievement. The strong sense of community helps to create a good climate for learning.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors fulfil their responsibilities well. They use their expertise well to benefit the staff and children.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school analyses the data available in relation to gender and in the areas children achieve very well. However, it does not always evaluate the progress of all the different groups of children in the school in the same depth.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Resources, including specific grants are used well. Priorities identified in the school development plan are appropriately costed and directed at raising achievement.

Strengths in leadership stem from a determination to enable staff to work well together and are creative in their use of unsatisfactory accommodation. Accommodation at both 'Top School' and 'Bottom School' presents many challenges to staff. They face these with tenacity, but overall the accommodation limits the organisation and delivery of the curriculum and opportunities for small group work. Children with physical disabilities cannot be accommodated in 'Bottom School' and unless changes are made, the school buildings will not meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. All major spending is subject to competitive tendering and governors apply the principles of best value satisfactorily.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children like school, and behaviour standards are high. Good teaching which helps children to work hard and become mature. Good leadership and management. That they feel comfortable approaching the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about their child's progress. Clearer information about the homework children are expected to do. Progress of children with English as an additional language. The range of activities provided for children outside lessons.

Inspectors fully support the parents' positive comments. There are good opportunities for parents to gain information about their child's progress, although this is more difficult for working parents. Information about the homework children are expected to do and when they are to return it could be made clearer. The progress of children with English as an additional language could be improved. This is a small

school which does its best to provide a good range of activities outside lessons.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Very high standards in English and mathematics at age seven and eleven.

1. Standards in English and mathematics have risen since the last inspection, faster than in many schools. Children achieve very high standards in National Tests at age seven and eleven. In current work there are examples of high standards in English and mathematics in Years 2 and 6. At age five, children are exceeding the early learning goals in these areas of experience.
2. Many children are articulate. This is because teachers provide good opportunities for children to contribute to lessons and use appropriate subject vocabulary. For example, in Year 2, children gave good clear explanations in mathematics about the different methods they used to calculate the answers to mental arithmetic questions. In the reception class, teachers extend children's vocabulary through activities which capture their interest. The provision of a range of different irons, such as a 'flat iron', electric iron, steam iron, enabled children to understand how life around the home has changed over the last one hundred years. The children used the correct vocabulary to explain how the different irons worked.
3. In Year 6, children make presentations about newspaper articles to the rest of the class who listen attentively. At the time of the inspection 'flooding' was the main theme. This, together with presentations in assemblies in which children explain the work they have been doing, significantly enhances children's achievements in public speaking. They present their arguments clearly, justifying the points they wish to make by drawing on a broad range of information. In one case, a child referred to rainfall statistics to illustrate the high level of rainfall over the winter.
4. Children in the reception class learn to read quickly. They soon learn the sounds that letters make and how these combine to make words. In addition, the children use the pictures to give them clues about the words on the page. Their very good attitudes to learning give them the confidence to try and read new words. Children read regularly at home with their parents and this significantly enhances their progress. By the age of seven, children read very well. They read both fiction and non-fiction books, which extends their knowledge across the curriculum. By the age of eleven, children have read a broad range of literature including popular stories such as 'Harry Potter' and children's classics, 'The Hobbit' and 'Lord of the Rings'. They read fluently with expression and show good understanding of the plot. They are confident and willing to read challenging texts, such as the story of 'Pandora's Box', in front of the class.
5. Writing skills are taught well. The youngest children are taught to form their letters correctly. They are encouraged from a very early age to write things for themselves using their knowledge of the sounds letters make. As a result they are confident in their ability to write and spell correctly.
6. As children move through the school, they are taught to join their letters in a fluent script. By the age of seven, children are writing confidently. The ability to use a joined

script, to spell well and use punctuation correctly means children write substantial amounts in short periods of time. At age eleven, writing is at its best when children are given the opportunity to express their ideas imaginatively and thoughtfully. Sometimes their work is quite moving, especially when they are invited to write about different emotions. For example, one child wrote, "Death, a never ending black hole that sends a shiver down your spine". Another wrote, "Peace is like a blooming flower swaying in the breeze". Stories and poems are imaginative as children draw on their extensive vocabulary to capture the interest of the reader. Children take pride in presenting their work well and handwriting is often of a high quality. Spelling and punctuation is usually accurate and they know how to organise their sentences into paragraphs appropriately. Children with English as an additional language write well in their first language and are beginning to record accurately in English using short sentences.

