

INSPECTION REPORT

NORMAN GATE SCHOOL

Vigo Road, Andover

LEA area: Hampshire

Unique reference number: 116604

Headteacher: Mrs J Sansome

Reporting inspector: Mary Last
17171

Dates of inspection: 8th – 9th October 2001

Inspection number: 194737

Short 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, moderate learning difficulties with provision for Autism and Early Years
School category:	Local education authority
Age range of pupils:	3 to 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Vigo Road Andover Hampshire
Postcode:	SP10 1JZ
Telephone number:	01264 323423
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr D Eagles
Date of previous inspection:	May 1997

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Norman Gate School is a community special school catering for up to 58 boys and girls aged three to eleven with moderate learning difficulties and/or autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). There are currently 12 girls and 35 boys on roll with ten diagnosed with ASD. The Acorns Early Years Centre provides assessment and early education for children aged between three and five with a range of learning difficulties. Twenty-seven children currently attend from three to five half-day sessions a week. Pupils are drawn from Andover and the surrounding area. All pupils have a statement of special educational need with moderate learning difficulties identified as their major learning need, and they are therefore working below standards expected in mainstream schools. No pupils have English as an additional language and 12 pupils have free school meals. As a result of the very high standards achieved in its last inspection the school was recognised as a Beacon school and has developed a support service for staff working with ASD pupils. Norman Gate now enjoys a very good reputation for its expertise in ASD work and has recently received a further three years' Beacon funding.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Norman Gate School is a very good school that provides very high quality teaching in a well organised and stimulating learning environment. All staff are genuinely interested in the support and well being of the pupils. They provide varied lessons with stimulating activities which help pupils to improve their communication and their work towards meeting their individual learning targets. The governing body and the school are totally committed to raising standards in all aspects of work in a school which is highly self-critical. The school operates as a harmonious community where all staff and pupils enjoy very positive relationships. The school has rigorous procedures for managing its finances and provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The school has maintained very good quality of teaching which helps all pupils to make very good gains in learning.
- As a result of its Beacon award the school provides highly effective support and guidance to other schools and promotes the successful inclusion of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) into mainstream education
- The staff provide a very good introduction to education for children under five within the Acorns Centre and at Norman Gate School
- The school provides good opportunities for pupils to use computers as an aid to learning
- Enjoys excellent respect from parents, involves them in all aspects of school life and provides outstandingly high support and guidance
- The school benefits from very good leadership and management through a shared commitment and determination of the governors, the headteacher, deputy headteacher and staff that they will continue to raise the quality of their work.

What could be improved

- The role of subject co-ordinators in observing lessons and monitoring the quality of teaching
- The consistency with which teachers write reports and records of pupils' progress.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very significant improvements since the last inspection in 1997 and improved the few issues found then. As a result of the high quality education reported at the last inspection the school was nominated as a Beacon school by the DfEE. This award enabled Norman Gate School to develop an outreach service to support and guide mainstream teachers in working with pupils with ASD. The success of this work has been further recognised by the renewal of Beacon funding for a further three years. Other significant developments have included increased and improved resources and training for work in information and communication technology so that pupils now use computers effectively as an aid to their learning. The school has continued to provide very high quality teaching with an emphasis on meeting the wide range of pupils' needs throughout the school.

STANDARDS

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

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

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

All pupils make at least good, and often very good, progress towards the targets in their individual educational plans in relation to their learning difficulties. Children under five quickly learn how to enjoy being part of a group and socialise with other children in preparation for more formal education at the age of five. By the end of Year 2, pupils make good progress in the early stages of literacy and numeracy and in using computers to help in their work. By the time they leave Norman Gate at Year 6 pupils have made good progress and grown in maturity. Higher attaining pupils are able to read well and to work

independently whilst lower attaining pupils make good progress in literacy and numeracy with skilled help from support assistants.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good: pupils are happy at school, speak politely to staff and visitors and are positive about their own achievements.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good: in almost all lessons behaviour is very good as pupils try hard to follow instructions and work co-operatively and quietly.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent: pupils grow in maturity and self-confidence and by the age of eleven relate extremely well to other pupils and staff.
Attendance	Excellent: with attendance figures well above those of similar schools and almost no unauthorised absence.

