

INSPECTION REPORT

PORTFIELD SCHOOL

Christchurch, Dorset

LEA area: Dorset

Unique reference number: 113942

Headteacher: Mr. Peter Gabony

Reporting inspector: Sue Aldridge
8810

Dates of inspection: 1 – 4 October 2001

Inspection number: 193910

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	2 to 19 Years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	4 Magdalen Lane Christchurch Dorset
Postcode:	BH23 1PX
Telephone number:	01202 486626
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Appropriate authority:	The Wessex Autistic Society
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs. Joan Dampney
Date of previous inspection:	July 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
8810	Sue Aldridge	<i>Registered inspector</i>	Design and technology; Post-16.	How high are standards? The school's results and pupils' achievements; How well are pupils and students taught? How well is the school led and managed?
19720	Deborah Granville-Hastings	<i>Lay inspector</i>		How high are standards? Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development; How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
16038	Jill Bavin	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics; Religious education; Foundation Stage; Equal opportunities.	How good are the curricular opportunities offered to pupils and students?
17530	Mary Cureton	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Geography; History.	
10668	David Walker	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science; Information and communication technology; Personal, social and health education; Special educational needs.	How well does the school care for its pupils and students?
21061	Mike Whitehead	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art; Music; Physical education.	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Portfield is an independent, mixed, day and residential school for 42 pupils and students with autism, from ages 2 to 19. All have statements of special educational need, and attainment on entry is low. Most pupils are white, and a very small number come from homes where English is an additional language. The school is administered by the Wessex Autistic Society. Since the school was last inspected, a purpose-built nursery has been added, and work has recently started on a new school building.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Portfield is an effective school. Standards of achievement are satisfactory overall. Behaviour and personal development are very good, and attitudes are good. Teaching is good, with some very good features, and the school is well led and managed. It gives good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Pupils and students make good progress in developing their communication skills, in reading, writing, mathematics and personal, social and health education.
- Children in the nursery get a good start to their education; students over sixteen make good progress and are well prepared for the next step.
- Teaching is good: the staff has very good expertise in teaching pupils with autism, in behaviour management, and in planning for individual needs.
- Relationships throughout the school community are very good: pupils and students behave very well and their personal development is very good.
- The school has very effective links with parents, other services, schools, and businesses; these links support learning well.
- The school's residential provision includes high quality care, and supports personal development well through the 24-hour curriculum.
- There are very good arrangements to encourage and keep a check on attendance, behaviour, progress and personal development.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- There are weaknesses in the curriculum and assessment that affect standards of achievement in science, design and technology (DT), geography and history. The religious education curriculum is unsatisfactory.
- There are not enough resources for learning in science, DT, geography, history and music.
- The school's present accommodation is unsatisfactory.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in 1996. There has been satisfactory improvement since then. Improvement in teaching has been very good. Standards of achievement in English and mathematics have improved, as has the provision for physical education. The attitudes, behaviour and personal development of pupils and students have also improved. Provision for developing pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, and social awareness has been enhanced. The school has strengthened further its partnership with parents and the community, and established a high quality service to provide respite care and advice for families who have children with autism. This has grown rapidly, and is now managed and administered by the Wessex Autistic Society. Some subjects have not improved enough since the last inspection, as they have not yet been a focus for development in the school's rolling programme. The accommodation remains unsatisfactory, although the school has continued to add improvements to the three houses. The school's capacity for further improvement is good.

STANDARDS

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

Progress in:	by Year R	by Year 6	by Year 11	by Year 13	Key
speaking and listening	B	B	B	B	very good A
reading	B	B	B	B	good B
writing	B	B	B	B	satisfactory C
mathematics	B	B	B	B	unsatisfactory D
personal, social and health education (PSHE)	B	B	B	B	poor E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	B	B	B	B	

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

Standards of achievement are satisfactory overall. Children in the nursery and students at Post-16 achieve well. Pupils of compulsory school age achieve well in English, mathematics, physical education, and PSHE. Although pupils of primary age make satisfactory progress in science and design and technology, those of secondary age do not. In geography and history, pupils do not make enough progress. High standards are linked to good teaching and learning, a broad range of learning experiences and good assessment. Despite good teaching in a few subjects, pupils make too little progress because of weaknesses in the curriculum and its assessment. Last year, targets were set for raising achievements of certain groups of pupils. Those set in the nursery and the residential setting were accomplished. A particularly challenging target for improving the literacy skills of a group of pupils was not met. The school has carried out preparatory work for setting whole school targets by the end of this calendar year.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils and students try hard and are keen to do their best. Pupils and students like coming to school. They concentrate well, particularly when they enjoy tasks, in food technology lessons, for example.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is very good in classes, around school, and when pupils and students are out in the local community. During the inspection, no bullying was seen, and there was no evidence of behaviour that was intended to be oppressive.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils and students increase their independence, and develop well their ability to communicate, co-operate, work and socialise with others. Harmonious relationships create a good climate for learning. As they grow older, pupils begin to show initiative by requesting help and guidance. Older pupils and students can be trusted to work independently, on a computer at lunchtime, for instance. Students over sixteen successfully work as a team to run a small business. In the residential setting, pupils and students live, work and play in a happy and homely atmosphere.
Attendance	Good. Attendance compares well with similar schools nationally.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 – 6	Years 7 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	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.

Teaching is good with some very good features; this is a dramatic improvement since the last inspection, when almost one in four lessons was unsatisfactory. Inspectors made 76 observations altogether. Of these, teaching in four were excellent, 18 very good, 41 good and 13 satisfactory. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen. Teaching is good in the nursery, and good at Post-16. Teaching is good in English, mathematics, literacy, numeracy, personal, social and health education, history, geography, and physical education. In science and design and technology, teaching of primary pupils is good, and for secondary pupils it is satisfactory. No teaching of religious education could be seen, as lessons were taught outside the inspection period. Teaching in all other subjects is satisfactory. The staff is very skilled in teaching pupils with autism, managing behaviour, and planning for individual needs. Teachers and support staff work very well together, and support staff make an important contribution to direct teaching. There is some room for improvement in the quality of information recorded, as it is not easy to get a clear picture of what achievement has been made and what needs to be worked on further. Although the staff reviews the day's activities, they do not always review achievement. This means that pupils do not develop an awareness of their achievements.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. A good range of learning experiences is provided in the nursery and for students over 16. For pupils of compulsory school age, science and some other subjects do not provide a wide enough range of learning experiences. The staff works very hard to plan and assess the learning experiences they provide. However, the arrangements for planning and recording are very time-consuming. The different formats for planning make monitoring of the curriculum an onerous task
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	There are very good arrangements to promote pupils' and students' social and moral development. Provision to encourage their spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. There are too few opportunities for pupils and students to explore the many different cultures in British society.
How well the school cares for its pupils	There are good arrangements for child protection and ensuring pupils' and students' welfare. Staff use different formats for recording, which makes it difficult to see easily what has been achieved and what needs further work. Staff provide good personal support for pupils and students.

The school works very effectively in partnership with parents, who co-operate well with staff to ensure that their children make the best possible progress.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher and senior management team provide clear educational direction. They work very well as a team, to consult staff, make decisions and develop policy and practice.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Governors are a skilled and very supportive group. They keep the work of the school under review, but acknowledge that they need further training to develop a truly strategic role. They fulfil their responsibilities in a satisfactory manner.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Senior managers have started the process of school self-evaluation, and they know the school's strengths and areas for development. They seek parents' views, and invite external evaluation through the process of accreditation by the National Autistic Society.
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory. Financial resources are used wisely; all surplus funds are used by the Wessex Autistic Society for the building of the new school. However, there are some shortfalls in learning resources, and there is no complete audit of resources in all subject areas.

Staffing is good, learning resources are satisfactory, but the present accommodation remains unsatisfactory. The arrangements for monitoring and supporting teachers are very effective, and recruitment has been helped by the school's commitment to offer teachers

financial support to follow substantial courses. Retention of staff has been improved by the introduction of new working arrangements for staff in the residential houses.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Their children like coming to school.• Teaching is good.• Behaviour is good.• Children make good progress.• The school helps their children to become mature and responsible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A few do not agree that there is the right amount of homework.

Inspectors agree with the parents' positive views of the school. They find that the school has satisfactory arrangements for homework. Staff maintain a good dialogue with parents through home-school books. The school also works closely with parents to ensure consistent management of pupils' and students' behaviour.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Standards of achievement are satisfactory overall. At the Foundation Stage and at Post 16, standards are good. For pupils of compulsory school age, there are variations in standards between subjects. Pupils achieve well in those subjects that have been a focus in the school's rolling programme of subject development; these are English, mathematics and physical education (PE), subjects that the school considers most important for their pupils. Pupils also achieve well in personal, social and health education (PSHE) because it is rightly emphasised as part of all lessons, during break and lunchtimes, and in the residential setting too. In subjects where pupils do not achieve well enough, this is because, over the years, pupils have a narrow range of learning experiences. The result is that in spite of good teaching, pupils do not make sufficient progress over time. There are no differences in the standards achieved by different groups of pupils or students in the school. Standards in English, mathematics, and physical education have improved since the last inspection.

2. Children in the nursery class (Foundation Stage) have a good start to their education. They make good progress in all the areas of learning. Planning is carried out carefully to ensure that all the areas of learning are covered, and there is a suitable emphasis on communication, language and literacy. Staff know children well, and they keep detailed records; this promotes progress well.

3. In English, standards are good across the school. High standards are associated with good teaching, planning and assessment. The National Literacy Strategy has been successfully adapted and introduced, and pupils are provided with a very good range of learning experiences.

4. Communication skills are particularly well promoted across the curriculum. Children in the nursery soon begin to use a system of handing over cards, with symbols or text on them, as a means of making a request. As pupils progress through the school, those with speech use an increasing vocabulary, and others make wider use of their cards to communicate phrases and whole sentences. Some use Makaton signs as well as their cards. Pupils grow in their ability to listen and attend, and verbal pupils become more confident in speaking. By the time students over 16 approach school leaving, verbal ones will introduce themselves to people they do not know well, and they answer questions by vocalising or signing; higher attainers can hold a reasonable conversation with an unfamiliar adult.

5. Pupils and students make good progress in acquiring literacy skills. Children in the nursery enjoy hearing stories read aloud, and they begin to recognise some letter sounds and to make marks on paper. By the time pupils reach Year 6, they read whole words, such as the day's activities, on cards. Higher attainers at this stage read simple books. Pupils write by copying over letters and words; higher attainers write simple tales, but do not yet spell all the words correctly, or use capital letters in all the right places. By the time pupils reach Year 9, they read simple texts, and choose books for quiet reading. All can write sentences, although lower attainers need support; higher attainers write short legible accounts of events such as a road accident, and improve their work using a word processor. When they reach Year 11, pupils all read simple texts, although some need support; higher attainers read narratives unaided. Pupils continue to copy and overwrite letters and words;

higher attainers write consecutive sentences, while others label objects and write phrases. Students over sixteen consolidate their reading and writing skills in a range of social and work-related contexts. For example, all read social signs, and higher attainers follow recipes with little assistance. Students write shopping lists, and higher attainers are able to produce a written plan showing how they will tackle a task.

6. Standards of achievement in mathematics are good across the school. Children in the nursery begin to recognise small numbers, and their understanding of mathematical words grows. For example, some begin to recognise round shapes. By the time pupils reach Year 6, they have progressed to carrying out simple addition, and select two different coins to buy an item. Higher attainers can accurately read times, at five-minute intervals, on a 12-hour clock. By Year 9, higher attainers begin to record addition and subtraction calculations; they also divide and multiply. Lower attaining pupils count to three, identify squares and circles, and use weights to measure, although they need support to do this. By Year 11, higher attaining pupils use their understanding of place value and number bonds, and their counting skills, to work out the easiest combination of coins to make given amounts, such as 53 pence. Students over sixteen extend their knowledge and understanding of money in business, when they take part in a business enterprise. They work as a team to open a bank account, secure a loan, keep simple accounts, write out cheques, and calculate profits. They also consolidate and extend mathematical skills when planning a lunch for several people, costing bus journeys, and planning times to catch buses.

7. Across the school, pupils and students achieve well in personal, social and health education. A firm foundation is laid in the nursery class, where children begin to become aware of others when taking turns; they start to collect their own resources, and are encouraged when they show initiative. As they move through the school, pupils make good progress against the targets set in their individual education plans (IEPs). All classes have frequent opportunities to go into the wider community, and pupils improve their ability to tolerate different situations, as well as increase their knowledge and understanding of the wider community. They increase their independence skills when working in the training flat, and those who are in residence steadily acquire personal care skills. Students over 16 work well as a team in their business enterprise, and individually when preparing meals for their group in the training flat.