7. The library has been reorganised and provides an appropriate resource to enable children to develop their skills to find information quickly. Children across the school use their high standards of literacy to enhance learning in other subjects. Homework tasks involve children in finding out information to help them in their lessons. Some notable homework in geography in Years 2 and 3 led children to find out a great deal about the Caribbean. Some children drew information from books, while others used the Internet. In a geography lesson in Year 6, children found information about the Sahara desert on the Internet and made useful notes to share with their friends.
8. Teachers in reception help children to develop their number skills quickly in a range of different ways. They challenge children to solve problems, such as, "The numbers have fallen off the number line and are in a muddle, can you sort them out in order from zero to 10?" In group work children recognise coins up to 5p and use them to add up simple numbers, or work out change from 10p. Children sing number rhymes and the brightest count forwards and backwards to 20. They also use coloured cubes to find different ways of making two numbers which add up to seven.
9. At age seven, children have very good skills in mental arithmetic and quickly add three numbers such as $4+18+17$, or $11+18+12$, giving the correct answer and explaining the method by which the answer was achieved. The children know much about symmetry, easily identifying shapes which have two lines of symmetry. They know about the properties of different shapes, both two and three-dimensional. They recognise and name correctly triangles such as isosceles, scalene and equilateral. In addition children know about fractions, numbers beyond 100 and how to record information in a graph.
10. By age eleven, most children use their very good skills in mental arithmetic effectively to solve problems. They are competent mathematicians as they have acquired very good knowledge and skills across all areas of the mathematics curriculum. Many can add, subtract, multiply and divide and apply these skills to practical situations and sums involving money, fractions, improper fractions, negative numbers, decimals and percentages. They know about the properties of many shapes, including the measurement of angles. Sometimes children use calculators well to check their answers. They enjoy solving problems related to real life situations.
11. National initiatives in literacy and numeracy have been fully implemented and are contributing significantly to sustaining high standards. In addition, homework increases the rate of progress. Children's high standards in speaking and listening, reading, writing and mathematics contribute significantly to children's learning across the curriculum.

Children's very good attitudes, behaviour and attendance.

12. Checks made when children first start school show that they have very good attitudes to learning. Teachers build on this and enable children to work happily in groups, without the constant supervision of an adult. Children are trusted to remain on task, perhaps investigating ways to separate rice, sand, corn and small beans, while the teacher works with a group on literacy or numeracy skills. At the time of the inspection, it was almost impossible to tell that most of the reception class had been in school for only five weeks. The children were confident, willing to talk to visitors about their work and determined to try out their developing literacy and numeracy skills. Established routines, high expectations of good behaviour and relationships between staff and children mean there is a very positive atmosphere in which children can learn. As a result children do their best and are not afraid to learn from their mistakes. They take pride in presenting their work well, especially art work. Displays of pastel drawings of robins and blue-tits illustrate children's keen observational skills as the shape and characteristics of each type of bird is clearly recognisable. This work is developed as children move through the school so that standards in art are very high particularly when children work in the style of famous artists such as Picasso.
13. The very good work habits developed in the reception class are continued in Key Stage 1 and 2. Children take pride in presenting their work well and often complete a lot of work in a short period of time. Sometimes, the children say they can do this as the work is easy for them, but they soon find a book or other activity to complete while they wait for their friends to finish. At other times, they persevere when the task is challenging. In a science lesson in Year 2 and 3, children had to solve the problem of why a light bulb in different types of electrical circuit did not light up. The children became engrossed in exploring their ideas, testing alterations and explaining their findings. The task required the children to work collaboratively in a small group. They did this very well, valuing the ideas their friends put forward.
14. In some classes the children are involved in evaluating their work. They write notes to the teacher expressing how well they feel they have completed the work and the teacher replies in a constructive and helpful way. This helps the children to know how well they have done and what they need to do to improve. In class discussions, children listen carefully to their friends and wait their turn before offering their ideas.
15. Parents and school report they receive many very favourable comments from the public about the behaviour and attitudes of the children when they are out on school trips. These are fully supported by inspection evidence. Children need to walk between 'Top' and 'Bottom School' for lunch, assemblies and some lessons. In addition Year 6 children walk to St. Alban's School for lessons in information and communication technology and others walk to the local swimming pool. Games lessons take place in the local park as rabbits have rendered the school field unusable. The children were observed walking very sensibly along narrow paths and older children took great care of the younger ones, teaching them to be safe.
16. Most children behave very sensibly when they are asked to carry out responsibilities, work in another part of the school or work with an adult who is not their usual class teacher. Year 1 children wrote their 'news' at tables in the school kitchen. When they had completed it, they went to work in the computer suite. They 'logged on' and typed up their work independently while the teacher continued to help other children with their spelling. Year 5 and 6 children showed high levels of respect for a student teacher who taught them Internet and other computer skills in the computer suite and mathematics in the school hall.