Pupils at Norman Gate School are very well behaved, enjoy coming to school and work hard. In nine lessons out of 12, their behaviour is very good and in one lesson the eleven-year-old pupils' behaviour and concentration were exemplary as they worked independently to plan, complete and check their work. Attendance figures are well above the average for similar schools and parents report that their children never wish to be away from school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 – 6	Years 7 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very good	N/a	N/a

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 throughout the school is very good. Teachers make every effort to ensure that all pupils are able to take part in activities and place a very good emphasis on ensuring that pupils' preferences for learning are known so that they are specifically supported by tasks which interest and motivate them. There is no significant difference in the quality of teaching across the school or between subjects. The teaching of children under five is very good because the staff plan well-balanced days which provide very good opportunities for a mixture of guided and free activities. In English teachers place a significant and important focus on communication as well as other aspects such as reading and writing, increasingly encouraging pupils to express their thoughts in writing, as they grow older. As a result, by the time they leave Norman Gate School at Year 6, the pupils are confident to talk to visitors and answer questions. In mathematics, teachers plan a good range of activities using resources well so pupils learn the skills of shape recognition, use of money and calculations. Teachers ensure that all pupils develop their skills in using information and communication technology by providing equipment such as touch screens for the youngest children, to indicate their choice of answer, and access to the internet for the eldest. The staff are very skilled in supporting pupils with ASD and, where necessary, provide

additional resources or individually planned ways of working based on sound ASD methodologies.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good: the school offers all subjects of National Curriculum and religious education and many opportunities for pupils to enhance their personal and social development. Extra-curricular activities are also very good and include residential visits.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good: the school makes good provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development through assemblies and visits to places of interest. Arrangements for pupils' moral education are very good the pupils understand the difference between right and wrong and work together harmoniously.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good: arrangements for ensuring pupils' health and safety and for promoting and supporting their education and personal progress are very good. Assessment procedures are also good but there are some weaknesses in recording.

Pupils learn through a broad, balanced and varied range of activities each week. These reflect the requirements of the National Curriculum and also place an important emphasis on addressing targets in the pupils' individual education plans. Teachers plan a clear focus on the pupils' personal development, and provide very good opportunities for them to develop in maturity, self-esteem and confidence through the tasks which challenge, yet support, their learning. The school communicates regularly with parents both formally and informally. Parents feel that they are fully consulted in decisions about their children's learning and play an active role in the life of the school.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good: the headteacher and chair of governors work efficiently and effectively together to ensure that the school operates as a harmonious community. The headteacher is a popular, energetic and skilled leader.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Excellent: the governing body works in harmony with the school continually seeking to raise standards. There is an excellent range of expertise amongst governors which they generously commit to supporting the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good: the school is developing very good procedures for identifying its strengths and weaknesses but has yet to complete this work in all areas.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent: the school has outstanding procedures for ensuring all money is spent wisely and for the benefit of the pupils. It provides very good value for money.

Since the last inspection the governing body, headteacher and staff have maintained the very good quality work found then and continue to work in close co-operation, sharing a firm commitment to raising standards in all aspects of the school's work. The headteacher

provides very good leadership which is admired and praised by parents and teachers alike. The school has very good procedures for gathering information on pupils' achievements and keeps full and detailed records of its work including feedback from parental surveys and testimonials to the value of its outreach project.

However, some methods for identifying the school's strengths and weaknesses are not sufficiently well delegated to the subject co-ordinators who have, therefore, limited opportunities to observe teaching of their subjects and to analyse the quality of writing provided by teachers in reports and in pupils' files. Despite these weaknesses, the school is very efficiently run, benefits from specialist financial acumen amongst the governors and has strong procedures for ensuring it spends its money wisely. The school provides very good value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendliness, support and help from staff • The pleasure their children gain from school • The progress their children make • The opportunities for them to take part in social events in Norman Gate and Acorns • The well organised annual reviews and other meetings • The way in which staff give freely of their time to support parents • The advice they receive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No issues raised

The parents are unanimous in their praise and respect for all the staff and particularly the headteacher. They all reported very good progress in learning and in social skills and personal development. The only complaint was that their children could not stay at Norman Gate School longer!

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The school has maintained its high quality of teaching which helps all pupils to make very good gains in learning.