8. In physical education (PE), standards of achievement are good across the school. Once again, high standards are associated with a broad range of learning experiences, and the good quality of teaching. Achievement is particularly good in horse riding. Pupils demonstrate considerable skill and confidence when on horseback. One particularly proficient primary pupil was seen standing upright on the saddle, performing a *flair*, which consisted of raising and extending one leg whilst raising and extending the arm on the opposite side of the body.

9. In science, although pupils are taught well, the total time allocated for lessons is low, and this restricts the progress that they make. In addition, there is a lack of suitable facilities, which reduces the learning experiences to those that can be safely offered to secondary-aged pupils. As a result of these limitations, standards are satisfactory for pupils of primary age, but unsatisfactory for secondary pupils.

10. There is a similar picture in design and technology, where teaching is satisfactory but the curriculum is limited for secondary pupils by the lack of suitable facilities for working on resistant materials. In addition, planning does not guide teachers well enough in systematically building on pupils' skills, and records do not show clearly enough which skills have been mastered and which need further work. As a result, primary pupils make

satisfactory progress, but for secondary pupils, progress is unsatisfactory. The best progress is made in the development of skills involving food, as pupils are highly motivated by this. Students over 16 build well on their skills through the activities that form part of the business enterprise, and when they tackle more ambitious tasks in cooking. At Post 16, standards of achievement are good.

11. In art, standards are satisfactory. Pupils make better progress in developing skills than they do in acquiring knowledge and understanding of art and artists. Standards are also satisfactory in information and communication technology (ICT), where pupils do not have discrete lessons but use computers in other subjects, and in their leisure time. In music, standards are satisfactory. The subject is not allocated much time for direct teaching, but pupils do listen to a range of music, which is used well to signal the end of the day, and to create a calm and relaxing atmosphere. For some pupils, there are opportunities to perform in music therapy sessions.

12. In geography and history, standards of achievement are unsatisfactory. This is because there is a narrow range of learning experiences offered to pupils. In geography, there is a suitable emphasis on developing an awareness of the local community, but other aspects of the subject are not covered well enough. In history, pupils are developing a thorough understanding of chronology, but their knowledge and understanding of times past is limited. In both of these subjects there are too few resources for learning to address the neglected areas well enough.

13. There was insufficient evidence to make a judgement on standards in religious education. No lessons could be seen, as they were taught outside the inspection period.

14. Last year, an ambitious target was set to improve the reading, spelling and comprehension skills of a group of 21 pupils. For example, it was hoped that all 21 pupils would make gains of 6 months in their reading ages. This was not achieved. However, a few pupils exceeded the target. Targets set for children at the Foundation Stage and in residential setting were achieved. By the end of the academic year, all pupils in the residence were able to use their timetables or schedules. The school has not yet set whole school targets for raising achievement, but all pupils have been assessed, using the P scales (Pre-Level 1, National Curriculum), and the school plans to set targets by the end of this calendar year. The school does, however, have a set of performance indicators, contained in the prospectus, that it plans to use formally to measure its success. These are expressed as a series of competencies, which students will have by the time they leave school. Analysis of students' achievements demonstrates the school's success. For example, by the time they leave school, students all have a suitable means of communicating with others. They have well developed independence skills, tolerate and enjoy social interaction with peers and others, behave in a socially appropriate manner, and are able to express themselves through creative and leisure pursuits.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

15. Overall, the behaviour and personal development of pupils and students are very good and their attitudes to learning good, and these areas are strengths of the school. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

16. Pupils' attitudes to their lessons and to learning are good. They often show a lively interest in their work and can concentrate well when they enjoy the task. For example, in design and technology, Year 7, 8 and 9 pupils enjoyed making boats from sterafoam and seeing which would float the best. Other pupils showed real concentration and

perseverance when preparing and chopping the ingredients for the pasta bolognese they were cooking for lunch. In a science lesson, Year 4 pupils were investigating which objects roll, by rolling various items to each other. They thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and although they became excited they were able to return to a quieter activity quickly when asked to do so. In a swimming lesson, Year 10 and 11 pupils worked hard putting a lot of effort into their strokes. Such positive attitudes in lessons have a direct impact on the progress that is made in lessons. Pupils and students try hard, and want to do better.

17. Behaviour of pupils and students in lessons and around school is very good and this is a considerable improvement since the last inspection. Pupils and students understand and enjoy the daily routines that structure their day. Sessions at the start of the morning and afternoon are a time to settle and prepare to start work. Pupils and students often show self-control as they calmly sit and listen whilst others respond to the teacher and talk about their morning or what they have had for lunch. At lunchtime, pupils, students and staff eat together in a comfortable and sociable atmosphere. Pupils and students are expected to conduct themselves in an acceptable way and they do, eating well and helping to clear away. When playing outside, most pupils energetically let off steam. They tend not to play together, but are aware of what others are doing and mix in well. For example, at lunchtime some pupils were on scooters and some in go-karts. They all moved around the playground quite quickly and independently and did not get in each other's way. Even at the end of the day, when pupils are tired, most are still calm, enjoying the winding down atmosphere. There was no bullying seen during the inspection, and no evidence of behaviour that was intended to be oppressive.

18. The personal development of pupils and students is also very good. Through the constant emphasis on encouraging them to communicate, pupils and students become aware of others around them. Pupils are mostly co-operative in class. They are taught to share and to listen to others and most achieve this very well. In an end-of-day activity, Year 2 pupils were able to choose from a variety of toys with no bickering. They then tidied up their toys, understanding the need to look after them. Some pupils are beginning to show more initiative and independence by requesting help and guidance; they do this verbally, by gesture or by signing. One lunchtime, some boys stayed in for a while to work on the computer. They worked quite independently, with minimum supervision, and enjoyed using the different programmes. Younger pupils show they are developing a sense of awareness of what constitutes acceptable behaviour. When having a drink and biscuit, they sit quietly, wait their turn and ask and answer properly, using speech or a card. Pupils also share adult attention well. There is little incidence of pupils wanting to be noticed when staff are talking with other pupils.

19. Students over sixteen work successfully as a team, and with people from outside school, in their mini-enterprise company 'Made It'. They have opened and run bank accounts, and made and sold items at different venues. One student represented the school at an event in Europe, and took part in making a presentation to a large audience about Portfield's enterprise activity.

20. Relationships between pupils and staff are very good, and this has a direct and positive impact on the attitudes and confidence of pupils. The staff provides very good role models for pupils, treating everyone with gentle and genuine respect, whilst expecting pupils to try their best. Pupils respond well to the praise given to them. When on a visit to Hurn airport, pupils behaved very well and responded quickly to staff asking them to moderate their noise or actions because of other people being around. They thoroughly enjoyed the experience of being in a new setting and seeing new things. In the residential houses, relationships between pupils, students and staff are also very good. They live, play and work together in a happy and homely atmosphere.

21. Attendance is very good. There is no unauthorised absence and little authorised absence (2.9 per cent). This compares very favourably with similar schools nationally. Registers are completed accurately and the good relationship with parents ensures that pupils very rarely miss any of their lessons. This has a tremendous impact on the continuity and consistency of pupils' learning, and on their confidence and familiarity with everyday routines and expectations.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

22. The quality of teaching and learning has improved dramatically since the last inspection. Then, it was unsatisfactory in almost a quarter of lessons. Now, it is at least satisfactory in all lessons, and good or better in more than four out of five lessons. A high proportion of very good or excellent teaching was seen; well over a quarter of lessons were of this high quality. Inspectors saw 76 lessons altogether. Of these, 4 were excellent, 18 were very good, 41 were good and 13 were satisfactory. For those of all age groups, teaching is good overall, with some very good features.

23. Teaching is good in English, mathematics, personal, social and health education, and PE. In the small number of geography and history lessons seen, teaching was also good. In science, and in design and technology, teaching of primary aged pupils is good, and teaching of secondary pupils is satisfactory. In art, ICT, and music, teaching is satisfactory. No teaching of religious education (RE) could be seen as it took place outside the inspection period.

24. Teachers and support staff have very good expertise in teaching pupils with autism. This results from a depth of understanding of pupils' and students' needs. Staff implement very well the guidance they are given in the teaching and learning policy. They ensure, for example, that resources which are not in use are out of the way, so that these do not provide a distraction. This entails a considerable amount of good organisation, as the classrooms are very short of storage space. Pupils and students are well prepared for the different sessions on each day's timetable. When pupils and students enter the class, staff ensure that there is a prepared activity, and when all are assembled there is a group welcome. Schedules are used well to signal the end of one activity and the beginning of the next, and each day closes with a review of the day's activities. This helps pupils and students to make a smooth and stress-free transition from one activity to the next. There is no time wasted between activities, either.

25. All staff take good account of the need to encourage communication and social development at every opportunity. All pupils and students have a suitable means of communication; staff vary their approaches for pupils and students of different abilities. For example, encourage the few verbal pupils and students to give full responses, by framing open questions for them.; for others, communication is encouraged by posing a closed question, where a simple *yes* or *no* response is required. In one literacy lesson, the teacher successfully used the strategy of leaving a word off the end of a spoken sentence, and pupils completed the sentence by giving a single word. Pupils and students understand what is said to them, because staff keep language simple, and sign well to mark key words. They also ensure that pupils and students sit where they have a clear view of whoever is leading the session. When individual pupils or students need support, staff sit beside or behind them. Good opportunities are provided for pupils and students to share and make

choices, and frequent group work ensures that they become aware of others, and take them into account. As a result, children in the nursery learn to tolerate the proximity of others when they are playing or carrying out an activity, and students over 16 learn to work successfully as a team in their business enterprise.

26. Staff work very effectively as a team in the classroom. Lesson plans show clearly what each person's role is, and what each pupil or student is expected to achieve. Staff respect one another's knowledge and skills, and share information and ideas well in the interests of achieving the best for pupils and students. This was evident in a design and technology lesson, when a member of support staff gave some excellent pointers about how a worksheet could be improved. Support staff lead some of the teaching sessions, and they do this well. They also contribute to assessment by recording pupils' and students' responses, during sessions where their direct support is not needed.

27. Planning for pupils' and students' needs is very good. Lesson plans show the learning outcomes for the subject being taught, as well as individual objectives for each pupil or student. Teachers use their good knowledge of the pupils and students to plan different tasks for different levels of ability. This ensures that all have tasks that are suitably challenging. A good example of this was seen in a science lesson for Year 5 and 6 pupils. Here, pupils were investigating the effect that wheels have on movement. Following a whole class session where pupils sorted objects into those with and those without wheels, the class was divided into two groups to 'race' objects down an incline. The more able pupils, in one group, had to predict which object would win each race, while those in the other group were asked simply to identify which one was the winner.

28. In the same lesson, there were good opportunities for pupils to develop their reading skills. For example, the teacher had prepared two cards; on one, *wheels yes* was written, and on the other *wheels no*. Pupils sorted objects by placing them on the appropriate card. Later, following the race, a higher attaining pupil was encouraged to read *winner* and *loser* cards. She could not do this at first, but towards the end of the lesson she read the word *loser* correctly. In general, all teachers build into lessons good opportunities for encouraging literacy and numeracy. For example, pupils and students weigh and measure in design and technology, and in geography they create bar charts showing the results of a traffic survey. They have many opportunities to read and write in lessons other than English. Teachers make satisfactory use of computers to help pupils and students learn. For example, in the nursery class children are encouraged to use a touch screen to make coloured patterns appear, and this helps them learn about cause and effect. Older pupils word process their writing to improve its presentation and students use a computer to design posters advertising their small business.

29. Staff are very skilled in managing the behaviour of pupils and students. They have high expectations of work and behaviour. At the last inspection, inspectors noted some disruption to learning arising from outbursts of behaviour. This situation has improved greatly. Staff have very good relationships with pupils and students, and they know how to manage individuals who occasionally experience difficulties in joining in activities. Once again, guidance given to staff is followed well. This was evident in a physical education lesson, where one pupil who was occasionally a reluctant participant was involved well. Success was achieved because the teacher avoided confrontation, yet gave repeated encouragement to join in. Pupils were moving round the hall, pretending to be different vehicles. When one dropped to the floor, the teacher made this part of the lesson, by exclaiming that the *car* had crashed. Returning the pupil to the planned activity then became an exercise in imaginative play. The highly prized reward of some time on the computer after the lesson acted as a carrot, too.

