

INSPECTION REPORT

**OAKLEIGH SCHOOL AND EARLY YEARS
CENTRE**

Whetstone, London

LEA area: Barnet

Unique reference number: 101396

Headteacher: Jenny Gridley

Reporting inspector: George Derby

25349

Dates of inspection: 15 – 16 January 2002

Inspection number: 194870

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 category:	Community special
Age range of pupils:	2 to 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Oakleigh Road North Whetstone London
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Councillor John Tiplady
Date of previous inspection:	June 1997

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Oakleigh School is a community day school for pupils who have severe or profound learning difficulties. There are 74 full and part time pupils on roll between the ages of two and eleven years. Nineteen children attend the Early Years Centre's *Acorn* assessment nursery, a provision which has recently been expanded. Children transfer from there to a variety of schools, including Oakleigh itself. The school is also specifically funded to provide for autistic pupils aged two to 11, 16 of whom are in the school's two *Spectrum* classes. Half of the pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) and the school is admitting an increasing number of pupils who have autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Nearly two thirds of the school's roll are boys, and approximately a quarter of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. A third of pupils have English as an additional language; many of these are at an early stage of language acquisition, mostly because of their learning difficulties. These pupils' main languages are Gujarati, Urdu, and Somali. Nearly all of the pupils come from Barnet, although a small number are from other boroughs. As a result of their severe learning difficulties, pupils' attainment on entry to the school is very low compared to that expected for other pupils of their age. Some pupils have challenging behaviour. The headteacher is also responsible for the management of the Barnet pre-school teaching service, which is based at the school. This provision was not inspected.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Oakleigh is a good and effective school. It has a number of very good features to its work, including the provision in the *Acorn* assessment nursery. There is a very strong ethos of care and concern for all pupils, and great value is placed on pupils' efforts and contributions. The school is very good at supporting families, and helping them, in turn, to support their children. The school is well led and managed and there is a very good shared commitment by all staff to improvement. The quality of teaching is good overall, as are pupils' achievements. These are very good in the Foundation Stage, where the curriculum very strongly supports pupils' learning. In relation to the standards achieved, the quality of education and the cost per pupil, the school gives good value for money. The school is very well placed to improve further.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- There is a very high quality of care for pupils, very good support for their personal development and there are very good relationships between staff and pupils. Staff have great sensitivity and respect for pupils and very good knowledge of their needs; consequently, pupils behave very well, have very positive attitudes to learning and a great keenness for school.
- The quality of teaching, pupils' learning and pupils' achievements are good overall and very good in the Foundation Stage.
- The leadership and management of the school is good and the headteacher and deputy headteacher complement each other well; there is a commitment to high standards and senior staff work well in partnership.
- The quality of provision in the *Acorn* nursery is very good.
- The school's work with parents is very good; parents show a strong commitment to the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- The consistency and detail of teachers' planning, particularly in relation to National Curriculum subjects.
- The provision for autistic pupils in the *Spectrum* classes, especially class organisation and the quality of the accommodation.
- Pupils' progress in information and communications technology (ICT) and the curriculum provided, so that pupils are able to develop skills in a systematic way and build on what they have learned previously.

*The *Foundation Stage* (Acorn assessment nursery and Rainbow class) covers all children from two to rising five years old. Key Stage 1 has pupils in Years 1 and 2. Key Stage 2 pupils are in Years 3 to 6.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good progress since its last inspection in June 1997. Pupils' progress and the quality of teaching have improved, and these are now good. The proportion of very good or better teaching has increased and there is virtually no unsatisfactory teaching. There have been improvements to the planned curriculum that place it more strongly within the framework of the National Curriculum. Teachers' subject expertise in reading, writing and mathematics has considerably improved through training and the school's successful implementation and interpretation of the literacy and numeracy strategies. All subjects now have schemes of work. However, there is inconsistency in the clarity and detail of teachers' written plans, which means that not all learning in subjects can be systematically built on. Time for learning mathematics has increased and the teaching of reading has improved, using traditional text, and symbols. The teaching of subjects, teachers' planning and pupils' work have all been regularly monitored by senior staff and subject co-ordinators. However, the school has made only limited progress in the use of ICT to support writing.

STANDARDS

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

Progress in:	by Year R	by Year 6	Key	
speaking, listening, signing and watching	A	A	<i>Very good</i>	A
Reading	A	B	<i>Good</i>	B
Writing	B	C	<i>Satisfactory</i>	C
Mathematics	B	B	<i>Unsatisfactory</i>	D
personal, social and health education (PSHE)	A	B	<i>Poor</i>	E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs	A	A		