1. The quality of teaching and learning is a strength of the school. All teachers are highly committed to providing very good opportunities for pupils to enjoy lessons and very good progress towards the targets in their individual education plans. Teachers also plan to meet pupils' social and communication needs through involving them in individual, paired, group and whole-class activities. This range provides very good opportunities for pupils to become more confident when speaking and listening to each other and to adults. Additionally, work on speech and language therapy, planned between the teachers and the speech and language therapist, ensures that all the pupils, but particularly those with ASD or communication problems, develop specific skills of language, articulation and conversation. The teachers ensure that every pupil in the school is included in all activities and that all life styles, beliefs and social backgrounds are reflected in materials and activities. As a result pupils can make connections between the content of lessons and their own lives and there is no significant difference in the very good progress they all make.

2. Teaching is very good or outstanding in eight out of the twelve lessons observed, good in three and satisfactory in one. The highest quality teaching is characterised by excellent relationships between teachers and pupils within an environment where the pupils are treated as maturing young people. For example, in a geography lesson with Year 6 pupils, the teacher started the lesson by talking to the class about a pupil who had become upset at lunchtime. Avoiding any detailed discussion, the teacher very skilfully concentrated the pupils' thoughts on how the boy would feel when he came back to the lesson. The pupils showed themselves to be sensitive and able to understand the feelings of others: a very good achievement, particularly for those with ASD. Consequently, when the pupil returned, he quietly joined a group of three who showed him what he had missed and what he should do.

3. All teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach and the individual pupils' needs and interests. They focus upon development of pupils' literacy and numeracy as part of the National Literacy (NLS) and National Numeracy Strategies (NNS) and also as an important element of all other lessons. For example, in a mathematics lesson the language of measurement was reinforced both by the teacher and through clearly designed wall displays to which pupils could refer. The teacher also took the pupils' learning styles into account by emphasising two different methods of subtracting so that pupils could choose the one they preferred and found easier to use.

4. Teaching is very good overall in all subjects. In English, teachers are fully trained and have a very good understanding of teaching all aspects of literacy; they pay very careful attention to the NLS and pupils increase their interest in books and text as a result. All pupils have reading books and are happy to read aloud to visitors. In mathematics, teachers similarly adopt the national numeracy strategies, placing a careful emphasis on the key vocabulary of lessons, such as the language of shape. They question pupils skilfully to ensure that each is challenged individually and use the target language themselves. It is not possible to make a judgement on the teaching of science as only one lesson took place during the inspection. However, evidence from this lesson and from the

pupils' work shows good coverage of the curriculum and good opportunities for theoretical and practical work.

5. In response to the last inspection the school has made a very substantial investment in equipment and training for information and communication technology (ICT). The work generated by the pupils in ICT is very good. Staff are now competent in guiding and supporting the pupils, and their work displayed around the school illustrates the good and developing achievement in word processing, including the use of simple databases and graphics.

6. A major factor in pupils' successful learning is the very good help and guidance provided by the support staff. Teachers plan carefully to make best use of these staff and deploy them efficiently so that all materials are ready for use and the pupils move swiftly and smoothly between activities. The support staff are very enthusiastic about their work, are well trained, with a good working knowledge of how to support pupils' learning. They enjoy excellent relationships with pupils and other staff and are developing their use of computer software, such as a symbol writing program, to help pupils understand written text.

7. All staff are highly skilled and adaptable in ensuring their lessons are interesting and that pupils learn in a way in which they prefer and, therefore, behave and work well. Pupils with autism are supported very well. For example, the school has adapted some specialist techniques for teaching autistic pupils to maximise the pupils' concentration. Where pupils are happy to work in the classroom, they do so, and others work in a quieter, room with individual 'work stations' to ensure that they are not distracted. The staff's response to the pupil preferences are very well illustrated by the arrangements made for one pupil who has difficulty tolerating the chatter in the class but wishes to be nearby. To sustain his interest and wish to be close to the classroom, he works independently at a table adjacent to his classroom. Here, he is able to work through the individual tasks designed especially for him, placing each in his 'finished' tray when complete. His daily schedule is also displayed to help him follow the sequence of events during the day.

8. Teachers also provide very good opportunities for pupils to understand how to behave and to acknowledge the school rules. Teachers ensure that pupils understand what is expected of them and have very high expectations of behaviour and concentration. In all lessons pupils' behaviour, responses and attitudes to learning are very good. In one lesson, the pupils were involved and interested in their group activities and were able to understand the progress they had made in developing their concentration skills when they had worked for up to 15 minutes without the need for adult support.