30. Teachers question pupils and students well to check their understanding, and this contributes to the progress made in lessons. They also give good feedback, and well-earned praise. In one aspect of teaching there is less consistency across the school, and this is in the keeping of records. There are different formats for records, and the quality of what is recorded varies. Information is not always useful for planning the next steps, as it sometimes describes attitudes rather than learning. In the nursery class very good information is recorded, and at Post-16 the practice is good. Here, photographs showing students' achievements enable the students to develop an awareness of their learning, and records help to indicate what should be done next. For example, an entry that reads, 'Matched names to faces well. Not so good at recognising symbols', shows achievement and points to what needs further work. For pupils of compulsory school age, practice is not consistent. The amount of information recorded is not always equal to its quality. There is some scope for improvement in the use of end-of-day sessions, too. These are used well for review of the day's activities, but are not always used to review actual achievements.

31. Although inspectors did not see traditional homework being given, staff maintain a good dialogue with parents about pupils' and students' performance during the school day, particularly progress against targets. There are also very effective links with parents to encourage consistency of practice between school and home. For example, there are agreed strategies for use at home and school where pupils have eating programmes. Some pupils and students are busily engaged in a variety of learning activities in the residential setting after school hours.

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

32. The curriculum is satisfactory overall. Since the last inspection the school has made satisfactory progress in developing a relevant and balanced curriculum. It meets statutory requirements and includes all subjects of the National Curriculum and RE. The school's chosen focus for improving literacy by embracing recent national strategies has been very effective and is improving standards of achievement for all pupils and students in English. The school has also successfully developed the curriculum for mathematics and this helps pupils and students to make good progress. Members of staff are currently using the latest national guidelines for this subject to further raise standards of achievement.

33. The teacher and nursery nurses carefully plan a suitably wide variety of activities for children in the nursery and reception class. Their plans take good account of the Early Learning Goals as well as children's individual learning objectives. The curriculum is planned to allow children time to work in small groups as well as working individually or in pairs with adults. It includes a good balance of activities that are led by adults, and opportunities for children to work without such evident adult intervention. This means that children enjoy their activities and participate well in them. Consequently, the curriculum is very effective and provides a good start to their school experience.

34. Since the last inspection the school has worked hard to provide a system of long and medium term plans based on the National Curriculum and guidance from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). Throughout the school, teachers endeavour to balance these with plans to address the key difficulties faced by their pupils and students, namely skills in communication, socialisation and imagination. They also plan for subjects to conform to 'topics' such as 'Myself' or 'Animals and Insects'. During the inspection the topic was 'Transport'. While such themes are useful in providing a relevant context for pupils' and students' learning, they make planning to ensure progress more complicated. Some teachers start with the topic, rather than the subject content prescribed

in the National Curriculum, and in a few subjects this narrows the experiences that are ultimately provided. In science, design and technology, geography, history and religious education the school provides a narrow range of learning experiences. In science and design and technology the present accommodation limits what can safely provided. In geography, history and religious education there is insufficient emphasis on certain aspects of the subjects.

35. Members of teaching staff have a heavier planning burden than is necessary. For example, they have to draw from a variety of different formats of planning for each subject, in order to produce yearly plans for each class, which are then used to inform their lesson plans. This is excessive, and makes monitoring an almost impossible task. If all subjects were planned using the same principles and format, and showed clearly what learning experiences should be included for pupils of different age groups, teachers would be better placed to plan their lessons, secure in the knowledge that pupils are learning the right things. It would then be up to them to plan suitable activities for pupils of different abilities.

36. Planning is best in English and mathematics, where there are very clear targets for individuals, and in physical education, which has been a focus for school development. It is also good at Post-16, where there is a clear framework provided in the accredited scheme.

37. The provision for personal, social and health education is very good. It is very effectively underpinned by the environments of the school and residential settings, which are rich in opportunities for communication. It is also well supported by classroom sessions, visits, and the 24- hour curriculum in the residential setting. All pupils and students have targets for personal and social development, and there is close co-operation with parents and carers to maximise aspects of personal and social development.

38. The school's links with other establishments are very good. Since the last inspection the school has developed a community-based support service, the Children with Autism Respite and Development Service (CARDS). Additionally, over this period the school has forged constructive relationships with various organisations in order to extend learning opportunities. It has developed successful initiatives allowing pupils and students greater opportunities for social inclusion. These initiatives take account of individual needs and may include younger children joining a local nursery for some sessions, younger pupils spending a playtime in a local primary school, or older pupils attending science classes at a local comprehensive school. The school is justifiably proud of its programme of work experience. This includes non-verbal students working successfully in the sorting office for the Post Office over a twelve-month period, and students with significant learning difficulties achieving independence while working on an assembly line.

39. Provision for students over 16 is good. The curriculum has been extended since the last inspection to include more work experience and Team Enterprise. Links with local colleges and businesses enrich the students' learning experiences. The curriculum is particularly relevant, and individual needs are met well. There is careful preparation for the next stage, and leavers go on to further education or placements in adult communities.

40. All pupils and students have good opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities. Staff run a successful holiday play-scheme and many also give their time to help staff the additional play-scheme provided by the Children with Autism Respite and Development Service (CARDS). All pupils and students have regular opportunities to take part in residential visits, such as a 'Life Skills holiday' to Cornwall, or a programme of outdoor and adventurous activities. The 'Friends of Portfield School' raise funds to contribute to these valuable activities.

41. The provision for the social and moral development of pupils and students lies at the heart of everything the school does, and it is very good. Provision for social development is strongly underpinned by the emphasis on developing communication and social skills. For example, students more than 16 took part in group activities, which relied on them, listening to descriptions and fitting them to the appropriate person. They thoroughly enjoyed the session and the humour the teacher brought into it.

42. The whole ethos of the school is one of providing a structured society in which pupils can operate. Pupils and students are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and develop an understanding of living in a community. Adults act as excellent role models and the high quality relationships are implicit in the forming of pupils' and students' attitudes to good social behaviour and self-discipline. Many trips and visits out of school are organised to give them experiences of the world beyond school and home. Staff encourage pupils to work co-operatively. They stress the importance of acknowledging and greeting each other, of sharing toys and equipment and of looking at the work of others.

43. Consistent use of suitable behaviour management strategies throughout the school and residential houses means that pupils and students know what is expected of them. As a result they are happy and relaxed and generally live together well. Within their world, pupils and students are very aware of what is right and wrong.

44. Provision for spiritual development has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. The teaching methods used embody clear values and help pupils and students develop a sense of curiosity. Teachers are receptive to pupils' responses and are adept at using praise to acknowledge achievement. Every person in the school is valued for his or her individual contribution and there is a great sense of co-operation between school, home, and a range of agencies all working together for the benefit of the children. This greatly enhances the dignity and quality of life for pupils, students and parents alike, enabling them to mix in the community and experience everyday events alongside others. Music is used often, either to soothe and calm pupils after a busy day or as a stimulating expression of creativity. The school readily uses specialist help, such as music therapy, to provide pupils and students with an uplifting environment in which they can create, enjoy and respond to music. The whole school gathers together for an assembly each week. Together they sing songs that focus on the individual and on others, share the work, and celebrate the achievements of others. It is an occasion in which all pupils take part and everyone enjoys.

45. The provision for the cultural development of pupils and students is satisfactory. The school uses its local environment well to familiarise pupils and students with the area in which they live and work. In English lessons, pupils and students read and share a wide range of stories and poems. In music, and through music therapy, pupils get the opportunity to use and listen to a range of instruments and music. For example, a group of Year 4, 5, 6 and 7 pupils took great delight in shaking the maracas they had made with rice and chickpeas in plastic bottles. They finished the lesson listening to Indian music. There are regular visits to local churches and the Christmas carol service is held in the Priory. The school celebrates festivals such as Diwali but, in general, school activities do not reflect the cultural diversity of British society well enough.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

46. The school has made satisfactory improvement in this aspect and has good provision for the welfare, support and guidance of all pupils and students, in a caring and

supportive environment. The welfare of pupils and students is given a high priority and this enables them to focus on learning. The school attaches great importance to the personal dignity of pupils and students. Residential provision is very good. It offers a very stable and sensitive environment with a wide variety of evening activities. Together, these promote the self-confidence, interests and experiences of the pupils and students, and extend their learning opportunities. They foster the right kind of behaviour and attitudes and enable students to start and complete the day in a positive frame of mind. Students feel safe and secure in residence. The residential experience extends the classroom curriculum and enhances the overall quality and standard of education provided by the school.

47. Procedures for child protection are good. The school has a named child protection officer, who is well aware of her duties. Staff are also well aware of their responsibilities, which they take seriously. Procedures are in place to cope with emergency, and the evacuation of the building is practised with sufficient frequency. Staff have been trained in safe restraint procedures. Accidents and incidents are recorded as required. Pupils receive very good guidance on how to take care of themselves, and this is incorporated in both living skills and personal and social education. The school has very good relationships with a wide range of support services and makes very effective use of them, which enables pupils to receive the additional support and help they need. Risk assessments are made of individual pupils as well as the situations in which they live. The provision for first aid is good: there is a nurse and, on one site, a designated medical room. Visiting medical professionals are willing to talk with staff, so that they have a good understanding of the needs of pupils and students. Members of staff are aware of safety issues relating to lessons and off-site trips, and take the necessary steps to ensure that the correct procedures are followed. For example, in a food technology lesson, the teacher very carefully explained the correct way to take hot buns from the tin.

48. The educational and personal support and guidance given to pupils and students are very effective in raising achievements throughout the school. Since the time of the last inspection, the school has reviewed its procedures for the personal support of pupils and students, and has developed very good practice with a high level of consistency, especially in the residential environment. Records of daily incidents are maintained in the residential houses and the procedures for passing information between care and teaching are staff good. Regular review meetings, with the support of a wide range of specialists, set realistic personal targets and monitor progress against these. This liaison results in a coherent approach to support and guidance. There are satisfactory arrangements in place for the educational aspects of pupils' individual education plans, which include targets in English, mathematics and science. However, the effectiveness of these is reduced because of the large number of targets, a few of which are not specific and measurable. This makes assessment and monitoring of progress difficult.

49. The procedures for promoting and monitoring attendance are very good and the school swiftly intervenes if there is concern over a pupil's attendance. For example, a few pupils have special arrangements to enable them to make the daily transition from home to school. Specially provided escorts, and parents, go through the school timetable carefully with pupils before they leave home, thus reducing pupils' anxiety about the change. This practice has been successful in promoting better attendance.

50. The school has very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour. There are clear, consistent routines for the pupils and students, and all staff have high expectations. These are consistently reinforced, and this helps pupils and students to understand and meet the expectations. Appropriate behaviour is frequently praised in lessons and on other occasions, so that pupils and students improve their social skills.

Behaviour in the residential areas is of the same high standard as that which exists in the school setting. There are very effective behaviour management plans, drawn up in consultation with parents, for pupils and students who have specific difficulties; these are also applied at home by parents and carers. As a result of this, and highly effective classroom management, the school maintains an outstandingly positive learning environment. Bullying rarely occurs; where the behaviour of a pupil causes anxiety for others, this is quickly dealt with, and staff are quick to establish classroom procedures to counter it.

51. There has been satisfactory improvement in assessment procedures since the time of the last inspection. There is now a well-written policy for assessment, which was last reviewed two years ago; it is due for review during this month. When pupils enter the school, a baseline assessment is carried out, and although this is not one that is accredited it is used well to set targets. Recently, all pupils and students have been assessed using the P Levels (Pre National Curriculum Level 1), in preparation for the setting of whole-school targets for raising attainment. Although all pupils are disapplied from national tests, some do take these when it is felt that they will achieve success.

52. Teachers and other staff record a great deal of information concerning each pupil and his or her achievements during each day. Much of this information is gained from observing the daily activities of the pupils and recording the findings in one of three ways. There is no doubt that all staff have a very clear understanding of their pupils, and what they can and cannot do. The provision of accreditation for students at Post-16 is a strength, and the school is currently piloting accreditation for some pupils from Years 10 and 11.

53. However, there are some weaknesses in assessment. Most importantly, the use of a number of different formats means that practice is inconsistent across the school. Recording often involves the writing of considerable sections of prose. This makes the retrieval of information difficult, as it is not possible to get a clear picture of the progress of individual pupils without reading through a great deal of documentation. At present, the number of targets being set in Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for each pupil is too great; in some cases it may be as high as 40, and targets are not sufficiently prioritised. It also makes the management and tracking of targets into an onerous task. Some of the targets on individual education plans still need to be tightened up in order to make them truly measurable.

54. The procedures that are followed in the nursery, at Post-16 and for the teaching of personal, social and health education are very good. For example, at Post-16 there are clear assessment criteria, associated with external accreditation. Students' achievements are recorded with annotated photographs, and this practice is worthwhile as it provides evidence of achievement that is meaningful both to students and to external moderators. This good practice could usefully be shared by the whole school.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

55. The school has maintained the good partnership with parents reported in the last inspection and is constantly looking for ways to develop the relationship further. Offering and providing practical advice and support for parents in the home is seen as part of the 24-hour curriculum that the school offers. Enabling parents to manage and extend pupils, using the same strategies as those employed at school, results in a consistent and supportive environment for pupils to live in and to make progress.