Pupils' achievements are good overall. These are very good and strongest for pupils' communication skills throughout the school. In English, pupils' achievements are good, although more use could be made of ICT to enable pupils to write. The use of equipment to help pupils who are unable to speak, to express themselves has increased well. Provision for personal, social and health education is very strong. Pupils make very good progress overall, although more could be done, at times, to help some pupils become more independent in their learning. The school invests a considerable amount of time and support for communication and

personal development, and this permeates everything the school does. In mathematics, including numeracy, pupils make good progress; the school's response to the numeracy strategy has had a significant effect on raising the profile of mathematics throughout the school and on pupils' improved progress. In science, pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1. This slows to satisfactory in Key Stage 2 as pupils do not have enough time to study the subject. Not enough progress is made in ICT by pupils because the programme is insufficiently detailed and inconsistently planned and taught. Pupils' targets in their individual education plans are now more precisely set to identify the most important things they need to learn to help them improve. They make very good progress towards these. Pupils with ASD in the *Spectrum* classes make good progress towards their personal targets; their progress in subjects is satisfactory. The lack of breadth in the teaching of some subjects, the large group size, and the restrictions of the accommodation somewhat restrict their progress. Pupils with PMLD make very good progress towards their individual targets and good progress in subjects; very good attention is given to their needs. Pupils achieve very well in the Foundation Stage in all areas of learning, and towards their own personal targets. The school is beginning to collect and analyse data on pupils' achievements and has set challenging targets for raising whole school attainment further.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are very interested and well motivated to learn.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils behave well around the school and understand clearly how they should behave. They are courteous to staff and visitors.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils' relationships with staff and each other are very good. Pupils are very responsive when given opportunities to make choices and decisions.
Attendance	Satisfactory. There is no unauthorised absence but some families take extended holidays abroad; this disrupts the continuity of their child's education.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 - 6
Lessons seen overall	very 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.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. It is very good in the Foundation Stage and has some excellent features in the *Acorn* assessment nursery; the knowledge that these teachers have of their children and of the curriculum is very good. The teaching is good in Key Stages 1 and 2. Nearly all of the teaching observed was satisfactory or better; seven tenths was good or better. A quarter of the teaching was very good or excellent. In one lesson the teaching was unsatisfactory. This was mainly due to a lack of pace, with pupils spending too long on an activity and losing interest. In the best lessons teaching is lively, it keeps pupils attentive and no time is lost; teachers identify precisely what the pupils will attain at the end of a lesson or a series of lessons. All teachers work hard to provide meaningful and interesting experiences to help their pupils learn. They are very strongly committed to pupils' good achievement. Teachers' knowledge of their subjects has improved since the last inspection and planning now takes account of the programme of study for the subject. However, there is

inconsistency in the clarity and detail of plans, and what pupils are to learn is not always sufficiently clear, both in individual lessons and over a period of time. Pupils with PMLD are taught well and teachers are skilled at identifying what they will experience and learn. The teaching of literacy, including English, is good overall. Most teachers plan carefully within the literacy framework, although, for some individual classes there is too much teaching to individual targets and not enough emphasis on the broader aspects of English. Pupils' communication skills are very well promoted overall, although more use could be made of ICT for writing or for helping pupils learn. The teaching of numeracy, including mathematics, is good because the numeracy framework underpins the teaching well. Support staff make a very strong and positive contribution to lessons, supporting individual pupils very well. Pupils are managed particularly well, although there is some challenging behaviour in the *Spectrum* classes. This is mainly related to the limited accommodation, and to times when pupils are not fully occupied. Timetables do not always show clearly the time allocated for pupils' lessons.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is satisfactory overall. Activities are made very relevant for the pupils to help them learn and there is generally richness in the programmes provided. The Foundation Stage programme is very strong. In other subjects, pupils' learning experiences could be more systematically and consistently planned for and built on, as could their links to other subjects.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. Funds are efficiently used to provide very good support to develop pupils' communication skills.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Spiritual development is well promoted through assemblies, lessons and the celebration of festivals. Staff are very good role models, and through very good relationships with pupils, are able to promote sensitively a range of moral issues. There are very good opportunities, in lessons and during leisure time, for pupils' social development. Access to a very wide range of cultural experiences helps pupils appreciate their own culture and that of others.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school takes very good care of its pupils. It provides a safe and very caring environment that provides a good foundation for the pupils' learning. Every pupil is valued by the staff, who know the pupils very well and show a real commitment to enabling them achieve their best. Assessment and monitoring of progress in relation to pupils' individual needs is very strong. Assessment in subjects has been strengthened in English, mathematics and science but still needs development in other subjects; in the Foundation Stage it is very good in relation to all areas of learning. Good policies and practices are in place to secure the pupils' safety and well-being and the school strives hard to involve the appropriate external agencies in meeting the pupils' needs.

The school's links with its parents are very effective. They have very positive views of the school's work. They feel comfortable about approaching the school and think it works well with parents.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the principal and other key staff	Good. The headteacher provides a clear educational direction for the school. The headteacher is very well supported by the deputy headteacher and they complement each other very well. The strong senior management team have clear lines of delegation, support the school's aims and values well and manage their areas effectively. Staff changes have been managed very well, resulting in a high quality committed staff team with a strong sense of purpose and willingness, and a very good commitment to improvement.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Good. Governors' understanding of the school's strengths, and where it needs to improve, is good. They have a well-developed role as critical friends in checking on standards and the school's curriculum. Their work in relation to health and safety matters is also strong. They have a clear view of how their responsibilities contribute to the school's leadership and management.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Senior managers and co-ordinators monitor the quality of the work of staff in their departments well. This results in them largely knowing where the strengths and weaknesses in the teaching and curriculum lie. Performance management has been approached rigorously and well. Whole school target setting, based on an analysis of the attainment of groups of pupils, is beginning to develop, using recently introduced measures of attainment. The quality of evaluation generally, including how the success of the development plan is measured, is satisfactory and a developing area of the school's work.
The strategic use of resources	Good. There are clear procedures and financial planning is well tied in to current school improvement priorities. Governors regularly monitor budgetary spending. Specific grants, such as the ethnic minority grant, are used well.