9. Teachers provide very good role models themselves when talking to each other and moving around the school, and are skilled in managing the pupils' behaviour. When pupils occasionally drift off task or lose their concentration, teachers immediately remind them of what is expected. Occasional noisy behaviour is dealt with swiftly and pupils and staff all work without allowing minor distractions to interfere with their concentration. Teachers and pupils make very good use of time and, as a result of such very high expectations, they work and concentrate to the end of each lesson.

10. The staff at Norman Gate School are very proud of the renewal of Beacon funding in recognition of their work. The skilled support provided to pupils with ASD within the school is now benefiting mainstream pupils. Pupils with ASD at Norman Gate also benefit from the increased awareness, focus on, and expertise in, teaching strategies and work very well together.

As a result of its Beacon award the school provides highly effective support and guidance to other schools and promotes the successful inclusion of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) into mainstream education.

11. The award of the Beacon status in 1997 has enabled the school to develop a very effective programme of support for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder in mainstream schools known as the 'outreach service' which has established Norman Gate as an example of good practice in ASD work. The good quality of this provision has been quickly recognised as very effective in ensuring that staff in mainstream schools develop their knowledge of autism and their skills in including such pupils in the full range of lessons in their own schools. Many people have provided testimony to the high quality of this outreach project – these include headteachers, local authority inspectors and advisors, SENCOs, parents and advisory teachers. Norman Gate continues to provide advice and guidance to staff in a range of placements from playgroups, units and schools.

12. A major strength of this initiative is the exemplary quality of the written reports reviewing the effectiveness of the pupils' placements. These reports are consistently written to the highest possible standards. The co-ordinator devotes a considerable amount of time ensuring that they are written in a style and content, which enables everyone to benefit. Each report includes an excellent professional analysis of the pupil's needs, interests and abilities which refer to previous achievements so that progress is clearly identified. Comments from the pupils themselves are included so that they may be taken into account in future planning. For example one pupil is quoted as saying 'I just don't do it when it's too noisy. I don't like it because of the noise.' This difficulty is then included in future planning for classroom support so that later in the report the teacher wrote that the pupil 'was able to work on a group table when focussed on his numeracy task', thus gradually preparing him for working with larger groups of pupils.

13. All staff and external advisors such as educational psychologists use this detailed information to draw up strategies based on the pupils' individual learning styles. Recommendations might include giving tangible rewards, practical activities and visual stimulation. However, the major strength is in the section which draws all the information together with a useful list of resources that match the pupils' requirements together with detailed guidance to staff and parents on how to use them to best support the pupil.

14. The undoubted success of, and continued need for, such support to mainstream schools has now been recognised by the renewal of Beacon status and funding for a further three years. The outreach co-ordinator is highly skilled and experienced in teaching and managing pupils with autism. She provides very effective and welcome help to Norman Gate and mainstream staff to increase their own awareness of ASD in supporting such pupils so that they take a full part in class activities and, therefore, make good gains in learning. The outreach co-ordinator has established very good relationships with many schools in the authority and, as a result of the respect that such schools have for the skills and knowledge of Norman Gate staff, they engender positive attitudes to ASD and to inclusion.

The staff provide a very good introduction to education for children under five within the Acorns Centre and at Norman Gate School.

15. Norman Gate School and the Acorns Unit provide a highly supportive, yet challenging, education for children aged three to five years in the Foundation Stage. The children work in a language-rich environment where socialisation and communication are a main focus. Teachers are highly skilled in planning and delivering activities which promote

the children's understanding of taking turns, working with others and listening to instructions. The quality of teaching is consistently very good and increasingly linked to the latest requirements for the education of children under five in the Foundation Stage. In all lessons the high quality of teaching is characterised by highly organised activities and skilled classroom management which ensure that children move smoothly through a contrasting set of experiences. For example, at the start of the day, staff have the classrooms prepared with a stimulating selection of games and equipment. As children enter they immediately become interested in playing and forget the fact that their parent or carer is about to leave. This highly organised system provides the very youngest children with opportunities to play and explore independently whilst the teacher catches up on difficulties, issues or celebrations at home. The parents value these opportunities to speak with staff and are positive about the progress their children are making.