56. Parents have positive views about the school. Through the pre-inspection questionnaire and meeting they made clear that their children enjoy school and are happy there. Parents are pleased with the quality of teaching and care that their children receive. They feel that the behaviour of pupils and students is good, and that the school is helping their children to become more independent and responsible. Comments from parents in the home-school book endorse and extend this view, and some parents write detailed responses to the daily entries from staff. The Wessex Autistic Society regularly conducts a consumer satisfaction survey amongst parents. The latest one showed parents support for and appreciation of the work of Portfield School.

57. Parents receive very good quality information on the school, and on its philosophy, beliefs and approach. The prospectus is detailed and clearly sets out what parents can expect from the school. However, it omits required information on the destinations of school leavers. Parents are asked to complete a pre-starting questionnaire that not only provides personal and medical details about the child but also gives parents the opportunity to outline their concerns, worries, and hopes. The termly newsletter is readable, and packed with interesting detail on activities and achievements. All the classes report on what they have been doing, with each child receiving a mention. Each issue also discusses a particular method or approach that the school uses with pupils and students. This helps parents understand the theory behind what the school is doing, and the impact that activities such as music therapy have on the development of pupils and students. At open evenings, parents have watched videos of their children in lessons so that they can see the range of activities that children are involved in, and how their children respond. Staff record day-to-day happenings in the home-school book, which provides the kind of detail that parents can cherish.

58. The school reports formally on pupils' progress through the annual review report. The review meetings involve teachers, parents, social services and specialists such as speech and music therapists, so parents get a full picture of all aspects of their child's development. The written review serves also as the annual report, and gives parents a detailed account of personal and social development of their child, and of the work covered during the year. The reports are less clear on pupils' and students' achievements and progress within subjects. The individual education plan for each child is updated twice a year, once after the annual review and six months later. Parents are invited to discuss the interim review if they wish, and they are also invited to a parents' evening each year when they can discuss progress with the class teacher.

59. The school is very responsive to parents' worries and concerns and goes to great lengths to help parents cope with and manage their children at home. Since the school was last inspected, CARDS (Children with Autism Respite and Development Service) has been established in direct response to parents asking for help at home. This is now a highly valued service that offers support to many families in the area, as well as those with children at Portfield. Residential social workers have also worked with families to establish strategies at home to support and reflect the way pupils live and work at school. Dialogue is regular and constant, with staff making every effort to find time to talk to parents. The school runs a monthly parents' group, which enables parents to offer support to one another, and to receive advice from professionals.

60. The school values the high opinion and level of support from parents, and strives to maintain it. The partnership is a genuine one and makes a significant contribution to the comfort and security of pupils in the school, and thus to the progress they make. There is a strong sense of everyone working together for the benefit of the pupils and students.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

61. Overall, leadership is good. The headteacher has led very effectively on a number of successful developments in the school, including the setting up of the CARDS, (Children with Autism Respite and Development Service) initiative. This is now so successful, and in such great demand, that it has had to be taken over by the Wessex Autistic Society. What began as a school initiative, and grew out of an awareness of the needs of the parents of pupils in the school, has become a regional service, set to extend further.

62. The senior management team provides clear educational direction, and members work effectively as a team to carry out consultation, set policy and manage consequent change. The quality of their teamwork is illustrated well by the way in which recent changes in the working patterns of residential staff have been managed. Careful consultation kept staff involved in the process of decision making, yet the team decided on the final changes. The changes have had the desired effect of improving retention; there is now less staff absence and staff morale is good.

63. Senior managers have a good understanding of where the school's strengths and weaknesses lie, and suitable action is taken to remedy these. Following training, the team has recently carried out school self-evaluation. All information that is gathered from monitoring, parental surveys, staff consultations, and the process of accreditation by the National Autistic Society is used well to identify the school's priorities for development.

64. The school's policy of recruiting high quality teachers by offering support for substantial training courses has paid dividends too. This has helped to improve the quality of teaching. Equally important, though, is the clear guidance given to staff in the teaching and learning policy. This contains practical advice, on one side of paper, that guides staff very well in teaching pupils with autism. The faithful implementation of this guidance has been monitored carefully, and this has helped to secure a consistent approach across the school. A similar approach has been adopted with behaviour management. There is clear guidance, staff receive good training, practice is carefully monitored, and consistent approaches are secured as a result. Monitoring of teaching is a particular strength, and could usefully be extended to ensure that teachers provide a broad range of learning experiences in all subjects.

65. Management of the curriculum is less well developed. Until recently, a senior teacher, who has now left, had the task of co-ordinating the subjects of the National Curriculum. This has now become the responsibility of the deputy headteacher. The task of monitoring is made more difficult than it needs to be. The monitoring of teachers' plans is very time consuming for one person to carry out. Teachers produce so much short-term planning that a task amounting to a full curriculum audit needs to be carried out each term. This is highly inefficient. The other side of this coin is the planning burden placed on teachers, which is far greater than it needs to be.

66. The school's curriculum policy, which is good in many respects, does not state how much time should be allocated to each subject, and this is left to teachers to decide. In fact, there is a shared view of where the emphasis should lie for pupils in this school, and a suitable balance is struck in most cases. However, when it comes to checking whether teachers have set aside sufficient time for teaching each subject, there is no benchmark to use. There is a lack of balance on some timetables, where classes have four fifths of one day spent in physical activities, for example.

67. The school has wisely targeted first its most important subject areas for further development, and there is a rolling programme so that each subject will be dealt with in turn. All teaching staff sit on the curriculum development group, and this is beneficial in that it acts as a forum for discussion as well as staff development. Because pupils and students need a high degree of consistency in their environments, co-ordinators of those subjects which are a focus for development are released from teaching for a week at a time to carry out monitoring work. This has worked well so far, although a few co-ordinators find it hard to contain their enthusiasm!

68. The governors are a skilled and very supportive group. They carry out their responsibilities in a satisfactory manner. Certain members have worked closely with staff to develop aspects of the school's provision. For example, a paediatrician's expertise was used well in developing practice in behaviour management. Governors meet regularly, and have a suitable committee structure to carry out their responsibilities. Several members are active in making day and night visits to the school, and their written reports are presented at governors' meetings. The curriculum committee has received presentations from key members of staff, so that it is well informed about developments. The finance committee approves the budget and asks pertinent questions about reasons for expenditure. However, governors acknowledge that they need further training in order to develop a truly strategic role.

69. Governance of the school is about to change. The Wessex Autistic Society is revising its own management structure to create an Education and Children's Services Action Team. Whilst the terms of reference for this group are clear about the commitment to carry out the statutory responsibilities of governors, the document does not describe how this will be done. However, there will be some continuity, as some governors will become members of this group. As part of the new structure, a group has also been formed to take a strategic view of development in the society. The headteacher is a member of this group, which has started to draw up a five-year business plan for the society.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources.

70. The school is well staffed. The ratio of teachers to pupils is better than that found in comparable schools. There is a good match between the initial training of teachers and the subjects and age range for which they are responsible. Half the teachers are additionally qualified in special educational needs. Teachers have previous experience but only two have more than four years service in the school. Last year, three teachers were replaced by a full-time equivalent of 3.8, a staffing improvement. There are more male teachers than female, which reflects the gender balance of the pupils.

71. Teachers are supported by an above average number of well-trained support assistants, some of whom divide their time between the classroom and residential provision. This helps to provide continuity of pupil care. In-service training of staff is a strength, which leads to improved standards of teaching and learning. There is a rolling programme of weekly training in addition to the five prescribed training days. The staff training committee reliably identifies the focus for this, which invariably reflects issues in the school development plan. Evaluation of this training is thorough and effective. The introduction of the National Literacy Strategy has been a recent focus. Local Makaton trainers have recently helped the staff improve their signing. There is regular updating of training in child

protection and physical intervention and restraint. Learning support assistants have full access to all training, which raises the effectiveness of the skills of the staff as a whole. Assessment and professional development of individual teachers is a strength. Performance management is well established in the school, and has made a significant contribution to the improvements in teaching and learning.

72. Since the last inspection, there has been a good level of improvement. Staff turnover, both in the school and in the residential accommodation, has been reduced. Staff training is now a weekly event, of good quality, and effective. It closely reflects the requirements of individual teachers and the professional needs of the school. It is now much broader in scope than described in the report of the last inspection. Whole school literacy has been a recent successful focus of staff development, which has resulted in the successful introduction of the National Literacy Strategy into the school. Support staff are now included well in training activities.

73. The school's accommodation is unsatisfactory. The school is based in three houses, a few hundred yards apart, but separated by a major road, near the centre of the town. Younger pupils are taught in one house, which also provides their residential accommodation. Classrooms at both sites are very cramped. The residential accommodation is adequate, but pupils must share bedrooms in this building. The playground is small and dark, and the toys available to the pupils are shabby. Some of them are broken. Privacy in the residential setting is now satisfactory and there is good provision for leisure activities.

74. The main house provides classrooms for older pupils and has space for school administration. Accommodation is generally cramped, with storage a perpetual problem. Unsatisfactory accommodation adversely affects progress in PE, music, art and design and technology. It restricts the curriculum for all pupils in science. Games take place on a public playing field. The school makes good use of a commercially-run leisure centre, and other venues in the local community.

75. The residential accommodation for all the pupils in the third house is better. It is spacious, attractively decorated, homely and welcoming. It is greatly appreciated by the three pupils who currently live there during the week.

76. Since the last inspection, there has been a good deal of effort invested in trying to secure improvement, the benefits of which are not yet seen in the school. On the first day of the inspection, work commenced on a new building, which should address all the weaknesses of the present buildings. A swimming pool is planned, and ample playground and leisure facilities form part of the plan. Discrete accommodation is also planned for Post-16 students, who are likely to remain in one of the existing three houses, close to the local amenities.

77. Resources for learning are satisfactory overall. There is a computer in every classroom and the school has a good number of CD ROMs. Resources for personal and social education are good. However, books and equipment for science, design technology, music, geography and history are unsatisfactory and do not support all aspects of the National Curriculum. The library provides a satisfactory number of books for higher attaining pupils to enjoy, but they cannot be well displayed in the very cramped accommodation.

78. Since the last inspection, there has been a satisfactory level of improvement in resources in mathematics, design technology, art, PE, and particularly in English. There are now sufficient resources for the foundation stage and Post-16.

Efficiency

79. Financial planning is satisfactory. There are good arrangements for setting the budget, and the development plan is costed well. The school has a large surplus on paper, but the audited accounts of the Wessex Autistic Society (WAS) show that all surplus funds are properly ploughed back into developments. The society has taken out a large loan to fund the building of the new school. There is commendable transparency in the setting of school fees, and representatives from the Local Education Authority (LEA) in which the school is located are involved well in the consultation process. The school prides itself on keeping its fees at a low level compared with similar schools nationally. However, in several subjects there are some shortfalls in learning resources that have not yet been a focus in the school's rolling programme of subject review, and there is no complete audit of resources currently held in the school.

80. Financial administration is carried out efficiently by the school's bursar and a member of staff in the WAS offices nearby. Co-ordinators are responsible for some of the management of their budgets, but the bursar, who monitors their expenditure carefully, relieves staff of the bulk of associated paperwork. Day-to-day running of the school is efficient. All staff make considerable efforts to overcome the difficulties associated with the weaknesses in accommodation.

81. The principles of best value are applied in a satisfactory manner. The school ensures that it gets good value when purchases are made, and compares itself with similar schools in any way that it can. Consultation with local education authorities is good, and representatives are consulted about changes in fee levels. However, although there are success criteria in the school development plan, these do not lend themselves to the evaluation of the cost effectiveness of spending decisions.

82. The school provides good value for money. Standards of achievement are satisfactory overall; pupils' and students' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are very good. Teaching is good, and the school is well led and managed.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

83. The headteacher, staff and governors should:

- Improve the curriculum and its assessment by:
(*Paragraphs 34, 35, 45, 47, 52, 53, 65, 66, 154, 156, 186*)
 - * ensuring that the school's curriculum policy gives clear guidance on the amount of time that should be spent teaching each subject;
 - * developing a whole-school approach to the planning of subjects that reduces the planning burden on teachers;
 - * developing a whole-school approach to recording that includes records that show, at a glance, what pupils know understand and can do, and are not time consuming to complete;
 - * reducing the number of targets in Individual Education Plans;
 - * developing manageable procedures for monitoring the curriculum;
 - * providing a wider range of learning experiences in science, DT, geography, history and RE;
 - * improving provision to develop pupils' and students' multicultural awareness.