The cramped accommodation for the *Spectrum* pupils limits the ways teachers can organise the classes and manage pupils' behaviour. It also limits the opportunities the pupils have to learn and exacerbates some pupils' difficulties. However, plans are in place for developing the accommodation and reviewing the organisation of these groups. The school is looking at how it can get the best from its finances by carefully considering how it applies best value principles. Overall, this is satisfactory.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils like coming to school, are expected to work hard and make good progress.• Their behaviour is good.• Teaching is good and the school is well managed.• Parents feel comfortable approaching the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The provision for activities outside lessons.• The information they receive.• Their children's maturity.• The amount of therapy for some pupils.

Inspectors support the positive views held by the majority of the parents. Only a small minority of parents had criticisms. The inspection team agree that there are few activities outside lessons, but these are of high quality. After-school provision is restricted due to issues relating to school transport, but there are regular holiday play schemes, and a parents and siblings music group at lunchtime. A small percentage of parents felt that their children were not sufficiently helped to mature, and that information they receive about their children's progress was not enough. The evidence supports the view that the vast majority of parents feel well informed and that pupils make very good progress in their personal development. Although therapy time meets the needs of some pupils it is limited. The school works effectively to support the work of the existing therapists.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

There is a very high quality of care for pupils and very good support for their personal development; this results in pupils' keenness for school, their very positive attitudes and very good relationships with staff. Staff have great sensitivity and respect for pupils and very good knowledge of their needs.

1. The quality of care is very good and pupils are very well supported by the school's wide range of staff. They enjoy the contact they have with adults, and show this verbally, through body language, or through facial expression. Pupils are very happy to come to school, and enter classrooms joyfully at the start of the day, greeting the adults they know and trust with 'hello', a sign or a smile. Parents report that their children are keen to attend the holiday play schemes arranged by the school, and do not like to be away from school. The relationships between adults and pupils are very good, and in most cases staff manage any pupils' difficult behaviour through gentle encouragement, although some do need very specific behaviour programmes to deal with incidents of challenging behaviour. This is dealt with sensitively, firmly and according to an agreed programme.

2. There is genuine care and concern for pupils, and the quality of support and guidance is very good. Detailed attention is paid to individual needs, and careful assessment and monitoring means that pupils' IEP targets, and the programmes that result, are generally of high quality. Pupils with more complex learning difficulties are very well cared for; their physical and emotional needs are dealt with sensitively and teachers include them very well in lessons. There is good teamwork between teachers and therapists; support staff and teachers carry out programmes planned by therapists very well. Some parents feel that their children should have support directly from a therapist, and are not happy about the amount of therapy provided. The school makes considerable efforts to procure the therapy provision outlined in pupils' Statements of Special Educational Needs, although in some cases, this has been difficult and is still an area for concern to both staff and parents.

3. All staff, including the very hardworking school caretaker, are fully committed to meeting the needs of the pupils. Very good help from volunteers also supports pupils well. Staff know the pupils very well, especially their personal care and medical needs, and show courtesy and respect for pupils. This is a school that uses all its time effectively to maximise pupils' educational opportunities. It takes care of pupils' personal needs swiftly, sensitively and efficiently and so minimises the amount of time lost from lessons. The school has maintained the high standards of care identified in the last inspection report.

4. Pupils are well supervised at all times by a very committed and caring staff. Parents report that all staff are very helpful and supportive when there are concerns about a child. The school nurse provides good support for staff on how to deal with medical conditions of the pupils in their classes. Very good procedures are in place for dealing with pupils' wide variety of medical conditions, and first aid incidents, and the school nurse is highly sensitive to the needs of the pupils when giving them their medication. She takes great care in explaining what is happening to pupils and is always as unobtrusive as possible when entering and leaving classrooms, so as not to disrupt the lessons.

5. Teaching assistants provide very good support for pupils, in class, around the building and on visits. They show that they are well trained, by the way they handle pupils and move them around, as well as by the way they talk with pupils and facilitate communication. They have a good knowledge of signs, symbols and objects of reference, and how these can be used with pupils to enable them to contribute to a lesson, or to help them feel secure in the activities they are to undertake. On rare occasions, support staff could be used better in whole class parts of

lessons. At these times, they do not always have a specific role, although in other lessons support staff are used to record pupils' responses and to contribute to teachers' assessments. This generally works very well, although sometimes they are 'generous' when identifying that a pupil has completed an activity which has met a particular personal objective.

6. The quality of support and provision for pupils at break time and lunchtime is excellent, particularly for communication and self-help skills in eating and drinking. Pupils are helped by staff who know the routines very well and who have been taught a range of ways of supporting pupils at this time. This means pupils' personal development is promoted very well and very good attention is given to pupils' social and personal needs. Break time and lunchtimes are appropriately included as teaching time and pupils have very good quality, highly specific targets which relate to their eating, drinking, and communication needs. All time is used efficiently to help pupils eat and drink and to improve their oral skills, whilst paying very good attention to their positioning. Staff also ensure that this is a high quality social time. They talk with pupils about what they have done and play popular music which pupils enjoy. They always give pupils opportunities to make choices, using pictures, symbols and switches to enable them to communicate this.