17. Children enjoy coming to school as there are lots of interesting things for them to do and to learn. They arrive punctually and the school day gets off to a very good start so that no time is wasted. Attendance is very good. Unexplained and approved absence rates are low. This high level of attendance and punctuality has a significant impact on achievement.

Very good provision for children's personal and social development.

18. Provision for children's social and personal development has improved since the last inspection. There are many opportunities for children to collaborate together in groups and show initiative in their work. In the reception class, children often work in small groups with the teacher or learning support assistant to extend their literacy and numeracy skills. At other times, they make choices about activities such as designing a 'dinosaur land' in the sand, playing in the role-play corner, carrying out science investigations and working with a partner on the computer. They move between these activities sensibly having spent time on each one. They are aware of how much time they have and use it very effectively to improve their social and academic skills. They ask each other questions, especially when trying to decide how to sort different materials or use the computer program effectively. In lessons in Key Stage 1 and 2, children collaborate very well in group work, especially in science. They share resources without argument and often help each other in individual tasks.
19. The school has a good programme for children's personal, social and health education. Older children share books with younger children and help them to learn to read. They operate a 'buddy system'. This means older children help younger children in many different ways. For example if the older children notice young children looking puzzled, unsure what to do or unhappy in the playground or in the dinner hall they offer help. There is a genuine sense of care among all the children to help and look after each other. The younger children know they can ask older children for help at any time and are confident in doing so. Older children help to tie shoe laces and teach younger children how to play games. This does much to enhance the strong sense of community within the school. Parents value this highly and report that this helpful attitude spills over into the clubs, such as cubs and brownies, that children attend after school, where the children get along together very well. The younger children are quickly assimilated into school through the induction programme, but also they are invited to attend the Wednesday church service each week. In this way young children get to know staff and other children at the school well before they start school.
20. Throughout the school children take part in 'Circle Time'. This is when children can talk together about a wide range of issues which may concern them. Ways to resolve issues are discussed and this gives children confidence in their relationships with others. A school council has been established recently. This is teaching the children much about citizenship and the appropriateness of elections. The school council operates democratically with a chair, vice-chair, secretary, and agenda secretary. Children write minutes of their meetings and these are circulated to all classes. The children rightly feel they have contributed to the school's decision making process and that this is valued by the staff. They have brought about changes to playtimes, with more play equipment, changed the time children say grace before lunch and

evaluated their role in the 'Buddy system' in the playground. Children at 'Bottom School' wrote to the headteacher bringing to his attention the fact that there were no locks on the toilets in their building and that this made them feel unhappy. Locks have been fitted now. Children look after the plants and animals and the library too.

21. The residential school journey to Aylmerton for classes 1 and 2 does much to enhance children's understanding about living in a small community away from home. The after school sports clubs are led by professional coaches. Together with music and French clubs, they are available to children in both Key Stage 1 and 2. The clubs teach the children many skills, especially the need for teamwork if the school is to be successful. There are also many links with the community such as Verulamium House Nursing Home and St. Michael's lunch club, which helps children to appreciate the needs of the elderly. Local members of the community bring their knowledge to share with the children. For example, a local artist is designing a mural to be completed with the children shortly to celebrate the school's 125th anniversary. Older members of the community share their wartime experiences and make history real. Many parents also help in school which helps to extend group work in cooking or sewing and gives opportunities for children to practise their reading and information and communication technology skills.
22. The school's links with Verulamium Museum and St. Alban's Abbey enhance children's understanding of the historical importance of the area in which they live. In addition, further links with industry and with Hertfordshire University, Oaklands College, St. Alban's Girls' School and St. Alban's School, enable children to learn much from, and about, the world beyond the immediate school community.
23. Assemblies play a central part in the provision for children's social development. They also promote the school's aims and values. Prior to the inspection the children had been considering the nature of promises and how hard they are to keep. The assemblies in which children share their work do much to contribute to the school's sense of community as children value the efforts of others. These efforts may involve academic, social or personal achievements.

Good leadership which promotes and sustains high standards.