- Ensure that there are sufficient learning resources for science, DT, geography, history and music by:
(*Paragraphs 134, 143, 154, 159, 173*)
 - * auditing existing resources in these subjects;
 - * identifying additional resources requirements;
 - * keeping resources under review as the curriculum develops in each subject.

- Improve the school's accommodation*.
(*Paragraphs 73, 74*)

- This forms part of the Wessex Autistic Society's Business Plan.

- Governors should consider including the following minor points in their action plan:
(*Paragraphs 57, 58*)
 - * including the destinations of school leavers in the school's prospectus;
 - * ensuring that all pupils' annual progress reports contain a section that describes achievements and progress in every National Curriculum subject.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	76
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	34

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Sates-factory	Unseats-factory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	4	18	41	13			
Percentage	5.3	23.7	53.9	17.1			

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	42
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	16

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	0
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	1

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	2.9	School data	0

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete 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	1
Chinese	0
White	41
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes:

YR–Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	10
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	4.2
Average class size	5.25

Education support staff:

YR–Y13

Total number of education support staff	37
Total aggregate hours worked per week	1,231.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	1185484.00
Total expenditure	1145325.00
Expenditure per pupil	27935.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	399655.00
Balance carried forward to next year	439814.00

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	3
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	3.8

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	42
Number of questionnaires returned	13

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	77	23	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	54	46	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	62	31	0	0	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	8	50	8	8	25
The teaching is good.	77	23	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	62	31	0	8	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	77	15	8	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	46	46	8	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	54	31	8	8	0
The school is well led and managed.	54	38	8	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	54	46	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	75	17	0	8	0

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

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

84. There are six children in one combined nursery and reception class. This room is situated in a new purpose-built annexe that was under construction at the time of the last inspection. Therefore, while it is not possible to compare previous nursery and reception provision with that available now, the school has clearly significantly improved the learning opportunities for children in the early years. This class provides good quality education for children and prepares them well for school after the reception year. By working closely with parents and carers the school successfully helps children to adjust to working away from home. The class teacher visits each child at home before he or she joins the class, and then a gradual system of introducing children to the routines eases the transition from home to school. Once children are in school, staff and families keep each other up to date on a daily basis by sharing information about each child in a home-school book. The care that is taken to help children settle into school, along with calm, consistent and kind relationships, contributes to children's enjoyment in this class. This in turn contributes to their good achievement.

85. Teaching of children in the nursery and reception class is good overall. Of the lessons seen, two were very good, seven were good, and one was satisfactory. This high standard of teaching makes a significant contribution to the good level of learning for all children irrespective of their level of need, gender or background. Members of staff work very closely and effectively as a team, with a consistent and shared commitment to addressing each child's individual needs. They rightly plan to ensure that every session, whatever its focus, supports children's communication and social skills. A key feature of this is the use of Makaton signs and picture symbols to communicate when lessons start and finish. This routine is very effective in reassuring children and helping them to change activity, and even location, without becoming upset.

Personal, social and emotional development

86. While members of staff have clear objectives for each child in this area of learning it is not taught as a separate lesson. Children's social skills and understanding are constantly taught and reinforced throughout the day. This is a highly effective means of promoting children's learning, and accounts for the good gains that they make. Teaching is supported by the positive attitude of the teacher and nursery nurses, who are unfailingly patient, calm, clear and involved. Consequently, children trust these adults, enjoy being with them and are ready to learn from them.

87. All members of staff encourage initiative. For example, when one child took the mop and started to mop the floor in imitation of an adult, the closest nursery nurse immediately helped the child to control the mop and applauded him for his work. During the week of the inspection, children gained confidence daily in anticipating snack time. For example, some collected their individual books of symbols and words without being asked, in preparation for their break.

88. Snack time provides a good opportunity for children to share drinks and biscuits or fruit around a table. The staff team has high expectations of behaviour and the children rise to the occasion. They have a good understanding of the need to take turns to communicate their choice of drink or food. Children are expected to gain independence by

learning to collect their own resources from the art cupboard. At this stage in the school year, members of staff provide plenty of clues when children need to collect one spatula before starting their gluing activity. This ensures that children learn well during the lesson, while accumulating positive experience to lay good foundations for future learning.

Communication, language and literacy

89. The quality of teaching of communication, language and literacy skills was good in all 10 lessons observed. In the one lesson, which focused exclusively on teaching children to use symbols to enhance their communication skills, teaching was very good.

90. This lesson was highly successful in helping children to gain a rapid understanding in linking the card signifying a colour with the corresponding toy car or boat of that colour. The careful planning to teach children step by step through a process of different matching activities was a significant cause of the high level of achievement within such a short space of time.

91. Members of staff exploit every opportunity to draw children's attention to pictures and words so that they begin to distinguish between them. For example, children work in a group passing around a 'word and picture bag'. The teacher and nursery nurses ensure that each child's task is well matched to the level of need, so that each child achieves success in placing either pictures or word labels in the correct position on a large board. Similarly, the team is skilled at encouraging those children who are beginning to use words and phrases to do so meaningfully. This means that those children who use language are required to name the vehicles they have successfully matched.

92. Stories such as 'Help! Big Brother's Coming', and rhymes, are shared with a high level of enthusiasm from adults, which is infectious. Adults make good use of props such as puppets and toys to support children's comprehension. Children enjoy stories, and those who are ready enjoy sharing reading books and recognising short sentences in them. They do this with an interest in letter shapes that often exceeds their interest in the illustrations. The team encourages children to regard sharing a book with an adult as a special time, and this makes a positive contribution to the interest and willingness that children demonstrate in trying to read. Adults place a suitably strong emphasis upon introducing children to recognising letters by sound, with a 'letter of the week'. Children enjoy feeling textured letters, and are beginning to enjoy making marks on paper with pens and pencils.

Mathematical development

93. Teaching and learning was good in the one lesson which was predominately focused on mathematical development. However, several good lessons included activities with individual targets for children to support this area of learning. In the mathematical session, good teaching meant that children learned well. The lesson was planned in detail to meet individual needs, so children either categorised toy boats and cars, or coloured pictures of transport. All children had an opportunity to consolidate their understanding of 'one', by linking this word to the action of handing one picture or object to the teacher. Good planning, with well-pitched objectives and suitable strategies to support children, meant that all children experienced success.

94. The staff team skilfully uses language that aids mathematical understanding. For example, while children are working with boats and water in the plastic 'canal system', adults provide a commentary that mirrors children's actions, and includes vocabulary related to size, shape or position. They point out that a child is pushing a boat *under* a

bridge, or *through* a passageway and that the canal is *long*. While children make trucks from boxes, members of staff draw their attention to the *round* shape of the wheels. Similarly, members of staff regularly use the language of number in action songs and rhymes, which children enjoy enormously. They encourage children to identify written numbers wherever possible, so when the weather and date board are being shared a child identifies the '2', denoting that it is the second of the month.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

95. Teaching and learning of this area of learning is good. During the inspection one lesson was seen where this was the principal focus, and teaching was good. Other lessons that contributed to this area of learning seen were also good. Good organisation and planning for individual tasks in a computer lesson enables children to learn effectively at their own pace. The whole team understands the purpose of the activity for each child and so the lesson proceeds briskly. Consequently, children touch the computer screen with varying levels of help and begin to understand that this will affect the colour and pattern on the screen as well as the sound that comes from the computer.

96. In an activity where they make trucks, children use glue to join bottle top wheels and shiny paper windows to the main box body of their truck. Good teaching from all adults means that children use the tools and materials with as much independence as they can manage, and staff take every opportunity to encourage communication and the understanding of specific vocabulary. As a result of this good teaching children learn well about the effect of glue as well as gaining further understanding of their environment. Children have regular opportunities to see how food changes when it is combined and heated, when they help to bake 'Cowboy Cookies', for example.

97. The regular use of picture symbols to mark the change from one lesson or activity to another helps children to understand the idea that time has passed. Additionally, the regular presentation of picture symbols in a vertical representing a sequence of events in the classroom helps children to understand that past and future events have an order to them. In common with staff, pupils and students in the rest of the school, children enjoy a programme of visits to help them understand the environment beyond the classroom.

Physical development

98. Teaching and learning are good overall. In the one lesson seen which focused on children's large movement, teaching was satisfactory. However, members of staff plan to develop children's control and co-ordination throughout the daily activities, and in the lessons seen where these skills were supported, the teaching and learning were good.

99. In the hall, children willingly 'follow their leader' and, with this adult support, climb on to a raised surface confidently. They have made good progress in accepting the hall space and the close physical proximity of others on the mat. For this reason, members of staff are slightly taken by surprise and the lesson ends having consolidated skills more than extended them. There are clear strengths in the high level of enthusiasm from staff, which promotes good participation and co-operation from children.

100. There are individual targets for children to increase their dexterity and control of small pieces of equipment, such as pencils and scissors. These are worked on well, and children make good gains in these physical skills.

Creative development

101. During the inspection no specific lessons addressing creative development were seen. However, activities to develop artistic and musical skills are planned to meet individual children's needs and to contribute to the successful development of their physical skills and their knowledge and understanding of the world. Several good lessons made effective use of music during the inspection and children enjoyed using different materials in a good lesson that involved them in making three-dimensional trucks. Members of staff successfully promote an interest in and enjoyment of music.

102. The staff team, in common with the rest of the school staff, plan specifically to support the development of children's imagination and this is done well throughout all activities. Staff make good use of music, rhymes and stories to encourage children to respond imaginatively. For example, they plan movement sessions to accompany songs which involve acting out being 'wheels on the bus, driving along' or moving like animals. They encourage children to take dolls on buggy rides and to enact 'going on a bear hunt'.

Summary

103. The strengths of the provision for children in this combined nursery and reception class lie in the shared depth of understanding of the needs of the children, the high quality teamwork and very good organisation. These qualities mean that children learn well across all the areas of learning. Additionally they trust the adults who work with them and approach activities with an impressive willingness to participate and learn.

ENGLISH

104. Standards of achievement are consistently good at all key stages and Post 16. This is because pupils learn and consolidate a broad range of early skills, which forms a secure base for subsequent development. Well-planned lessons, based on the national literacy strategy, provide a strong framework for pupils to learn in a systematic way and derive benefit from the wide range of literacy experiences they are offered at the school. Reading lessons are successful and based on a well-trying method that takes into account pupils' often severe and complex difficulties. Pupils are carefully assessed on the small steps of progress they make, as they proceed to lessons based on the National Curriculum.

105. By Year 2, pupils listen to the teacher attentively and most are able to make eye contact when she speaks and signs. *Hello* routines are well known. With considerable prompting, pupils say or sign *hello*, and higher attainers write their names on the blackboard. Pupils repeat the days of the week. The teacher uses good, well focused signing to help them. In a lesson at the beginning of the day, pupils were helped to read *Today is Wednesday and the weather is sunny*. Pupils understand that objects have names, and identify familiar things by confidently pointing and vocalising. Some use picture exchange cards, or word cards, to enable them to be understood when they ask for a drink in a café, for example. In a lesson that recapitulated the events of the day, a higher attaining pupil read the words *word box* and then the names of every member of the class. All recognised their name when it was shown to them on a card, and were able to place it on the *goodbye* board. On a visit to the public library, higher attaining pupils showed interest in books, particularly those with vivid illustrations. Almost all listened quietly to a simple story when it was read to them. Pupils understand that books open from right to left, and that print has meaning. During this lesson, pupils became familiar with the concept of borrowing

books to support their reading. Most took pleasure in choosing which books the group would take back to school with them. Higher attaining pupils copy shapes, colour them and match colours by joining them with a line. Low attainers need hand-over-hand assistance to help them to achieve this level of co-ordination.

106. By Year 6, pupils continue to focus on the teacher and listen attentively when she speaks. Pupils understand routines clearly when they are enabled to read the day's activities on a card. Higher attainers say what these are, whilst others sign their responses or use cards. In afternoon circle time, pupils say or sign what they have had for lunch, and indicate their favourite foods, some using word cards for this.

107. Pupils usually listen attentively to familiar stories such as *This old car*. All enjoy *Dear Zoo*. Most read the names of the animals confidently, and higher attaining pupils read adjectives such as *fierce*, and say that the lion is fierce, pointing to the illustration in the book. The highest attainers read very simple fiction such as *Packing my bag* and *Ball game* with interest and concentration. They show a good grasp of single syllable, high frequency words. They write simple tales such as *Jack and the beanstalk*, using uneven but readable letters, phonetic spelling, and random use of capital letters. Average attainers write their name and some phrases. They are given a great deal of help to use capital letters appropriately. Some sign their name. Lower attainers copy and over write letters and words.