The leadership management of the school is good and the headteacher and deputy headteacher complement each other well; there is a commitment to high standards and senior staff work well in partnership.

7. The headteacher, appointed shortly before the last inspection, has done much to raise standards in the school, and to ensure that every pupil's efforts are praised and valued. Standards in the school have risen since the last inspection, and pupils now make good progress overall, and particularly good progress in the Foundation Stage. School development has been good, and major initiatives such as the expansion of the *Acorn* nursery and the increased accommodation needs of the school have been well thought out and planned. Both the headteacher and deputy headteacher are well organised, and facilitate a well-run school through management structures in which all feel involved. The headteacher and deputy headteacher work very well together, each with clearly defined roles and responsibilities which complement each other well. The headteacher has built a strong high calibre staff team, evidenced through the very good quality of teaching and pupils' learning. She takes an active interest in those who lead initiatives, and supports them well, but also monitors the progress of their work to ensure that these are accomplished successfully. She has carefully considered the role that all staff, including support assistants, need to play in helping the pupils, and staff are very well deployed as a result. Their work is effective, and the team spirit in classes and in the school is very strong; there is a high level of morale amongst the whole staff. They work well together under the strong leadership of the headteacher, for the good of the school, to enable pupils to achieve as much as they can.

8. The senior management team is a strong cohesive group, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities and a very strong sense of commitment to the work they do. Staff teams, such as the one overseeing augmentative communication work well, working to common goals and values and supporting each other well. The headteacher and senior management team are strongly supported by governors, many of whom bring a good level of expertise to the school. They are reflective in their approach and think critically about the work of the school. They are very committed to the school's continued improvement and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

9. A major thrust of the school's work since the last inspection has been to ensure that the programmes of study of the National Curriculum were planned and taught. The whole process of the role of targets to improve the school's performance, pupils' IEPs and what should be contained in these, and systems for planning have been reviewed, and current systems in

operation are regularly evaluated. The consultative approach means that staff feel involved in decision making, and are better placed to carry through developments. The school has now developed a system which has led to challenging, but realistic targets being set, and IEPs now contain the most important things a pupil needs to learn, with mostly clear targets formulated. Although there are still inconsistencies in teachers' planning, the senior management team, through its monitoring, are aware of these and know that more needs to be done, especially with relatively new staff. The monitoring of the impact of teachers' induction programmes needs more rigour, to ensure swift and direct support when there are weaknesses in planning and in the match and pace of the work to pupils' levels and needs. Performance management has been approached and managed rigorously, with the school gaining the highest level for its implementation by the Department of Education and Skills. The headteacher has used the performance management model of teacher observation effectively in evaluating the quality of teaching. Her supportive approach has been accepted by staff and is leading to improvements in teaching. Monitoring by subject co-ordinators is well established, although the quality of written evaluations vary; some are very clear and prescribe how improvements can be made, whilst others are more about whether the observer has enjoyed a particular lesson and about the pupils' interest and engagement.

10. There is a clear agenda for school improvement, shared by the whole staff, and development planning is well supported through subject plans. The school's broad long-term vision is not specifically articulated through written plans, although governors realise this is something which needs developing. However, annual plans are regularly reviewed and updated with staff and governors, reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of the work undertaken and the analysis used to plan subsequently. The school has started to look at the success of its actions in terms of pupils' outcomes, but this needs to be taken much further. Much of the success criteria stated in the development plan is in terms of actions completed rather than in relation to improving standards. This also makes it difficult for governors to fully measure the effect of where they target their spending.

The quality of provision in the *Acorn* nursery is very good.

11. The provision in the *Acorn* assessment centre is highly effective. This is because of the high calibre team of teachers and support assistants, the quality of learning opportunities provided and the very close ways in which staff work with other professionals, such as the therapists, and with parents. Children attend the centre mainly on a part-time basis and have a much broader range of special educational needs than in Oakleigh School. The nursery organisation, and the high level of staff expertise ensure that effective programmes are in place for all children and that they are challenged appropriately. At the time of the inspection, some children were new to their class groups and a few were attending with parents, carers and/ or family support workers. In every case the children were quickly settled. Parents were welcomed, involved and supported towards understanding their children's learning needs better. Parents of more established children spoke eloquently of the progress their children were making and the strength of the support that they received. Where children have joint placements with other pre-school providers, the school does everything that it can to ensure that children experience a continuity of provision, and other staff are given advice on successful ways of working with the children. Home-school diaries and regular newsletters ensure parents and others feel informed and involved in their children's learning.

12. Teachers, support staff, therapists and the designated educational psychologist work very closely together to assess the children's needs and monitor their progress. Detailed observations and assessments are made that are used very well to inform teachers' planning for children's learning experiences in school and to help parents understand their child's difficulties. All areas of learning are effectively planned for and covered, although there is an appropriate emphasis on communication, language and literacy and personal and social

development. Records and review reports are of very good quality, and demonstrate the careful monitoring of children's progress, not only in relation to their individual education plans, but in all aspects of their nursery experiences, including their relationships with others. They also demonstrate how much children have benefited during their time in the nursery as they grow in sociability, confidence, awareness, mobility and communicative skills.