24. Leadership is good and parents hold the school in high regard. Strengths in the leadership stem from a determination to enable staff to work together for the benefit of the children. A strong sense of community permeates the school, and it is particularly successful in implementing the aims to provide:
 - a happy and stimulating environment based on Christian values;
 - a wide and balanced curriculum in accordance with the National Curriculum;and encourage:
 - good work habits and self discipline so that each child may contribute, question and evaluate with confidence, in all aspects of school life;
 - all members of the school to show care, concern and respect for each other, the

wider community and the environment.

These aims contribute strongly to the high standards and are valued by parents. This means that the governors, headteacher and staff have a very clear view of the educational direction of the school and what kind of school it should be.

25. Subject leaders have responsibility for standards in their subjects. Together with the headteacher and curriculum and assessment manager, they monitor and evaluate the programmes of work children follow in each subject, standards achieved and the quality of teaching. This represents an improvement since the last inspection and has brought about a more challenging curriculum, especially for bright children. There are very good assessment procedures to monitor children's progress, although this does not yet take sufficient account of the needs of some children with English as an additional language or special educational needs. However, close checks on most children have assisted in the maintenance of high standards. Children are aware of the levels they are achieving and some teachers make it very clear to them what they have to do to achieve the next level of achievement. This sustains a good rate of progress. Recent plans and determined action to improve standards in information and communication technology are raising standards in the subject, but there is still work to do.
26. The governors are well informed and fulfil their responsibilities well. Together with the headteacher, they make good use of the school's resources to benefit the children. The school undertook considerable research to find the best value for money when it decided to create the new computer suite. As a result, high quality computers have been purchased and linked together to form a network. Governors together with the teachers, have a good understanding of the standards achieved and how the school performs in comparison with other schools. They use national and test results, plus information from the local authority to confirm their view that the school is doing well. Governors are aware of the annual targets for children's achievement and how these may vary in the future depending on the abilities of the children in the year group.
27. To sustain the high standards, the school development plan identifies clearly the priorities for development and the likely costs. One of these priorities is to sustain a good number of teachers and learning support assistants. This means there is some flexibility as to when particular year groups are taught. At present the youngest Year 1 and reception children are taught separately in small groups for literacy and numeracy each day. Year 5 and Year 6 children are also taught in their year groups in those subjects in the Spring term to boost standards. The learning support assistants are very good and confident in taking a leading role in children's group work. Most are well trained, but not in working with children who speak English as an additional language.
28. New teachers are inducted into the school well. This is an improvement since the last inspection, when induction procedures were inadequate to ensure continuity in children's learning. School documentation and guidance from colleagues enable teachers to settle quickly into the school, following established routines, the National

Curriculum and expectations in the quality of teaching. Teachers are given clear guidance about behaviour management procedures and expectations of children's achievement so that work is 'pitched' correctly. All teachers have clear job descriptions and have been appraised and the new performance management policy is being implemented. This too is an improvement since the previous inspection and is having an impact on standards.

Good teaching.

29. Teaching is good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed and this is an improvement since the last inspection. When teachers cater very well for all the different groups in the class and provide challenging and interesting tasks for children to work on, teaching is very good. This was especially true in a science lesson in Year 3 and an English lesson in Year 5. In both lessons, children were challenged to find information quickly. In science, this was through practical investigation and in the English lesson, children used skills of skimming and scanning to find the information they wanted. These lessons helped children to draw on their previous knowledge, captured their interest and challenged them to think hard. The work was conducted at a very good pace and enabled children to become absorbed in what they were doing and reflect on their learning. The lessons were structured well and often involved children in providing clear explanations and helping others to learn. Tasks were thought out carefully and matched well to children's different abilities.
30. Teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. Literacy and numeracy are taught well. Teachers plan their work in accordance with the National Literacy and Numeracy Frameworks. In other subjects, the planning follows national guidance closely, so that the National Curriculum is covered. Often teachers ask good questions which challenge children's thinking. Children's contributions to lessons are valued. Teachers' expectations of what children know and can do are high and work builds well on what children have learned before. Plenary sessions at the end of lessons allow useful discussions which help teachers to review what has been learned. Children also share their achievements and this boosts their self-esteem.
31. In the reception class, teachers have good knowledge of the needs of children under five and provide work that is relevant and interesting to them. Activities involve practical, written and oral work and appeal to both girls and boys. The variety of strategies chosen by the teacher makes learning enjoyable and fun. For example, children made simple zigzag books and drew something beginning with 'e' on each page. Children enjoyed sharing their ideas, thinking up unusual words such as 'engine' as well as obvious ones like 'elephant'. In history, the children gained great pleasure from using irons from the 1900s to 2001 to press different kinds of materials. (None were hot). Parents are right to be pleased about the way children are taught to read. Teachers enable children to learn the sound letters make and use this knowledge to read simple books and write words independently. In whole class and group sessions, children respond very well to the teacher's questions. When working on their own or in small groups they can be totally absorbed in what they are doing.
32. A good communication system between some teachers and learning support assistants means they are clear about the role they are to play in lessons, what children are to achieve and how they are to achieve it. Learning support assistants add strength to the teaching and complement much of the work in school enabling