108. By Year 9, pupils continue to greet the teacher and each other by signing and vocalising. They listen to stories attentively. When they are in a group they pay attention to the speaker, sometimes needing help to focus their attention. Pupils use their word cards and picture exchange cards confidently in response to direct questions. Pupils do not always understand what is said, but fully understand when it is signed to them. They show little spontaneous interest in conversation. Pupils continue to enjoy the stories that are read to the class. They enjoy choosing books for quiet reading, and most, with help, decode very simple text. Their level of understanding varies. The highest attainer at this key stage has written short legible accounts, with correct spelling, as well as letters to his family. His account of a road accident is presented neatly, using a word processor. Lower attainers need help to use high frequency words to create a simple sentence. Average attainers produce complete sentences, using familiar words, to accompany a picture that they have seen before.

109. By Year 11, pupils continue to listen, with help, to a range of speakers. They continue to greet their teacher and the rest of the class. Some are helped to respond to questions, using vocalisation, word cards and picture exchange cards. Most, with help, read very simple text but a few read simple narratives unaided. Pupils continue to copy and overwrite letters and words. They label objects, and write phrases and consecutive sentences.

110. Post-16 students successfully develop their conversational skills and show increasing awareness of themselves and others. They introduce themselves to other people. They do not do this spontaneously, and the teacher must quietly insist that they do so. Students are enabled to answer questions about themselves, vocalising, or signing. They are helped to make positive comments about each other. A higher attainer speaks fluently about her interests. As part of Team Enterprise study, students learn to smile, make eye contact and behave in an appropriate manner as they meet others in the workplace. Besides their personal reading, they read words and phrases useful to them socially, such

as *Parking*, street names and other social signs. Students write cheques and fill in paying in books and ledgers with varying degrees of competence. Most, with help, make a shopping list, but not all can follow a simple recipe. Students write reviews of their college visits and work experience in very simple terms. Some successfully keep a simple diary.

111. Teaching and learning are good across the school. Of the 24 lessons, or parts of lesson, seen, one was excellent, six were very good, 11 were good and six were satisfactory. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. The lessons were effective because teachers have a very good knowledge of autism and possess a range of skills that enable students and pupils to learn. This was apparent in lessons at the beginning and the end of the day when pupils' daily routines are reviewed. In these lessons, speaking and listening, reading and writing receive the same emphasis, so pupils' communication skills make good progress and provide a firm foundation for wider learning. Pupils respond well to the challenge of social interaction in these lessons. They respond to verbal prompts and gestures to sit at the desk, acknowledge others and concentrate on the task in hand. Teachers made good use of resources to extend the multi-sensory dimension of their teaching, and enable pupils and students to learn. In the lesson where *Dear Zoo* was read, pupils were shown brightly coloured illustrations and given opportunities to handle model animals to help their understanding of the words used to describe them.

112. Lesson planning is consistently very good. Learning experiences for pupils and students are individually planned so all are allowed to progress at their own pace towards their individual targets. This is especially effective during *Tray time*. Activities for this are based on good assessment procedures, and are well designed to ensure pupils make as much progress as possible. For example, in a lesson in Year 11, there were detailed plans for two pupils to learn separate sounds in words. These others were at different stages of writing acquisition, and all received a different level of help with specially tailored resources to help them. Another pupil in this lesson received a good deal of well focused help to make purposeful marks as a precursor to writing. Attitudes towards learning in this lesson were good because each pupil was challenged individually and enabled to experience some measure of success. Teachers' management of potentially difficult pupils is so good that it appears to be effortless. Teachers are patient and persistent in their teaching of appropriate behaviour and the expected learning routines.

113. Teachers and support staff work harmoniously and patiently to calm pupils whilst enabling all to continue to maximise learning. Ongoing assessment is good and record keeping is thorough. These strengths of teaching ensure that pupils and students continue to build on their knowledge, skills and understanding.

114. Since the last inspection, there has been a very good level of improvement. Teaching and learning have improved for all age groups and are now consistently good. Pupils' progress overall has improved from satisfactory to good. Pupils' response to lessons is now good and, on occasion, very good. Lessons are now properly focused on the promotion of communication and literacy. Lessons based on the National Literacy Strategy have been successfully introduced and are taught by all teachers. Resources continue to improve, and are now sufficient to teach the full National Curriculum. Excellent materials to promote the first stages of reading and writing acquisition are currently on order. Signing to support communication is now effectively used to support pupils' learning. A new, highly appropriate scheme of work has been written since the last inspection. The curriculum is now very good. In it, communication skills are given appropriate emphasis. Literacy is now well addressed. Pupils' learning experiences have been developed to include a widening range of books and a range of worthwhile poetry. Pupils are now effectively assessed through a system specially designed for them, which helps teachers to track pupils' progress as they move towards detailed learning objectives provided by the

national literacy framework. Teachers have been well trained by the co-ordinator of English in order to make the most effective use of this framework, which is already beginning to raise standards. Techniques based on the sound principles of reading recovery have successfully been introduced. Leadership of the subject is very good, and has already made a strong impact on the quality of teaching and learning through a systematic process of monitoring and evaluation

MATHEMATICS

115. The quality of teaching in mathematics is good overall and standards of achievement are now good across the school for the great majority of pupils and students. This represents very good improvement in the subject since the last inspection. The school has achieved this because it has focussed upon planning the full curriculum, while using specific and measurable targets on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to ensure that in every lesson teachers and support staff meet the needs of individual pupil and students.

116. There has been a change of staff since the last inspection, and senior managers have worked hard to support staff in this new way of working. All classes experience a balance of learning in small groups and working individually in mathematics. This is an effective way of ensuring that pupils' social skills are developed, that teachers have sufficiently high expectations of pupils and that good use is made of lesson time. Additionally, senior staff have regularly observed teachers teaching mathematics and given them detailed feedback on their strengths and weaknesses in a drive to raise standards, to good effect.

117. During the inspection six lessons were observed where mathematics was a primary focus. One excellent lesson was seen; two were very good, two good and one satisfactory. In one lesson, where pupils worked individually on work in their trays and there was an equal amount of English and mathematics teaching, teaching was good. Judgements are made additionally on evidence from a scrutiny of pupils' and students' work, teachers' plans, IEPs and reviews of progress.

118. Teaching for pupils in the younger age range (Years 1 and 2) is consistently good. It is successful because the teacher is very focused and constantly assessing what pupils know, understand and can do. She plans very carefully for support staff to concentrate upon prompting pupils with precise timing, just as much as they need, and without distracting them from the focus of the lesson when they are working as a group. Consequently they make good progress in naming shapes, in following counting up to twenty, and beginning to recognise numerals. They pay close attention to well chosen resources, such as a counting story, *Where's the cat?*

119. Teaching for pupils between Years 3 and 6 is good overall. Where teaching is excellent in this age group the quality of relationship between the class teacher and pupils inspires pupils to a high degree of motivation and effort. In these circumstances the room is very organised, the pace of the lesson very brisk, and the teacher's skills combine to ensure that pupils achieve exceptionally well. Pupils begin to apply their understanding of addition to using money. They select coins in two different ways to buy an item. Pupils working on understanding time move from recognising a quarter and half past to identifying five-minute intervals, and pupils who have the greatest difficulty with the subject extend their recognition of coins.

120. Judgements about teaching for pupils in Years 7 to 9 are based upon one good lesson, with an equal amount of English and mathematics work, and a detailed scrutiny of work in mathematics. This evidence demonstrates that teachers very clearly adapt work to meet individual pupils' needs, and so promote good levels of learning. Higher attaining pupils begin to record addition and subtraction calculations, and apply these to money. They use all four mathematical operations in a variety of contexts. For example, they time five-minute intervals and record that they have done this in a science investigation. Pupils with a greater level of difficulty count to three in practical situations, begin to identify squares and circles and, with adult support, use weights for measurement.

121. Older pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve well overall as a result of generally good teaching. During the inspection the one lesson observed with this age group was very good. There are considerable strengths in teachers' expectations, which mean that they meet the needs of all pupils effectively. For example, higher attaining pupils use their understanding of place value and number bonds and their skills in counting in twos or tens, to work out the 'easiest' combination of coins to make a particular amount, such as '53p' or '£1.20p'.

122. Students over 16 follow programmes of work that require them to use and apply their mathematical skills and understanding in practical situations. For example, they use several mathematical skills when they plan a lunch for nine people; or when they plan a bus journey that involves identifying times of bus arrivals and departures as well as costing the ticket.

123. The school's commitment to continuing to raise standards in the subject is exemplified by its current interest in using the national guidelines for numeracy, and making the ideas relevant to the pupils. For example, teachers are seeking ways to start mathematics lessons with a quick session of mental work. During the inspection this worked well when a teacher held coins in his hand and encouraged quick responses to his questions, which were adapted very effectively to meet the needs of individual pupils.

124. The school makes very good use of IEPs to support pupils' learning in this subject throughout the entire age range. Since the last inspection, senior staff have ensured that the subject has developed very well and the new co-ordinator for mathematics has a good understanding of how to develop it further. Staff work very hard to compensate for the cramped classrooms and ensure that the accommodation does not have a detrimental effect on the subject. There are sufficient resources to support the full curriculum.

SCIENCE

125. Pupils of primary age make good progress in lessons, because teaching is good or very good. Pupils have good opportunities to practise their investigative and experimental skills, which effectively enhance their knowledge and understanding of science. However, there not enough time is allotted to the subject each week, with the result that, over time, progress is satisfactory. For secondary aged pupils, not only is there insufficient time devoted to the subject, but there is a narrow range of learning experiences because facilities do not exist to tackle certain tasks safely. Overall, achievements for these pupils are unsatisfactory. Standards of achievement in science are unsatisfactory overall.

126. By Year 2, higher attaining pupils know some of the parts of the body such as arm, leg, hand, tummy and chest, and recognise the written word. They are developing an understanding of left and right. They understand hot and cold, and can sort hard and soft objects, recognising the appropriate symbols. They begin to predict which objects will *roll*

and *not roll*. Lower attaining pupils will point to their arms or legs, copying the teacher or support staff. They explore hard and soft objects by touching and rubbing, and enjoy watching objects roll.

127. By Year 6, higher attaining pupils can recognise the difference between floating and sinking, and will make a prediction. They investigate what dissolves and what does not, and answer correctly whether a substance is *soluble* or *insoluble*. They will copy and complete a simple table accurately. They recognise different homes for animals ; for example, a bird lives in a tree, a sheep lives in a field and a fish lives in water. They know that some household appliances use electricity and they can make simple circuit drawings and label them. They make good attempts at predicting what will or will not be attracted by a magnet. Lower attaining pupils sit appropriately, watching and experiencing sensory activities. For example, they will touch ice and look at steam.

128. By Year 9, higher attaining pupils can make a solution, following written instructions, and compile a table showing when different solutions become saturated. They establish the conclusion that more sugar dissolves in hot water than in cold water, and write up the experiment well. They predict which substances will be attracted to a magnet, and experiment with magnetic fields. They investigate floating and sinking, and distinguish between objects with wheels and without wheels. They measure the distance different objects move down an inclined plane, and the time it takes to reach that point. The most able pupil is taught about the relationship that speed has with distance and time. Lower attaining pupils needs adult support for all activities. They recognise some differences between themselves and others, talk about what plants need to grow, and match some animals to their environments. They discuss the different materials one will find in the home, and take part in sorting activities before visiting the recycling bins. They can distinguish between *wheels* and *no wheels*, but need hand-on-hand support to write and record their findings.

129. By Year 11, higher attaining pupils recognise that people are of different height and weight, and they show in graphical form the information they obtain. They weigh, mix and heat ingredients in the kitchen to show that some changes cannot be reversed. They also mix powder paint with the same result. They make simple circuits and learn that many appliances use electricity. They make sounds in different ways by plucking, hitting and shaking. They classify substances, using two criteria, such as rough or smooth, wood or glass. Lower attaining pupils generally follow similar investigations, but usually need hand-on-hand support to take a full part.

130. Literacy and numeracy are promoted well through the written description of investigations and the recording of results in tabular form with the necessary calculations. In turn, pupils use a word processing programme to complete this electronically. Inclusion is promoted so that able pupils or students may follow courses at a local secondary school to obtain success in the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) science examination.

131. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. It is frequently very good and never less than satisfactory. During the inspection, four lessons were observed, and of these, one was satisfactory, two were good and one was very good. Teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 3, good at Key Stage 1 and very good at Key Stage 2. All teachers know the pupils' abilities and difficulties very well and in the best lessons they use their secure subject knowledge to inspire the pupils. However, not all teachers have such an understanding of science and this can lead to incorrect results in experimental work. This was seen in a lesson where the teacher did not emphasise the need to ensure a fair test.