13. The nursery curriculum and assessment procedures have been reviewed, and reflect the Early Learning Goals and the Stepping Stones identified in guidance for the Foundation Stage. The curriculum is very strong and relevant to the children's needs and there is careful attention to breadth and balance. On a medium-term and day-to-day basis, teachers are very skilled at adapting the topics and themes to meet the needs of the individual children in their group. They, and the very skilled support staff, are particularly successful in helping the children to listen, attend and communicate. Many children on entering the nursery have little interest in others and are wary of new experiences. The very high quality of teaching, the interesting lessons and the high quality visual aids and other resources, gain children's co-operation and interest and lay very good foundations for their later school life. In a communication and pre-literacy lesson, for example, tactile and other sensory experiences were used very well to remind children of the rhyme, '*Walking in the garden, blow wind, blow*' and '*I'm for ever blowing bubbles*'. Pupils were helped to sign 'more', reached out to touch the bubbles when asked, and tracked the bubbles and the 'wind' when it was another child's turn to be the focus of the activity. Support for communication, language and pre-literacy skills, and for personal and social development, is particularly strong. Teachers and support staff are very responsive to each child's communications, whatever their form – and are skilled at interpreting and responding to them. They extend these very well. The children know their teachers are interested in what they want to communicate, and are stirred to even greater effort as a result. The close involvement of parents ensures that such skills and attitudes start to transfer into children's relationships and learning outside of the classroom.

14. There is a tremendous sense of enjoyment and celebration in the nursery as parents, children and staff celebrate together children's involvement and successes. In a lesson with a transport theme, a very effective imaginative airport situation was jointly created by a child and support assistant. By using a particularly expressive voice, she extended the play and engaged the child's interest and enthusiasm for many minutes, to their mutual enjoyment.

15. Teachers make every effort to keep parents informed of their children's experiences, feelings and successes, and home-school books are used effectively to support this.

16. Parents know child's targets, and are given very helpful advice and skills to support their children at home and help them to progress even further.

The quality of teaching, pupils' learning and pupils' achievements are good overall and very good in the Foundation Stage.

17. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection when the teaching in nearly one in ten lessons across the school, and one in five in Key Stage 2, was unsatisfactory. Weaknesses in teaching were principally because the subject focus of the lesson was not clear. The quality of teaching is now nearly all satisfactory or better with a quarter of lessons where it is very good or excellent. It is the combination of teachers' knowledge of the pupils' needs, together with their increased subject knowledge and their ability to match work to pupils, which makes the teaching particularly successful. Teaching is particularly successful in the Foundation Stage (*Acorn* and *Rainbow* classes), where it is very good, with some excellent features; this is because of the high level of knowledge teachers have of their children and the way they make learning meaningful and enjoyable. During the inspection, the newest children in the *Acorn* nursery, with complex communication needs,

showed exceptionally positive responses to their environment. This was because teachers and support staff were highly receptive to their needs, knew how to approach situations with them, and, in particular, how to engage with the children to start building relationships.

18. Parents feel, with justification, that part of the school's success is because of the good quality of teaching. They say that the teachers set good, challenging targets and this helps parents to be clear on what their children are learning. They view the school as helping children to make 'all round' progress, and that it is very strong and successful in promoting pupils' communication and mobility. Parents feel pupils' self-help skills, particularly eating, drinking and toileting are developed very well, and pupils make very good progress in these. These views were confirmed during the inspection, and the development of these skills pervades all lessons and social activities.

19. The introduction of new initiatives, such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), is having a positive effect on pupils' communication. Teachers promote a wide range of ways of helping pupils to communicate their ideas, such as by sign, symbols, objects and pictures, and are insistent that pupils respond in whatever way they can. As a result, pupils make very good progress in their communication skills, including speaking, listening, signing and watching. Pupils' efforts are valued considerably by staff, and teachers' high expectations enable pupils to understand that communication is a two-way process. This means that pupils are far more involved in their learning, and are always encouraged to make choices, and indicate or identify preferences. Pupils generally select a single symbol or sign, although higher attaining pupils can sequence a small number of these. Some pupils have extensive sign and symbol vocabularies, but there is evidence that most pupils' vocabularies are growing well and they are motivated to use the school's systems. Good support is also provided during lessons for pupils to use devices such as simple switches which activate a spoken message, and other simple communication aids. The work of the occupational therapist, and the programmes support staff follow, have had an good effect on pupils' hand manipulation skills, and on pupils' handwriting and pre-writing development. In particular, more pupils are now able to make meaningful marks on paper. Although in the past there have been some good developments for pupils to use ICT to help them to write, there is currently little use of this. There is also limited use of ICT to support pupils' learning in other subjects. Computer resources have increased considerably over past years, and the teachers make good use of touch screens when pupils do use ICT. However, there is an absence of overlay keyboards and limited use of a range of other devices to help pupils access the computer.

20. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subjects they teach, and plan their lessons to make pupils' learning meaningful. They know what particularly interests pupils, and ensure that lessons contain a wide variety of activities, which are frequently changed, but which usually build upon each other. The pace of lessons is mostly swift, and this helps maintain pupils' attention, which for some is extremely difficult. This represents a good level of improvement since the last inspection. The introduction of the numeracy and literacy strategies, in particular, has really helped teachers improve their teaching. It has helped them to think more carefully about how activities can be planned to help their pupils understand ideas, and build upon what they have learned previously.

21. Teachers ensure that pupils learn new ideas thoroughly, through regularly reinforcing these over several weeks. The best planning shows regular reviews of work done, with new activities developed to aid consolidation, and to build on what has been previously covered, often week-by-week. However, in some planning there is not enough progression built into the plan, and there are sometimes generalised statements indicating that pupils could do much the same work every week for the half-term. The objectives set for pupils are clear, fully explained to them at the beginning of lessons, and contribute to the assessments that teachers make.

Support staff also contribute to this in many lessons. Not all teachers use their planning as a means to assess pupils' progress thoroughly in all subjects and to evaluate their lessons. However, their assessments are much better in relation to pupils' individual needs, and also in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.

22. The expectations of pupils' behaviour are high. Most teachers make it absolutely clear what pupils are expected to do and they are consistent in their approach. They follow carefully constructed behaviour plans where necessary. However, some staff could be more rigorous in dealing with minor behaviour, which, nevertheless, interferes with pupils' learning. Some pupils' behaviour could be managed better the layout of the class environment, and with more space in *Spectrum* classes. Sometimes this is because of a lack of smooth changeovers between lesson activities, which disrupts the flow of the activity and unsettles pupils.

23. The teaching of literacy and numeracy are good and teachers' planning for the different parts of the lessons is carefully thought out. These can occur at different times of the day. The start to the day is often used very well to identify what pupils will be taught for the morning, ensuring they are clear about this from their symbol timetable, and also to identify key features they are to learn. Plenary sessions sometimes take place at the end of a morning and teachers use these to assess and reinforce ideas from several lessons pupils have undertaken. Occasionally, this is just a recap, and assessment opportunities are missed. In literacy, the broader aspects of the framework are sometimes insufficiently taught, as some teachers focus too much on individual targets. Mental and oral starts to lessons in numeracy sessions have been well thought out and are a particularly strong feature. Teachers often use songs (with words relevant to the activity and written by school staff) which really engage pupils and involve them in getting ready to think about their number work. As a result, pupils make good progress in literacy and numeracy. Science is also well taught, and teachers use a range of imaginative ideas to help pupils learn. This occurred in a lesson for Reception pupils with complex needs; they had to respond to the different tastes, smells and appearance of various round-shaped fruits, then complete a group chart to represent them. Pupils were highly delighted with the activity and staff ensured that they were all involved. Overall, pupils' achievements are satisfactory in science. These are good in Key Stage 1 but progress slows towards the end of Key Stage 2, because there is a lack of time for pupils to study the subject. By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils' achievements are satisfactory.

24. The school recognises that teachers' timetables need to be clearer, with times of lessons specifically stated. This is so the senior management team and subject co-ordinators can better check that the time allocated for subjects is fully used, and that what is on the timetable is actually taught at the time stated.

The school's work with parents is very good; parents show a strong commitment to the school.

25. The school is highly committed to working with parents, sharing in their children's successes and enabling parents to have a full understanding of their children's needs and development. It provides good quality training to help parents help their children. Very good records are kept on pupils' progress, and parents feel considerably included in the formal and informal reviews of their children's progress, including the annual review. Some said, that this was very thorough and one said it, 'feels like my child'. They believe that the school has a 'can' approach, meaning that it will do all it is able to ensure that every opportunity is provided for pupils to make progress.

26. The school is particularly successful at informing, supporting and helping parents to understand the needs of their children, and has good on-site training arrangements. The 'school for parents' helps parents with movement techniques to support their children with cerebral

palsy with sitting, standing and walking. Support and guidance to parents by physiotherapists is provided weekly, and parents or carers work with their children in the school's parent facilities. A very friendly atmosphere is created, where parents support each other and encourage each other's children. For pupils with autism, parents attend the regular 'Early Bird' workshop, a training programme to learn about ways in which they can help alleviate their children's fears and anxieties, as well as to enable them to communicate better. Individual support is also provided by teachers and support staff, and parents find the advice they receive in review meetings to be of high quality, guiding them in how they can help their child reach the targets set. Home visits and guidance on dealing with issues at home are well received.

27. Parents regard the school very highly in almost all respects. Over a third of parents responded to the inspection questionnaire and those who attended the parents' meeting were overwhelmingly positive about the school's work. Criticisms relating to the lack of provision of occupational and speech and language therapy were identified, but parents also acknowledged that the school does all it can to ensure this is provided, and also that the quality of what is provided is good. In addition, some parents felt it took too long for their children to have an assessment for a communication aid or to be issued with one. This too, is beyond the school's control. Over nine tenths of parents who responded to each question on the questionnaire were happy with all but two aspects of the school's work. All parents agreed that the teaching was good, the school was well led and managed and the pupils made good progress. The exceptions are that some parents feel that there are not enough extra-curricular activities, and that the school does not help their children become mature and responsible. The school provides holiday play schemes, although there is little in the week, mainly due to school transport difficulties. There is a good quality siblings and parents music group, but little else. Taking into account the needs and disabilities of pupils, the school provides very well for their personal and social development and helps them to become mature and responsible.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The consistency and detail of teachers' planning.