children to cover a broad and varied curriculum. Learning support assistants also note children's achievements or what they found difficult. This is very helpful in enabling teachers to plan relevant tasks in future lessons. However, this is not consistent in all classes. In some cases, teachers and learning support assistants plan work together so that there is a clear understanding of work to be covered and so time is used to best advantage. The specialist assistant for children with English as an additional language supports the children well in lessons. However, there is insufficient liaison or joint planning between this assistant and class teachers to ensure children with English as an additional language can make the most of lessons where they do not receive additional help. There is no specialist teaching for children with special educational needs. Some teachers' lesson plans do not always take sufficient account of their needs to ensure they can make good progress.

33. Overall, teaching is good and parents are right to say that it is.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The school should develop a detailed strategy to ensure that all the different groups of children benefit equally from its provision.

34. Staff are alert to the importance of ensuring that the needs of all the different groups of children represented in the school are met, and have taken very effective action in several respects to ensure that this is the case:
- the headteacher and deputy headteacher analyse and compare the assessment and test results of girls and of boys each year to see whether children of either gender appear to suffer any disadvantage. Overall, the school finds no significant difference in the progress made by girls and that of the boys. The inspection confirms this view;
 - the governors appreciate that the school's access for disabled children does not meet requirements. Plans are in hand to improve this provision;
 - in response to a concern that children in the 'Bottom School' building might lose teaching time moving from building to building, the school has slightly lengthened the school day for these children. This is a very good response to an important issue.
35. The previous inspection commented on the lack of an equal opportunities policy.

Such a policy would set out with precision how the school provides for, and monitors the progress of different groups of children. Although the school development plan shows the governors' concern to produce such a policy, this has not yet been done. In the absence of an effective strategy for ensuring equal opportunities, some teachers' planning of work does not take enough account of the particular educational needs of some groups of children.

36. Some improvements have been made in increasing the challenge for bright children. The school has identified its bright children, and calls on the services of a retired teacher to visit regularly to work with them in small groups. The school also makes good use of its close relationship with a nearby secondary school to boost its provision in information and communication technology. Oversight of provision for bright children has been properly allocated to the special needs co-ordinator, and the current school development plan shows the school's concern to make further improvements in provision in this area. Staff intend to introduce better systems for monitoring their progress, and are considering ways in which learning support assistants might be deployed to improve the programme. Overall, the school's response to this key issue from the 1997 inspection has been positive.
37. While the school has identified a higher number of children than might be expected as having special educational needs, very few have particular learning difficulties. Most children are on the lowest stage of assessment⁵ as set out in the National Code of Practice for special educational needs, which requires class teachers to provide work that meets their needs. There is no specialist teaching for these children or those on the higher stages of assessment. Some receive additional support from learning support assistants and follow a programme of work linked to the National Literacy Strategy. Most children on the higher stage 3 are at present in Year 5 and 6. They have behavioural difficulties and find it hard to acquire literacy and numeracy skills as fast as other children in the class. They are supported effectively in most classes by learning support assistants, but not all teachers take their specific learning needs into account when planning lessons. Individual education plans, which are devised to support teachers, lack specific targets for children to achieve. This means children find the work too difficult and find it hard to keep up.
38. A small group of children in the school are learning English as their second, or additional language. Several of them are still at an early stage in developing fluency in

⁵ Stages of assessment in the National Code of practice for special educational needs are level 1 (the lowest) where teachers provide the support children need: level 2 the special educational needs co-ordinator helps the class teacher to write individual learning programmes to target the progress children need to make: level 3 (the higher stage) outside agencies provide specific advice and support: level 4 child is assessed for a specific statement of special educational need: level 5, child has a statement of special educational need with specific resources.

speech and the social confidence which comes with it. While in some respects provision made for them is satisfactory, there are areas of weakness needing to be addressed. The children work happily alongside the rest of their class, sharing the same broad curriculum, and achieving success in their work. A specialist language assistant and a learning support assistant help them in the classroom, and provide additional small group teaching when it is felt to be appropriate.