16. As the day starts, teachers introduce more formal activities and each adult takes responsibility for a small group. The range of children's ability in communication and language is immediately apparent, for example, a higher attaining child says 'I want to play with the mouse', whilst a lower attaining child states 'I find it.' All adults have a keen awareness of, and an ability to, address this range and challenge children accordingly with well-conceived questions. For example, a lower attaining children is given a choice of two answers with the question 'Is it a giraffe or a tiger?' The higher attaining child is asked a more open question, such as 'How do you think . . . ?'

17. The support staff are alert to children's difficulties and immediately help when necessary, for example providing a cue for the first sound in a word such as 'monkey'. When children drift from task and begin to wander around the room an adult quickly offers gentle encouragement to return to work by re-directing the child to a new activity or different piece of equipment. This highly skilled, yet seemingly seamless classroom management results in children moving between activities with no wasted time. Nevertheless, staff are extremely sensitive to those children who require moments of reflection before they are able to choose a task and adjust their own response time accordingly.

18. All the children behave well as a result of good prompting from the staff. For example, when it is time to start a new activity, the teacher quietly sings a reminder and the children start putting their equipment away as she begins a countdown. The staff make very good use of resources including ICT and, in a language and literacy lesson, the teacher programmed the soundbeam equipment to reflect the events of the story in the 'big book'. This highly effective strategy enhanced the dramatic effect of the story and the teacher made excellent use of the technology to ensure the children listened to, copied and reproduced the relevant sounds, for example an aeroplane keeping someone awake or the only sound in a quiet house being a clock ticking. These activities fully stimulate the children and they buzz with excitement as they interact with the soundbeam equipment which responds with appropriate sounds to the duration and speed of their own movements. Staff also made very good use of ICT by using a touch screen so that the children could point to the correct illustration and obtain an immediate repeat of the sounds, for example familiar items such as a telephone ringing, or a dog barking.

19. The content of lessons is very good and provides many opportunities for children to develop their creative and physical skills through singing, dancing, painting and play. Quiet moments and role-play opportunities with staff provide further very good opportunities for children to develop their personal skills such as dressing, taking turns to choose food and understanding they must listen to children and adults. Children also benefit from very good support with their communication and language development from a speech and language therapist who also advises staff on the children's termly targets.

20. As a result of this very good quality work, children settle down very quickly and make good progress in social skills and in preparation for attending full time school, either at Norman Gate, or elsewhere, by the age of five.

The school provides good opportunities for pupils to use computers as an aid to learning

21. Since the last inspection the school has invested heavily in equipment and training to raise standards in information and communication technology (ICT). All classrooms now have at least one computer that is used regularly to help pupils learn and become familiar with the keyboard and other devices, for example, the mouse. The school has a good range of programs to support pupils' work in the literacy hour and for pupils to use the Internet to search for information on projects and topics.

22. The use of ICT is planned well and used effectively, starting with the Foundation Stage where children under five understand that they can elicit a response by touching the interactive screen. The oldest pupils learn to word process their text and develop good skills in moving between screens to select the information they are seeking.

23. Because the subject co-ordinators and teachers include the use of computers and other technology in their lesson plans ICT work is a feature of many lessons. Teachers make very good use of word processing so pupils present their work neatly and label displays around the school. There are several good examples of computer-generated graphics on display and pupils' workbooks include examples of the use of computers for presenting data in different formats from an early age.

24. The school is currently developing the use of a symbol writing programme to help pupils with their literacy skills. Although quite new, pupils' work is already beginning to illustrate how effective the well-chosen and selective use of symbols as an aid to understanding or recall. All pupils enjoy working at the computer and behave well at all times. Although the pupils often share a keyboard, they do so with good humour and co-operation, take turns and help each other when necessary.

25. The current work in ICT represents a very good and logical development since the last inspection when the provision was judged to need more time for teaching and learning and more staff training. The school is continuing to train staff and is still involved in assessing pupils' needs. Staff are quickly developing better strategies for recording pupils' progress and setting small, yet challenging, achievable tasks for all pupils in order to clarify their level of competence in using computers. ICT makes a good contribution to pupils' social and cultural education as the youngest pupils learn to work well with a partner or in a group whilst older, more experienced pupils use the computers to explore information about other countries and cultures.

26. The governing body, headteacher and staff are committed to continuing improvement in the provision and focus on ICT so that equipment remains appropriate and that a good range of programs are available to maximise pupils' learning.