28. The school has worked hard to improve its planning since the last inspection. Teachers write their plans using sources such as the Oakleigh schemes of work, Equals programmes and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's (QCA) guidance. In writing their plans, teachers aim to provide challenge for pupils in their lessons, and to provide interesting, relevant and motivating activities to help them learn. They are mostly successful in this. Lesson objectives have improved considerably, and are reasonably clear, although some staff need to be more specific in what they want pupils to learn. The school has thought carefully about how plans should be constructed. Guidance on planning identifies that teachers should produce a long-term outline for what is to be taught and when, and that at the medium-term stage the school's 'advanced planning sheets' should detail what should be taught over a term or half term and identify what individual pupils should learn. In the best plans, the activities are linked and referenced to the National Curriculum programmes of study, and what is to be learned by pupils builds clearly on what has been taught and learned before, usually week-on-week. Teachers plan carefully in small steps and each lesson is part of a sequence. A particular strength is the way that some teachers specify very clearly what individual pupils should learn and produce plans for each pupil, identifying precisely what they should do and learn. Teachers' evaluations of lessons and assessments of pupils are marked on the plan, and plans are subsequently modified in the light of these. There are some really good examples of this type and quality of planning in the school, which could be held up as examples of very good practice. However, the quality of teachers' planning is not consistent across the school and varies considerably. The senior management team is well aware of this, and the headteacher and deputy headteacher have identified specific planning issues to address from their recent monitoring. Weaknesses in planning result in lack of clarity about what is to be learned. Plans are sometimes too

descriptive, focusing insufficiently on the individual needs of pupils. Some plans do not specify what pupils are to learn at all, and just record the activities they are to do or what they are to experience. Overall, there is insufficient evaluation of planning.

The provision for autistic pupils in the *Spectrum* classes, especially class organisation and the quality of the accommodation.

29. The pupils in the *Spectrum* classes have a highly structured and well organised specialised programme of work, which ensures they are clear about what they are to do and the order and type of activities they are to undertake. This helps to minimise their anxiety and alleviate stress during the day. The pupils' use of symbols from the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is well established and is taught well. At all times, pupils in the *Spectrum* classes are expected to identify what they want, or to post or hand over a symbol to denote an activity has been completed and another is to be started. Teachers make very good use of 'leisure time' at break or lunchtime to enable pupils to rehearse their 'exchanges' or 'communications'. Staff work really hard to ensure that pupils take full part in these activities, despite the limitations of the accommodation and relatively large pupil numbers. Routines are well known by pupils and the regular reinforcement of these, such as how to choose a biscuit or drink, or how adults should be greeted, help establish good patterns which the pupils use elsewhere. These are also very good social occasions.

30. Much work undertaken by pupils is related to achievement of personal goals. Pupils make good progress towards these, although some of their targets could be expressed in more 'pupil-friendly' language, both in written plans and around the classrooms. The emphasis on working towards achieving these means that much time is taken up on specific activities which are not always linked in a progressive way to subjects of the National Curriculum. This results in subject teaching being limited by the time there is available and leading to insufficient balance in the overall curriculum for these pupils. For instance, although English and mathematics are identified as taking place over most of the morning, the actual focus is on teaching individual pupils specific aspects of reading, writing and mathematical work as well as the reinforcement of previous learning, supported by teaching assistants. Pupils undertake routine activities such as matching, sorting and those to help hand movement for writing. Separate lessons in literacy are also taught in the week, which follow the principles of the National Literacy Strategy, but not enough time is set aside for these. Similarly, other subjects of the National Curriculum have little time devoted to them. Teachers do make good links with literacy work, however. A good example was seen in a science lesson on 'How plants grow' which used a text from the school's literacy resources.

31. The quality of teaching and learning in the *Spectrum* classes is satisfactory. Judgements are not as high as elsewhere in the school, and quality of teaching and learning is limited by a number of factors. The strong emphasis on personal targets in lessons, and activities which are well taught so that pupils achieve these, means that the subject focus of the lesson is sometimes lost. Moreover, the organisation of the rooms and the work areas, in particular, result in pupils being in too close proximity to each other; they have an inadequate space to work in. There are difficulties caused when activities are changed in a lesson, but it is not possible to do this smoothly because of the layout of the room. The number of pupils in the *Spectrum* classes has increased over recent years and the rooms are too small to cater adequately for the complex needs of such pupils; pupils' anxiety is often raised because of this. In whole class work seen in several lessons during the inspection, some pupils became uneasy when they were 'squashed' together in circle with the large number of support staff. This disrupted the flow of the lesson and the learning by others. Plenary sessions are often difficult times and pupils sometimes pay little attention to the teacher or to other pupils showing the work they have done. The use of ICT is limited; there are few adequate distraction-free areas for pupils to use computers. The emphasis on having 'low arousal' classrooms means there are limited displays

of pupils' work, and there is no space to have a range of different areas. New accommodation is being planned for the *Spectrum* classes, although this does not appear to be much larger than at present. Careful account needs to be taken of the wide ranging needs of such pupils, and of the implications for the layout and design of such teaching areas.