39. At present the school lacks a sufficiently precise approach to identifying these children's language and social needs, to planning individual work programmes, and to monitoring their access to other school activities. At present, they do not have adequately detailed work programmes, based on a thorough assessment of the language skills they need to acquire, against which their progress can be monitored regularly. In planning classroom lessons, teachers often do not take sufficient account of the particular needs of these children. As a result, when the part-time assistant is not present, they often receive too little help, and sometimes struggle in lessons. The school development plan, while comprehensive in other respects, makes no reference to the provision for these children. Most teachers and learning support assistants have not received training in working with children with English as an additional language.

40. Similarly it is important for the school to begin to monitor systematically the extent to which children learning English as an additional language are able to benefit from the full range of school activities. Such monitoring should include issues such as whether:

- their bilingual skills, and the cultural richness they bring are acknowledged and celebrated in the school curriculum and displays;
- the provision for children learning English as an additional language receives the attention it deserves in the school's self-review, and development planning processes;

and they:

- take a fully active role in class discussions and group work;
- have friends to play with at playtimes;
- take a full part in outings, extra-curricular activities and other school events;
- undertake responsibilities in school.

41. The school rightly takes a serious view of any discriminatory behaviour or language. A racist incident book has been established in case such incidents might arise, and staff have received guidance on how to act in this event. These are simple monitoring instruments, which can lead to the detection of incidents which might otherwise remain hidden. The school's prospectus should also make a clear statement about

its attitude to discriminatory language or behaviour.

The school should review its provision for children's cultural development, especially in the arts, to ensure that they gain a fuller appreciation of the multicultural nature of Britain today.

42. One of the key issues from the last inspection was to improve children's appreciation of other cultures. Curriculum areas such as art, music and dance contributed less in this respect than they should.
43. While the school recognises the need to move forward on this issue, and is rightly concerned to make a thorough rather than a superficial response, little has been done since 1997 to improve this provision.
44. The school's development plan refers to the need for a policy to be established in this area of work. It anticipates that religious education and history will contribute a multicultural dimension to the work programme. The new mathematics scheme also indicates some of the ways in which multicultural awareness can be built into children's work in the subject. Recently, work on the Chinese New Year and an African Week have helped broaden children's experience.
45. Within the school's overall curriculum framework, however, neither the art programme, nor that in physical education and dance, address cultural diversity adequately. In music, some attention is given to world music, but this is not consistent from class to class. None of the programmes of work outlined in the framework provide enough opportunity for children to learn about the cultural variety and richness of their own, contemporary society.

Put in place a written curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage.

46. In January 2001, the school admitted its highest number of children under the age of five. As the school has five classes, this means the children are admitted to a mixed age reception and Year 1 class. At the moment the combined year groups bring the number in the class to 33. Children's achievements on entry to school are very good and so in the past, children have immediately begun work alongside their Year 1 friends, within the National Curriculum. In September 2000, a separate curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage, that is for children aged from three to five, or the end of their reception year, was introduced nationally as a statutory requirement. The staff have taken time to review the implications of this curriculum and its impact on the school. Changes have been made since January 2001. To overcome the challenges this presents to a mixed aged class of children in the Foundation Stage and Year 1, the school has employed, temporarily, a second teacher who teaches the Year 1 children as a separate group for literacy and numeracy.
47. Since January, the school has planned a curriculum that successfully captures children's interest and promotes their independence, social, literacy and numeracy skills. It also allows them to make decisions about their work. Teachers' planning takes into account the areas of experience set out in the new Foundation Curriculum and the children's good levels of achievement on entry into school. In many respects the curriculum offered is good. Written, practical and oral tasks are relevant to the children's age and experience. Children quickly learn to read and write, carry out simple mental calculations, develop their observational skills in art and investigational

skills in science, learn to operate computers effectively and know about time passing by looking at different objects from the past.

48. The good quality of the curriculum is due to the current good teaching and close liaison between the full and part-time teachers responsible for these age groups in the Foundation Stage. The teachers' knowledge and expertise with children of this age allows them to provide appropriate learning experiences. Currently, there is no formal written curriculum to show how the work done in the Foundation Stage prepares children well for work in Year 1. This means if teachers change year group or schools, there is little to ensure continuity of good practice. Teachers in other year groups need to be clear about what has been taught in the reception class. This will enable them to build children's skills systematically from a secure base and avoid unnecessary repetition. The school is currently deciding whether:
- there should be a written curriculum for children under five that matches only the areas of experience set out in the national guidance. Many children have already achieved the early learning goals for the Foundation Stage when they first start school;
- or
- the scheme of work for each subject of the National Curriculum should contain the aspect of the subject to be covered in the Foundation Stage. The school believes these could be closely linked to the areas of experience and take children forward in a broad range of knowledge and skills.
49. It is important that these issues are resolved as soon as possible to avoid gaps in children's knowledge and skills.