Enjoys excellent respect from parents, involves them in all aspects of school life and provides outstandingly high support and guidance.

27. Parents are extremely supportive of the work of the school. They are enthusiastic in their praise of the headteacher, who, they report, is always willing to help and knows all the

families very well, including details of the pupils' brothers and sisters and the progress they are making in their own schools.

28. In the parents' questionnaire and at the pre-inspection meeting, all those present were effusive about the commitment of staff and the support they give. They welcome the ease with which they can communicate with the school at any given time. Several have benefited from shared strategies for managing behaviour at home. One parent described the outstanding support she had received from a teacher who was helping her implement a behaviour management plan at home. On mornings when her child proved a little difficult to handle the teacher arrived at the parents house at 7.30 am to take the older children to school so that the parent was able to implement the behaviour management plan effectively. Parents are most enthusiastic about these ways in which the school caters for the whole child and the complete commitment of teachers, several commenting on the long hours teachers were in school and how frequently adults, including many support staff, provide crèche facilities for social events.

29. Parents are heavily involved in the life of the school: one described them as giving 'fervent' support to social events such as barbecues and discos. Parents who attended the meeting, feel that the richness of lessons and activities, which includes many trips and visits and the celebration of festivals and special days, helps pupils develop their personal skills and development. Parents are particularly pleased when pupils also take on small tasks around the school as they grow in confidence and reliability which then helps them to feel valued and trusted.

30. Parents also value the quality of the information they receive from the school especially the documents concerning their children's annual reviews. The school makes every effort to ensure that parents feel included in the annual review process by encouraging them to contribute to their children's educational targets. Parents are also complimentary about the way their children's reports are written, saying that the language is easily understood. Where medical terms have been used in the past the school has translated them. However, elsewhere in this report inspectors are critical of some aspects of reporting documents and feel parents could be even better informed by clearer and more specific details of what the pupils have learnt.

31. Many parents provided examples of the very good progress their children had made in relation to their previous unsatisfactory experiences. One parent reported that, after just three weeks in the school, his son could read his whole name and a few other simple words, after three years trying elsewhere with little success. The school's Beacon status is recognised by the parents as proving how good the school is in supporting pupils with ASD. They are delighted that Norman Gate is better known as a result of gaining the recognition they feel it deserves in the local community.

32. The enthusiasm and feelings of the parents was summed up by one who wrote 'I have never had a day when my son has been unhappy about attending school. He is about as keen as you can get.'

The school benefits from very good leadership and management through a shared commitment and determination of the governors, the headteacher and staff that they will continue to raise the quality of their work.

33. The award and subsequent renewal of Beacon status undoubtedly illustrates the fact that the headteacher and governors have continued to work together as a true partnership in raising standards throughout the school. The headteacher provides highly skilled and energetic daily leadership, is a highly visible presence in the school and is

always on hand at the beginning and end of the day to greet parents and carers. The school operates very efficiently and daily routines are known and understood by adults and pupils. All lessons and activities start promptly and everyone works hard throughout the day, with adults providing very good role models by treating pupils with respect and politeness. The office staff are extremely helpful, they greet visitors in a very friendly manner and give high quality administration and support to the school. These staff maintain up-to-date records and accounts and ensure all documents are stored safely and confidentially.

34. The management of the school is very good overall. The headteacher is popular and has excellent communication skills which help to ensure that all staff feel able to voice their opinions. The roles of other staff are still evolving and the improved focus on identifying strengths and weaknesses has resulted in co-ordinators monitoring the plans for teaching their subjects closely and regularly. The role does not yet require subject co-ordinators to observe teaching in their subjects. Such observations are mainly, but not exclusively, the task of the headteacher. The school recognises that a fully effective co-ordinating role will include visits to lessons to observe teaching and give feedback on the quality of teaching and learning. Such a delegation of responsibility could relieve the headteacher of some duties and also instigate wider opportunities for discussion amongst staff about strategies, learning styles and the definition of good teaching. The subject co-ordinators would then be responsible for reporting all aspects of work and the strengths and weaknesses of their subject. However, the school's system for identifying its strengths and weaknesses is good overall.

35. Since the last inspection the school identifies more precisely how pupils are achieving in terms of gender ability, ethnicity and social background. Although the school is small the large amount of information generated through testing and assessment shows that all pupils' learning is improving well and that there is no difference between any particular groups of pupils. Despite these strengths, the school has not recognised the inconsistency in the quality of information provided by teachers for inclusion in reports and pupils' files.