132. Teachers make good use of questioning to promote the pupils' listening skills, and then encourage pupils to communicate the reply as clearly as possible. Their questioning enables the pupils to recall what they already know, particularly when reviewing what they had already discovered and learnt in a previous lesson. Lessons plans are detailed and show clear expectations for each pupil. They have suitable objectives, which are well structured with activities that will stimulate the class. As a result, pupils have positive attitudes to their science lessons. The management of pupils is very good and teachers and support staff use the clear behaviour management plans consistently and successfully. The occasional occurrence of inappropriate behaviour is managed effectively, and this ensures that all the pupils join in the activities.

133. Pupils have very good relationships with staff. They are generally keen to learn, and the behaviour of most is always at least good, and often very good. At times pupils are encouraged to work collaboratively, and they do so well. The attitude of pupils towards practical work is good. They maintain their interest well and often remain engrossed at this time. Support staff are very effectively involved in supporting pupils during lessons. In particular, the learning support assistants are used well to support individual pupils, both in terms of behaviour and to ensure that pupils are able to do the work. Good use is made of discussion in lessons, and pupils' understanding is well supported by signing and communication. After the lesson the teacher and the learning support assistant make detailed notes of the gains in knowledge, understanding and behaviour displayed by each pupil. These build into a very full dossier, though finding and tracing particular information to substantiate progress can be time consuming.

134. Science has not yet had its turn in the rolling programme of subject development. The co-ordinator acknowledges that few improvements have taken place since the last inspection. It is envisaged that the move to the new site, with its designated specialist room, will act as the catalyst for development. At the present time, the scheme of work, written after the previous inspection, and the termly topic approach do not link well to provide the systematic development of the subject through the key stages. There is also insufficient time devoted to the subject, for all pupils, and inadequate resources and accommodation for secondary pupils. All these factors combine to make improvement since the last inspection, and leadership, unsatisfactory.

ART AND DESIGN

135. Standards of achievement in art are satisfactory across the school. Since the last inspection there has been satisfactory improvement in the provision for art within the school. This is mainly due to the improved quality of teaching.

136. By Year 2, pupils have learned to appreciate the various uses of paint brushes of different size. They work on a variety of paper, some very large and some smaller. They mix primary colours and discover the exciting secondary colours they can make. Pupils develop skills in printing as they use modelling media and polystyrene as materials from which to make printing blocks. Pupils also work with fabrics; they learn to sort them by colour and to decorate them, by fraying the edges to form fringes.

137. By Year 6, pupils develop an understanding of colour mixing and shading. They learn that adding white to a colour will create a pale colour and that by adding more of the original, it will darken again. Pupils also learn that, when working with crayons or coloured pencils, it is possible to vary the shade of a colour by varying the pressure that is applied to the paper. Pupils gain knowledge of space and shape as they cut pieces of fabric and card to the required shape when making collage pictures and patterns. In one lesson, pupils

worked on producing symmetrical pictures by a variety of different methods. They worked quickly and accurately, following the instructions of the teacher. Pupils were able to recognise and name the triangle shape. They cut and folded paper to form the shapes they needed and then glued them into place, taking great care with the positioning.

138. By Year 9, pupils have developed the technique of using a sketchbook in which to record their observations. One piece of work involved research into hot and cold colours, which entailed collecting illustrations from magazines. Other work includes the investigation of texture, from the bark of trees or from the leaves of plants. Lower attaining pupils enjoy learning about the effect of glue and glitter, and how it can be used to create a decorative effect on pictures. They learn to spread glue and, with the help of the classroom assistants, are able to observe the change in effect when light is shone upon the glitter. Pupils also learn to mix powder paint and, having spread some on paper, they then make interesting patterns by dabbing the wet paint with small sponges.

139. The pupils in Year 11 and the students who are over 16 work extremely well during their art lessons. In one lesson, the pupils and students produced some observational drawings of a car in the school car park. They were highly motivated and took great care to follow the horizontal lines of the car body, the triangular shapes of some windows, and the circular shapes of the lights. Pupils worked quietly, and very effectively, using pencil as a medium. By the end of the lesson, there was a good selection of drawings from different elevations. The work was of a good standard and the pupils had made very good progress during the course of the lesson.

140. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. It was possible to observe only three lessons, of which one was satisfactory, one was good and one was very good. The strengths in the teaching were clearly the preparation that had gone into the lesson and the very high levels of consideration the pupils were given. Staff have a very good understanding of each individual pupil, and a high level of skill in teaching pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. This is of great benefit to all pupils and students in the school. The only weakness observed in one lesson was the slow start, but it soon picked up and the pupils were well taught from then on, being treated as individuals. Work is carefully matched to the individual special needs of the pupils, and the teachers and support staff are very careful to make sure that all pupils are able to take a full part in every lesson.

141. The lessons are generally planned well, and provide suitable opportunities to work with a variety of media. However, there is too little emphasis on the knowledge and understanding of the work of well-known artists. Teachers have very good relationships with the pupils and in return the pupils relate well with the staff. Teachers and support staff work very well together, and ensure that all pupils have the materials that they need or choose. There are sufficient resources for the teaching of art throughout the school, and materials and equipment are available in each classroom. The accommodation is generally unsatisfactory for the teaching of art to pupils of secondary age. Although there is a room used for art and design and technology activities, there are no facilities for working with clay, firing pots and creating basic ceramic objects. There is no special area where 'messy' artwork can be carried out. This has a limiting effect on the experiences that can be offered.

142. The co-ordination of the subject is satisfactory and resources are well managed. The subject does not enjoy a particularly high profile in the school and there is room for improvement in this area. The lack of use of the work of other artists detracts from the subject's contribution to pupils' and students' cultural development.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

143. Standards of achievement in design and technology are satisfactory for pupils in the primary age range, where a suitable range of learning experiences is provided. However, standards are unsatisfactory for pupils of secondary age, because they repeat several of the tasks they have already encountered and, without a proper workshop, they cannot work on a wide enough range of resistant materials. For all pupils of compulsory school age, progress is best when using food as a material. Pupils and students are highly motivated when using food; they show enthusiasm for making and for evaluating the finished product. Progress is limited by weaknesses in planning and recording, and to some extent, the fact that there are not enough learning resources for the subject. Students over 16 achieve well. They build well on their designing and making skills through their involvement in Team Enterprise, and continue to develop their skills in using food as a medium.

144. The youngest pupils build satisfactorily on their experiences at the foundation stage. For example, they make cards for different events, assemble gift boxes, and use building bricks to make structures. In a food studies lesson, higher attaining pupils were able to successfully identify the ingredients that were to be used to make biscuits, and could use a cutter independently to cut biscuits from dough. Lower attaining pupils needed support to cut out the dough, but were able to take turns to mix ingredients together. By Year 6, higher attaining pupils make iced cakes by independently following a recipe, but lower attainers need support to make cheese on toast. At this stage, pupils have widened their experience of materials and processes. For example, they have made model houses, using junk materials, and made Christmas decorations from dough. They have also practised some weaving and sewing.

145. Provision for secondary aged pupils is unsatisfactory overall. These pupils repeat similar tasks to those set for primary aged pupils. Some repetition is desirable in order for pupils to acquire specific skills. However, long term planning does not give sufficient guidance to teachers on how to make sure that pupils continue to build on their knowledge, skills and understanding. Teachers develop their own yearly plans, rather than draw from a prescribed set of plans that support the systematic development of skills. Records do not always show clearly enough which skills have been mastered and which need to be worked on, so teachers are not promoting skill development as well as they might. Nonetheless, pupils do continue to make progress in using food. They make an increasing range of products, and the staff's good knowledge of individuals' skills and preferences ensures that progress is made in this context. During the inspection, pupils in Years 10 and 11 made a lunch consisting of pasta Bolognese.

146. Provision for students over sixteen is good. They have a range of opportunities to design, make and evaluate products for Team Enterprise. For example, they have made candles, plant pots and bird-feeding boxes. Students were observed during the inspection making a lunch consisting of chicken balti, rice, jam tarts and ice cream. Higher attaining pupils were able to plan the tasks, and independently follow a recipe; lower attainers needed verbal instructions in order to complete tasks in the correct sequence.

147. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Of the seven lessons seen, teaching was very good in one, good in four, and satisfactory in two. The best teaching is at Post-16, and teaching of primary pupils is usually good. However, there is occasionally a lack of subject focus in lessons for primary pupils. Teachers use lessons well to promote literacy and numeracy skills. For example, there are opportunities to weigh and measure in cookery sessions, and to read labels and write out recipes. Communication skills are effectively developed by offering pupils choices, using signing, and encouraging pupils to

use picture, word and symbol cards. Suitable attention is usually given to safety and hygiene in most lessons, but in one lesson seen there were no aprons available for pupils to use.

148. The subject makes an important contribution to pupils' and students' personal development by enabling them to engage in everyday activities, such as shopping for ingredients, which brings them into contact with members of the public. Pupils and students are always well behaved when out of school for such purposes. They also show considerable determination when carrying out less pleasant tasks, such as chopping onions, and this helps to promote progress.

149. In their plans, teachers include individual objectives for pupils and students, ensuring that all are challenged at a suitable level. Particularly high expectations were seen in a lesson for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9, led by the co-ordinator, a subject specialist. The task was for individual pupils to make a sailing boat, and test this to see which would win a race. The session proceeded at a good pace. Pupils tackled the task with enthusiasm, filing styrofoam blocks into the shape of a hull, and adding screws to form a keel. Masts, made from drinking straws, were glued in place, and sails cut out from plastic carrier bags. Pupils were well supported, so that all achieved the satisfaction of making a boat that could be tested. Those who had rushed the task, or not taken sufficient care when following instructions, found that their boats would not sail as well as others.

150. A new co-ordinator, who is a subject specialist, has recently joined the staff. Capacity for further improvement is good, but unsatisfactory leadership in the past has meant that not enough improvement has been made since the school was last inspected. The subject has not yet been allocated development time as part of the school's rolling programme. The policy does not state how much time should be allocated to teaching the subject, or describe arrangements for monitoring and evaluation. As a result, some teachers devote more time to this than others, and this has not been noticed. Key areas for further development are to streamline and improve longer term planning and record keeping, and to monitor the curriculum and pupils' progress.

GEOGRAPHY

151. Standards of achievement are unsatisfactory because pupils have a narrow range of learning experiences.

152. By Year 11, pupils have a good knowledge of the topography of the school and the local town centre. They have visited a local airport to count the number of planes. During the inspection, pupils in Years 9 to 11 undertook a simple traffic survey, and made a bar chart to present their findings.

153. Three lessons were seen during the inspection, all of which were trips out of school. Behaviour was good, due to the careful preparation of the teacher and learning support assistants. Teaching and learning on these occasions were good, but the learning objectives were focussed on a broad range of curricular and behavioural targets, and pupils' progress in geography was unsatisfactory.

154. The school acknowledges that the present scheme of work requires substantial revision. As it stands, the curriculum is narrow and lacks balance. Only the attainment target "Knowledge and understanding of places" is addressed with any consistency. Some teachers plan geography lessons for their classes, but the unsatisfactory level of co-ordination does not allow pupils to make continuous progress between stages or even

between years. Resources for geography are unsatisfactory, as there are not enough maps and plans, and storage problems make it difficult for staff to access the resources that exist.

155. The subject has not yet been a focus for development in the school's rolling programme, and the co-ordinator has been heavily involved in supporting the improvements in teaching and learning. There is a good awareness of what needs to be done to improve teaching and learning of the subject. Nonetheless, improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory.

HISTORY

156. The standards of achievement are unsatisfactory because there is a narrow focus on chronology. Although teaching addresses some elements of knowledge and understanding of life in the past, it does not develop this in a systematic way.

157. By the time they are at the end of their school career, pupils have learned and consolidated a good level of chronological understanding, as they have been taught the sequence of their daily routines and helped to recall it before they leave for home. Pupils are given opportunities to visit castles and other historical sites as part of the history curriculum, and there is evidence that pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 have some knowledge of key words to describe a castle and can label a drawing correctly. Pupils have experienced dressing up as Romans and taking part in an authentic banquet, but no planning was seen for this. A storyteller in Roman costume has visited the school.

158. The teaching and learning of personal chronological understanding is consistently good. Lessons are well planned, and routines become well known. Pupils gradually come to understand words associated with the past, such as *before*. In the one history lesson seen, in Year 8, pupils successfully made a timeline of different types of motorcar which were in production between 1900 and 2000. Planning for this lesson was detailed and effective, with good use of pictures to tell the story, with the passing of time indicated by the turning of the pages. Pupils maintained their concentration during this lesson and showed interest in their work. When they were asked to come to the front of the class to place their pictures on the timeline, they concentrated hard to put theirs in the right place.