Raise standards in information and communication technology.

50. The school has rightly given the development of information and communication technology high priority. It has invested heavily in the provision of high quality computers in recent months to help raise standards. It has also developed close links with St. Alban's School. Children in Years 5 and 6 visit the school regularly to work in the computer suite. This means teachers can teach explicitly, information and communication technology skills to the whole class at one time. In turn, children from St. Alban's School visit St. Michael's to work with children in Year 5 on the school's new computers. This provision, supported financially by parents, is paying dividends as children are achieving good standards and offers promise of much higher standards in the future.
51. All classes give an appropriate amount of time to teaching computer skills. In this way standards are rising, but they are taking time to work through the school. Groups of up to eight children can work with a teacher or learning support assistant to practise or develop their computer skills in the new computer suite. Each child has the use of a computer without the need to share. The youngest children can open the programmes they want and type up sentences they have written previously.
52. In Year 6, children word process their work using different fonts, styles and texts. They import pictures to combine pictures and print. Some children can set up the page size and use borders. The most challenging task to date, that was completed successfully, was for the children to draw up a timetable of lessons. To do this they needed to draw a table that included boxes of different sizes and draw diagonal lines to divide some of the boxes in two. Year 6 children are confident in using the Internet

to send messages and find out information for topics in subjects such as geography. While children word process some of their work, few use the programmes to the fullest extent, such as desktop publishing. Children bring many skills in information and communication technology with them from home. These have yet to be extended to enable the children to reach higher standards in the use of spreadsheets and presentations. (Junior PowerPoint). The school is aware that a lack of resources for control technology limit opportunities to create, test, improve and refine sequences of instructions to make things happen and to monitor events and respond to them. For example, monitoring changes in temperature. Teachers use information and communication technology to enhance standards in other subjects, but as at the time of the last inspection, it is not fully developed.

53. In the small group sessions observed, all teaching was satisfactory. Teachers give clear instructions which the children can follow easily. The children are very confident and listen carefully so they can give the computer the correct instructions. They are not afraid to try out new ideas. If children are unsure, they help each other. Throughout the sessions children were involved in the tasks, working productively. In the reception class, children make a good start in their use of computers. Computer programmes help them to learn about different shapes and support the early stages of reading. Children can open and close programmes and operate them independently using the mouse.
54. The school has made good progress in the last four years. Current provision and standards are better than they were at the time of the last inspection. There is now a very good assessment system linked to the scheme of work that tracks children's knowledge, skills and attitudes. This enables teachers and learning support assistants to follow up areas children find difficult. The headteacher and co-ordinator for information and communication technology have a clear view about the strengths and weaknesses in the subject. To continue the drive to improve standards in information and communication technology, training to increase teachers' knowledge, skills and confidence, has been arranged within the New Opportunities Fund to start later in the school year. It is also planned to purchase resources for control in the next financial year.

Accommodation.

55. The school's accommodation has presented many difficulties over the years. In the past two years the problems have taken up a considerable amount of the headteacher's and governors' time in their efforts to win planning permission for significant improvements to the school. It has also disrupted the day to day work of the school. Substantial repairs have been carried out to 'Top School' to maintain it in good condition. This meant classes had to be taught in the hall at different times while repairs were carried out. Inside, the cramped accommodation has been organised so that space is used creatively. There is now a small, attractive non-fiction library which children can use to extend their research skills. An open area has been converted effectively into a small computer suite. A small storage area has been built to house furniture that used to be stored around the edge of the hall. With significant financial support from parents, the school hall has a new floor.
56. However, the Year 6 classroom is very small. Some children have to sit facing the

wall so that there is enough space for the teacher and children to move around the room safely. This means they have to turn around or sit awkwardly to see the teacher or marker board. The room for the Foundation Stage and youngest Year 1 children is too small to cater well for the age group. At the present time, the equivalent of two full-time teachers covers the class. This allows the Year 1 children to be taught in a small group each morning. They have to work in a small kitchen. While teachers do their best to brighten it with displays, it allows little freedom of movement and is uninspiring as a learning environment for the age group.