36. The governing body includes members of long experience and much useful expertise – it includes an ex-teacher, an advisory teacher and finance officer, several parents and representatives from the school staff. Governors visit the school often and provide much support and encouragement to staff. Although teachers report on their subjects at governing body meetings, governors are aware that the next step in increasing their knowledge of the school is through observing lessons. They recognise the value of further discussions based on their own direct evidence on the quality of teaching and learning. Governors have, however, been very effective in monitoring performance management procedures in the school. The chair of governors is a frequent, and well-liked visitor whose commitment is illustrated by the number of visits he makes, often changing other appointments to do so, and the warmth with which he is greeted by pupils, parents and staff alike.

37. Governors keep themselves very well informed about the work of the school. They have very secure strategies for setting the budget and ensure that their outstanding financial arrangements make the best use of its money for the benefit of the pupils. Norman Gate School provides high quality teaching in a Beacon school where the atmosphere is one of shared respect and commitment to high standards of teaching and learning, and therefore provides very good value for money.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The role of subject co-ordinators in observing lessons and monitoring the quality of teaching.

38. The school has increased and improved its procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. The headteacher however completes most of the actual lesson observations and this strategy has enabled her to familiarise herself with the work of all teachers especially during the initial stages of her appointment.

39. Since then the role of the subject co-ordinator has been developed so that co-ordinators regularly scrutinise schemes of work and teaching plans for their subjects. As a result each co-ordinator is able to judge how effectively the teaching and learning activities are planned to meet the pupils' needs and challenge them on an individual basis. Through examining a series of lesson plans, co-ordinators can also judge the coverage of the National Curriculum over the time pupils attend the school from Year 1 to Year 6. However, the school has not yet developed the co-ordinator role fully by adding classroom observations to these responsibilities. Subsequently very few teachers are observed by anyone other than the headteacher or external inspectors/advisors and they have few opportunities to observe their colleagues' teaching. Whilst the co-ordinators know in theory how the subject is planned and recorded they are not able to gather direct evidence on how effectively the teachers' planning is translated into classroom practice or to develop their own skills in lesson observation and feedback.

40. Records of previous observations show that they are valued by staff and have encouraged debate which has been regarded as a useful and professionally worthwhile activity. The feedback leads to stimulating discussion between observer and observed. Observation visits to lessons by co-ordinators would require them to develop their skills in observation and feedback and consequently, open up within the school, a wider platform for debate on teaching and learning. The senior management team agrees that increased opportunities for staff to share good practice and become ever more self-critical would provide further opportunities for the school to improve the already very high quality of teaching and learning.

The consistency with which teachers write reports and records of pupils' progress.

41. The school has a well-established system for recording pupils' progress and achievements to parents. It is currently also developing samples of pupil's work to provide evidence of progress during their time at Norman Gate. The range of work included in these files is already providing a clear picture of activities undertaken, but there is a weakness in the consistency with which the staff record the detail of the support given and their thoughts and judgements about the pupils' achievements.

42. In the very best recording, staff write clear objective statements illustrating what the lesson was about, what the pupil was required to do and how well he or she succeeded. For example, one pupil's knowledge in religious education was clearly defined as -

'. . . is aware that people who believe in God are called Christians, knows that the special Christian book is called the Bible . . . Has listened to three miracle stories and can retell them.'

43. However, not all such reporting is as positive and where staff include negative comments about pupils' learning they are discouraging to those who read them and do not provide relevant information. For example:-

(pupil) '. . . did not achieve any progress towards these learning objectives . . . did not show any awareness.'

44. In a significant number of other reports the teachers' use of imprecise language is unsatisfactory because it is not easily understood by the reader and gives little useful information about how much the pupils have learnt and what they need to do next. For example in design and technology, a pupil's progress is described as '. . . consistently extending her knowledge of the working characteristics of materials.' As a contrast, a

clearer report includes details of a pupil comparing different materials and being 'able to recognise stone, metal and glass', thus giving clear examples of the pupil's knowledge and awareness of the materials.