Pupils' progress in information and communication technology (ICT) and the curriculum provided so that pupils are able to study all aspects of the subject in a systematic way and build on what they have learned previously.

32. Although, a scheme of work for ICT has been written which covers all aspects of the National Curriculum programme of study for the subject, this is not sufficiently detailed for the level of knowledge, expertise and experience teachers have of ICT. Schemes of work for other subjects do have references to the use of ICT, but ICT work is not sufficiently planned or taught systematically by teachers. There is little guidance on the small steps required to enable pupils to achieve the objectives set, and to make sufficient progress in the subject. More rigorous checking is required to ensure that teachers include ICT in their planning for other subjects, as this is the school's preferred method of teaching ICT skills. There were a few good examples where this occurred, such as in the Reception class when pupils pressed a switch to indicate 'more', to contribute to a rhyme in a language literacy session, and to express their likes and dislikes about fruits in a science lesson. However, teachers do not generally indicate how what is taught will contribute to pupils' understanding of ICT or to how ICT can support learning in subjects.

33. The ICT co-ordinator worked hard following the previous inspection, to increase the emphasis on writing across the curriculum through the use of ICT. However, the momentum for this has not been sustained. The co-ordinator was released from his teaching commitments for one year to work with staff and to support individual pupils. There is evidence of successful activities being undertaken with pupils, especially in the use of software to enable pupils to select words by touching a computer screen. However, staff's knowledge of ICT, at that time, was extremely limited and much work was undertaken to increase their skills. This, together with the recent government training in ICT, has improved staff knowledge, although there is still some way to go before staff are completely confident in its use. There is now insufficient use of ICT to support pupils' writing through traditional text or symbols and a limited range of software which could facilitate this, although there is good use of simple communication aids to augment pupils' spoken communication. The help from speech and language therapists and the specially designated support assistant for ICT and literacy enables pupils to make a more direct contribution during lessons and to be more active in making choices.

34. The co-ordinator mainly monitors the provision through the use of ICT, as indicated on planning sheets. Monitoring needs to be more wide-ranging, and, although increased use of computers has been identified, this is still insufficient to enable pupils to make at least satisfactory progress in the subject.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

35. In order to improve standards in the school and the quality of education even further, the headteacher, senior management team and governors should ensure that the school works to:

- Improve teachers' planning so that it more systematically and consistently:
 - * has sufficient detail to show clearly what pupils are to do and learn in each lesson and over a period of time;
 - * sets out clearly the targets for the different groups or individuals;
 - * focuses on the learning by pupils and what they are to achieve rather than the activities they are to undertake;
 - * identifies links to be made with other subjects and aspects of the school's work, especially ICT, literacy, numeracy and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development;
 - * is evaluated to identify what works and what does not work in lessons or in a series of lessons, so that improvements can be made.

- Improve the provision for autistic pupils in the school's *Spectrum* classes so that:
 - * there is sufficient space and adequate practical, leisure and work areas for pupils to undertake a range of activities, without the need for them to be always in such close proximity to each other;
 - * timetables and lessons are organised so that there is a better balance of individual, small group and class activity, linked both to personal targets and to the National Curriculum programmes of study;
 - * the outcomes for pupils' learning are specifically identified in written plans.

- Improve pupils' progress in ICT and in the use of ICT to aid pupils' writing so that:
 - * the ICT curriculum is planned and taught in a more systematic way; builds on the skills pupils' have learned previously; shows more detail to aid teachers with less experience than others; the time when the units of work are to be taught; and the development of ICT knowledge, skills and understanding is shown in the planning for other subjects;
 - * better use is made of ICT to help pupils to write using symbols and traditional text.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	32
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	14

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	1	7	14	9	1	0	0
Percentage	3	22	44	28	3	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	72
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	13

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	17

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	5
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	1

Attendance

Authorised absence	%	Unauthorised absence	%
School data	10.29	School data	0

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

It is not possible to record pupils' attainment in the National Curriculum tests and task as too few pupils were assessed at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	7
Black – other	0
Indian	4
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	0
White	30
Any other minority ethnic group	2

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:

YN–Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	11.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	6
Average class size	8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff:

YN–Y6

Total number of education support staff	28
Total aggregate hours worked per week	720

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	1026132.00
Total expenditure	1020597.00
Expenditure per pupil	12919.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	47006.00
Balance carried forward to next year	52541.00

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	1
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	72
Number of questionnaires returned	23

Percentage of responses in each category

Number of responses in brackets

My child likes school.

My child is making good progress in school.

Behaviour in the school is good.

My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.

The teaching is good.

I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.

I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.

The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.

The school works closely with parents.

The school is well led and managed.

The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.

The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	87	13	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	77	23	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	82	18	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	50	44	6	0	0
The teaching is good.	83	17	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	83	9	9	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	91	9	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	77	23	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	83	17	0	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	87	13	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	79	11	11	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	70	15	15	0	0