57. Few classrooms, especially for the Foundation Stage, enable children to access water independently. This restricts the activities children can do. There is not enough space for children to draw and paint large pictures, choose paints for themselves and wash up afterwards. These choices have to be made by adults. The teachers often overcome difficulties with the accommodation by spending considerable time collecting resources, such as water, for the children to carry out simple science experiments. Difficulties with space and access to resources, limits opportunities for older children to devise experiments, carry them out and write up their findings during the same lesson.
58. Facilities at 'Bottom School' have not changed significantly since the school was built in Victorian Times. Hot water has only been installed for six years. A small area off the classroom has been adapted to provide a kitchen so that meals can be provided on site. The classroom in 'Bottom School' doubles as the dining room. Lessons finish promptly at 11.50am so that tables can be cleaned and dinners served. Throughout the lunch period it is difficult for the teacher to prepare work for the afternoon as tables are in use and children are constantly moving between the two schools. Many resources have to be transported between the two schools, especially in the Spring Term when Booster classes are in operation.
59. The school has drawn up plans and negotiated with appropriate authorities to improve the accommodation. The plans to extend 'Bottom School' are well advanced and the school reports finance has been arranged to carry out the substantial building work required. The building still has outside toilets and is unlikely to meet the requirements of the Disabled and Disabilities Act 1995 unless significant alterations are made. However, the school is situated in an area of important historical interest and this is causing delays in gaining planning permission. The cramped conditions, especially in Years 4, 5 and 6 and the reception year are now impacting the effective delivery of the curriculum.
60. The school can no longer use its playing field for sports. It has become unsafe as an infestation of rabbits has dug a maze of burrows. This cannot be dug out or filled in, as this will disturb essential historical information. There are imaginative plans for the school to work with an industrial company to turn the area into a place of environmental interest to enhance teaching and learning, in knowledge and understanding of the world, geography and science. This does mean that the school has to use part of its budget, which is paid back by the local authority, to rent the use of playing fields in the adjacent park.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

61. The headteacher, governors and staff should build on their many strengths to:

- (1) develop a detailed strategy to ensure that all the different groups of children benefit equally from its provision by:
 - writing and implementing an equal opportunities policy;*
 - implementing learning programmes for children learning English as an additional language, to ensure they progress quickly, especially when the specialist assistant is unavailable;
 - providing specific training for teachers and learning support assistants in the education of children learning English as an additional language;
 - developing a system for monitoring the extent to which children learning English as an additional language, and their parents, are enabled to play a full part in all aspects of school life;
 - ensuring targets in the individual education plans for children with special educational needs are specific and are taken into account in all teachers' lesson plans;

Paragraphs: 34-41

- (2) review provision for children's cultural development, especially in the arts, to ensure that they gain a fuller appreciation of life in a multicultural society;*

Paragraphs: 42-45

- (3) put in place a written curriculum for the Foundation Stage;*

Paragraphs: 46-49

- (4) raise standards further in information and communication technology;*

Paragraphs: 50-54

(5) improve the accommodation, especially in 'Bottom School'.*
Paragraphs: 55-60

* These are already among the school's priorities for development.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	18
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	11

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0%	11%	67%	22%	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	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	154
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	8
Special educational needs	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	33
English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	4
Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	11
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	4

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.4
National comparative data	5.2

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	0.5

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	2000	13	10	23

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	13	13	13
	Girls	10	10	10
	Total	23	23	23
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (96)	100 (96)	100 (96)
	National	84 (82)	85 (83)	90 (87)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	13	13	13
	Girls	10	10	10
	Total	23	23	23
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (96)	100 (96)	100 (96)
	National	84 (82)	88 (86)	88 (87)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	2000	8	14	22

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	8	8	8
	Girls	13	12	14
	Total	21	20	22
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	95 (95)	91 (95)	100 (95)
	National	75 (70)	72 (69)	85 (78)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	8	8	8
	Girls	13	13	13
	Total	21	21	21
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	95 (95)	95 (100)	95 (100)
	National	70 (68)	72 (69)	80 (75)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	152
Any other minority ethnic group	1

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)	7.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	20.5
Average class size	30.8

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	5
Total aggregate hours worked per week	87

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
	£
Total income	298,977
Total expenditure	305,837
Expenditure per pupil	2,124
Balance brought forward from previous year	19,273
Balance carried forward to next year	12,413

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	154
Number of questionnaires returned	75

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	57	41	1	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	49	39	8	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	49	44	3	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	37	51	11	0	1
The teaching is good.	65	28	3	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	35	47	13	1	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	67	33	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	40	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	32	56	7	0	5
The school is well led and managed.	60	33	3	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	59	36	3	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	15	55	20	1	9