45. The school's recording system is also inconsistent and unsatisfactory in some end-of-year procedures. Some documents headed 'Assessment Outcomes' are written in the future tense and appear to suggest that the staff are required to predict what the pupil will be able to do. For example, 'the pupil will learn to identify and describe changes and how a settlement fits in with it's (sic) region in a country.' This unsatisfactory situation appears to arise because the school currently writes reports before the last topic of the school year has been covered. As this objective was photocopied for all the class it fails to support the school's aims of providing an individual approach to meeting the pupils' needs – an otherwise strong feature of most of its work.

46. The system for compiling samples of the pupils' work over their time in school was only started in September 2000 and is already proving a good source of evidence of work they have completed. However, there is, again, an inconsistency in the way staff record the amount, level, and nature of support they have given to the pupils in helping them complete their work. Some merely state, for example, 'help to draw body shape from card', a description which does little to inform the reader what aspect of the task the pupil could do unaided and how he could be supported and guided to do a little more, on his own, next time. Few documents define these details sufficiently clearly.

47. All reports to parents are detailed and provide parents with a good idea of what their children have experienced. However, it is only in the best examples that parents are given an equally clear report of what the children have learnt, know and can do, since their last report.

48. The school is aware that the quality of reporting ranges from outstanding to unsatisfactory and that reports for pupils on the outreach programmes are exemplary in their detail of assessment, observation, recommendations and in presentation. Whilst this level of detail is not necessary for all aspects of recording the school has not yet ensured that this existing good practice is disseminated to all staff.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

49. In order to maintain the current high standards of work and to improve the school's procedures overall the governors and headteacher should:

a) **Improve the quality of information written by adults in the pupils' files and end term reports by:**

- promoting discussion amongst staff about the purpose of, and the audience for, the documents they write;
- deciding what needs to be written down and providing a framework for all staff to follow; including sharing existing good practice;
- identifying procedures for annotating pupils' work so that the amount and level of support is consistently included; and
- monitoring all reports until such time that the quality is consistently high.

(Para refs: 35, 38-45)

b) **Increase the number of people involved in classroom observations by:**

- including lesson observations as part of the subject co-ordinators' role and providing opportunities for planning and discussion;
- promoting discussion on the criteria for high quality teaching; and
- gathering subject reports on the quality of teaching and learning from each co-ordinator to identify whole-school improvement.

(Para refs: 34, 46-48)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	12
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	45

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	2	6	3	1	-	-	-
Percentage	17	50	25	8	-	-	-

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	57
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	12

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	0
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.19

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.04

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

At the end of the latest reporting year the school had five pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 (Year 2) and six at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6). Given this small number of pupils it is not appropriate to report their SATs results, particularly as the pupils' learning difficulties affect their ability to work at national levels. However, all the pupils make very good progress in meeting targets in their individual education plans and the highest attaining pupils achieved as follows:

			Key Stage 1		Key Stage 2	
			Level 1	Level 2	Level 1	Level 2
Key Stage 1	English	speaking and listening	20% (1)*	0	100% (6)	
		Reading	60% (3)	0		
		Writing	0	0		
	Mathematics		60% (3)	20% (1)	16% (1)	84% (5)
	Science (overall)		60% (3)	20% (1)	50% (3)	50% (3)

*Figures in brackets = actual numbers of children

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	2
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	55
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other	1	
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White		
Other minority ethnic groups	1	

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YN – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	6.5
Average class size	9.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: YN – Y6

Total number of education support staff	16
Total aggregate hours worked per week	376.5

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	519,036
Total expenditure	499,910
Expenditure per pupil	8,619
Balance brought forward from previous year	13903
Balance carried forward to next year	19,126

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	2

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	57
Number of questionnaires returned	35

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	80	17	3	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	74	20	3	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	60	34	6	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	23	20	0	31
The teaching is good.	89	11	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	77	14	6	0	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	89	6	3	0	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	74	20	0	0	6
The school works closely with parents.	77	20	0	0	3
The school is well led and managed.	89	9	3	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	69	17	3	0	11
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	40	17	3	0	40

Other issues raised by parents

The parents hold very positive views of the school and agree that it serves their children well. There is some confusion over homework because roughly one third of the responses came from parents of children in the Acorns Centre who do not receive homework or participate in extra curricular activities. The school provides a great deal of information in its prospectus and newsletters about homework and extra curricular activities but has agreed to ensure that the situation is made clear to parents of all young children and pupils. The school also plans to improve the quality of its work on report writing. At the parents' meeting and in these questionnaires there were no criticisms of the school whatsoever.