159. The subject has not yet been a focus for development in the school's rolling programme. The schemes of work require major revision, so that they strike a better balance. Teachers plan lessons on their own initiative, but the level of co-ordination is insufficient to maintain continuity. Resources for the subject are unsatisfactory. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

160. There were no discrete ICT lessons timetabled during the inspection, but conversations with pupils and teachers, analysis of pupils' work and teachers' planning and records show that achievement and progress over time by the substantial majority of pupils are at least satisfactory. Pupils word process their work to communicate information clearly, and this leads to an improvement in literacy skills. Older pupils use CD-ROMs as sources of information.

161. By Year 2, pupils are already enjoying their time at the computer. Higher attaining pupils have favourite programmes and are developing mouse skills. They connect the buttons and mouse with changes on the screen. Lower attaining pupils enjoy the cause and effect programmes and observing the *Roamer*.

162. By Year 6, higher attaining pupils can write their name and address, daily schedule and other simple word processing activities, finding the way around the screen by using the mouse and keyboard. They also access simple story-telling CD-ROMs. Lower attaining pupils use the remote control for video and television with assistance. They show some interest in the computer, but need hand-on-hand support to control the mouse.

163. By Year 9, higher attaining pupils use the computer to write lengthy letters and stories, to which they add pictures they have drawn (using a draw programme) or cut and pasted from the 'clip-art' facility. They are confident in the use of the keyboard, and open, close and save files. They use a variety of interactive CD-ROMs, both individually and in pairs. Lower attaining pupils play games, and use interactive programmes with one-to-one support.

164. By Year 11, most pupils are using the computer to improve the presentation of their work. For example, typing in the ingredients and method for making a cheesecake. Although help is needed to spell some words, they know their way about the keyboard, recognising all the letters and numbers and operating the shift key appropriately.

165. ICT is used to support other subjects. For example, it is used in English for reading and spelling, and in other subjects to improve presentation. Pupils were often observed in their free time in the library with a favourite CD-ROM programme.

166. The teaching of ICT occurs with individuals or groups of two or three pupils in short sessions within other lessons, generally on a need-to-know basis. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning at these times is satisfactory. Teachers are confident when teaching ICT, and are generally secure in their knowledge and understanding of the subject. Pupils enjoy using computers. They respond well to their teachers and work co-operatively. They are able to concentrate for surprisingly long periods of time. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour, and pupils' behaviour is usually very good; they can be trusted to use the computers responsibly. Teachers encourage pupils to be as independent as possible, to think for themselves, and to solve problems, but when explanation or instruction is necessary it is given very clearly, so that pupils are unlikely to misunderstand what they are doing, or what they are required to do. Most pupils are working at their own level, but teachers know and plan precisely for each pupil from a range of very appropriate activities and programmes. Teachers make sound assessments of the work completed. Unfortunately, not all pupils' work is printed, so that they are not always able to evaluate their own work. Lessons are well organised so that pupils have access to machines and know that their turn will come to use them. Support staff, who also know the practicalities of the technology well, provide very effective support, and understand and manage the needs of the pupils very well.

167. Development of the subject since the previous inspection has been satisfactory, and further improvements are planned when the school moves to its new site. The leadership of the subject is satisfactory, and the newly appointed co-ordinator works to ensure that staff feel confident and well supported in their planning and use of the technology available. There is a clear policy statement and a skills-based scheme of work. Computers are sited in each classroom, which is an effective policy, as the behaviour management skills of the staff enable some pupils to work at ICT skills without distracting the main body of the class from their activity. This ensures that ICT is firmly established as an integral part of the school's curriculum. There is a satisfactory quantity of hardware and range of software and other technology.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

168. All pupils are disapplied from studying a modern foreign language, through their statements of special educational need, or via the annual review process.

MUSIC

169. Pupils in all year groups make satisfactory progress in music. It was possible to observe only two music lessons during the inspection and both of these contained pupils of the same age group. However, from the close scrutiny of pupils' files, teachers' records and discussions with staff it is clear that achievement throughout the school is satisfactory. Pupils behave well in lessons and their attitudes to work are good.

170. By Year 2, pupils learn to recognise different moods in music and begin to understand that different sounds are made in different ways. Pupils begin to recognise patterns in music. By Year 6, pupils are able to add percussion to music and song. Often this is body percussion, as was observed in one lesson. In this lesson, pupils were able to use their arms to wave in time with the music; they could clap their hands together, slap their knees and stamp their feet to form pattern of sounds, all of which were in time with the music. One activity involved pupils having a free choice of instrument and these included a whistle to represent the squeak of a pig. The class listened very carefully to their teacher reading the story of *Mr Little's Noisy Truck*. As the story progressed the pupils added their own percussion representations for different events. This was very successful, and all pupils learned a great deal about producing sounds at the right time and of the right loudness.

171. By Year 9, pupils are able to join in and sing songs from memory and take part in group performances. They plan their presentations, rehearse them and then present a final performance. Pupils also have a deeper knowledge and understanding of percussion instruments. They select instruments to represent moods. For example, high-pitched bells represent happy moods whilst a low slow whistle can represent a sad mood. Pupils illustrate a walk in the woods with percussion to represent footsteps, falling leaves and running water. They appreciate the different moods that can be represented by the different tempo of the music.

172. The quality of teaching overall is judged to be satisfactory. It was possible to observe only two music lessons during the inspection. The overall judgement of satisfactory is based on the evidence gained from the scrutiny of files and teachers' comments, as well as pupil records.

173. There has been satisfactory improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection. There has also been a significant change to the role that music plays in the school. However, the teaching of music as a timetabled subject has a much lower profile within the school. The subject is co-ordinated by a well-qualified music specialist who has an exciting vision for the school but is not yet in a position to realise that vision. Music does not feature sufficiently on the school timetable and this is an area that needs to be addressed. The low profile is reflected in the unsatisfactory resources that are available to the teachers. There are some good quality, simple percussion instruments, but there are not enough for the whole school. There is no special room for the teaching of music and therefore no piano or electronic keyboard, which could be used to support pupils as they sing and/or dance. There is no storage space for larger musical instruments.

174. There is a suitable emphasis on the value of music as a vehicle for therapy. The music therapist, who is full-time, makes high quality provision within the school. Pupils benefit greatly from their sessions; they also learn some musical skills during these.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION (PE)

175. The school has made good improvement in the provision of physical education (PE) since the last inspection. Achievement is good for pupils of all ages, and for students over 16. A broad range of well-planned learning experiences is provided, and staff are skilled in managing pupils with autism. It was not possible to observe lessons for pupils in Years 3 to 6. However, from discussion with staff and close scrutiny of the records that are kept, it is clear that they make good progress in developing new skills.

176. By Year 2, pupils can kick a football to one another, and also use other techniques, such as rolling or bouncing, to pass the ball from one to another. They take part in many games designed to improve their skills of moving and handling objects. Pupils learn to throw using two hands; they throw beanbags into containers, and the most able pupils are able to catch beanbags with two hands. Pupils gain in their ability to follow instructions. They stop when the teacher blows a whistle and they are then able to find a space for themselves. Pupils hold hands as they dance and sing *Here we go round the mulberry bush*.

177. Pupils also visit a local riding school, where they all learn many skills. During one session, all pupils worked extremely hard. They walked the horse around the arena, ran whilst holding the horse's reins, and sat on whilst the horse walked. During this session the most able pupils showed how much confidence they had gained as they sat on the saddle with their arms outstretched as the horse walked and trotted around. Two pupils rode very confidently when the horse was commanded to canter around the arena. The most able pupil stood totally upright on top of the saddle, then knelt on the top of the saddle and performed a 'flair' which involved raising and extending one leg, whilst raising and extending the arm on the opposite side of the body. The pupils showed complete trust in the staff who were with them and were very highly motivated by their own success. The rest of the group watched in silence and admiration of each other's achievements. This excellent facility is greatly enjoyed by all pupils, and is of great benefit to them.

178. By Year 6, pupils use their own skills and imagination as they use their bodies to represent the different types of transport. In one lesson observed they moved quickly or slowly as they showed the difference between the movement of a car, a plane and a rocket. Pupils made choices during the lesson, and carried out some exercises co-operatively. The pupils listened carefully to the teacher and also watched for signing as a routine was developed for starting and stopping each activity. Another class of pupils demonstrated their skills in being able to shuffle on their bottoms, hop like *bunnies*, move on tiptoe and even walk on all fours like a bear.

179. By Year 9, pupils have also developed swimming skills, and during swimming lessons they gain many additional skills. They swim confidently, even if some of the styles are somewhat unorthodox. They spend a great deal of time and effort in improving their ability to swim and 'survive' in water. Pupils clearly enjoy their lessons, and they learn the importance of safe behaviour as they enter the pool taking account of all safety rules. They climb carefully down the steps into the water, and when necessary they use buoyancy aids. Pupils begin to use their arms in a backstroke technique, as most of them are confident with the arm movements for the front crawl or breaststroke. Even the least able swimmer moves effectively in the water, though this is in a sitting position. During these lessons, the pupils also learn many social skills. They work together as a group, meet the general public as they walk from the minibus to the swimming pool, and also take responsibility for their own swimming kit, with the help and support of the staff.

180. By Year 11, the pupils, along with the students in Years 12 and 13, are growing in physical skills and maturity. They enjoy dance sessions in which they learn some very complicated dance routines. In the dance lesson observed, the pupils and students performed six different country-dances, which included *Miss Zudio*, *Shoo Fly*, *Blaydon Races* and *Tennessee Mixer*. The students were extremely confident and competent as they chose their partners, and clapped their hands and stamped their feet in time with the music. The *Tennessee Mixer* proved to be quite complicated, and they were less confident, but as time passed they took the lead from the staff and the smiles returned to their faces as they became united once again in music and dance.

181. The quality of teaching and learning in PE is good overall. Five lessons were observed, of which two were excellent, one was very good and two were good. The planning for every lesson was good, and teachers showed that they had a very good understanding of the pupils' individual special needs. Lessons were planned to ensure that all pupils were able to take a full part and that they were all challenged by the work that they were expected to do. These high expectations of the teachers resulted in pupils being well motivated and achieving well, despite their difficulties. The teachers have excellent relationships with the pupils, and the pupils in turn show complete trust in the teachers. This is particularly true when pupils are performing physical activities that are very demanding of them. All pupils and students show very positive attitudes to their lessons and behave well. This is true when they are enjoying activities in school and also when they take part in off-site activities.

182. Leadership of the subject is good. The subject has been a focus for development recently, and is well managed and carefully co-ordinated by a specialist teacher. The school is also very fortunate in having the services of a teacher who is keen on country dancing and another member of support staff who is skilled in dance. The subject enjoys a high profile within the school and the pupils benefit greatly from that. The curriculum is well planned and documented, though the documents are due for review in the near future. The school's resources are satisfactory, as there is just sufficient small equipment to meet the needs of the pupils, and the school makes very good use of the resources within the community. Pupils use the local swimming pool, and some use a pool in a local mainstream school. Other pupils and students use the facilities at the local sports centre, where they can use trampolines. The school's existing accommodation is unsatisfactory as it is cramped, with low ceilings in both halls. In one of the buildings, there are two brick pillars that are encroaching upon the available space in the hall. Approved plans show that the new building will have a suitable hall for PE.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (RE)

183. During the inspection the organisation of the timetable meant that it was not possible to observe any religious education lessons. This means that there is not enough evidence to make secure judgements about the quality of teaching and learning. However, discussions with staff, and a scrutiny of pupils' and students' work demonstrate that the curriculum for this subject is unsatisfactory. This means that there has been unsatisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

184. The school uses the syllabus provided by the Schools' Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) as a basis for religious education, but has not made the full curriculum relevant to pupils and students at Portfield. This subject is heavily dependent upon the school's strengths in personal, social and emotional development. Consequently, there is clear evidence of pupils and students achieving well in their understanding of the human experience.

185. Children in the nursery and reception class learn to share. Younger pupils learn to give, for example when they make cards for others. By Year 6, pupils have an increased awareness of others. Members of staff work hard and successfully to help higher attaining pupils understand values such as trustworthiness. Teachers plan suitably to develop empathy by introducing pupils in Years 7 to 9 to characters from the past. They visit a mediaeval castle to understand that people live lives that differ from their own. Records demonstrate that higher attaining pupils achieve some success with this. By Year 11 all pupils have achieved very well in recognising the impact of their actions on others.

186. However, there is too little opportunity for pupils and students to learn about the world faiths. While the school celebrates special events such as pupils' and students' birthdays, Christmas and Divali, there is no systematic planning to ensure that pupils and students build on their knowledge and understanding.

187. The school has sufficient resources to address this. The leadership of the subject has lacked continuity but the new co-ordinator has reasonable plans to address the shortcomings in the subject. When pupils and students take part in the nativity play, the experience makes a significant contribution to the development of their imaginations. At present, the subject does not achieve its potential for developing pupils' and students' awareness of the many different cultures in Britain.