

INSPECTION REPORT

PARKGATE INFANTS & NURSERY SCHOOL

Watford, Hertfordshire

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117163

Headteacher: Miss A Lawrence

Reporting inspector: Ms R J Schaffer
23698

Dates of inspection: 24 – 27 June 2002

Inspection number: 194916

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant School
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 to 7 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Northfield Gardens Watford Hertfordshire
Postcode:	WD24 7RL
Telephone number:	01923 221 984
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr M Curry
Date of previous inspection:	June 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
23698	R J Schaffer	Registered inspector	Mathematics Design and technology Music Physical education Special educational needs English as an additional language Foundation Stage	What sort of school is it? School's results and achievements How well are pupils taught? How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
114437	A B Anderson	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
18370	K Johnson	Team inspector	Science Information and communication technology Art and design Religious education	
2740	E Barratt	Team inspector	English Geography History Equal opportunities	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Parkgate Infants and Nursery school is situated on a very pleasant site in a residential part of North Watford. Although some of the 97 boys and 89 girls live nearby, most come from areas nearer to the town centre where housing is more dense. Since the time of the previous inspection, there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils who join the school later than the Reception year. There has also been an increase in the number of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds. Eighteen per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language, and of these most speak Urdu at home. The number of pupils with special educational needs is broadly average. Two pupils have Statements of Special Need, which is an increase since the previous inspection. When children start in the Nursery some exceed expectations for their age but, in general, most children's skills are lower than expected.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school is working well towards fulfilling its aim to help all pupils achieve their best. The quality of teaching is very good in the Nursery and good in other year groups and as a result the achievements of pupils are good. Pupils have good attitudes to their work and by the time they are in Year 2 pupils' speech is better than in most schools, and those learning English as an additional language gain fluency in their speech more quickly than usual. The leadership of the headteacher, key members of staff and governors is good. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils' achievements are good throughout the school because teaching is good.
- The school develops pupils' spoken language particularly well, and as a result, by the time pupils reach the end of Year 2, they are more articulate and use a wider range of words in their speech than in most schools.
- Pupils are confident and show more initiative than is usual for their age because the school provides very well for their personal development.
- Provision for those who speak English as an additional language is very good.
- Provision in the Nursery is very good and at the end of the Reception year children exceed the goals for their age in mathematics.
- Pupils achieve a good standard of work in history.

What could be improved

- The consistency with which teachers plan and evaluate their work so as to provide activities that are well-matched to pupils' needs.
- The teaching of letter formation in the Nursery and Reception, and writing in the Reception year.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school's improvement has been good. The standard of pupils' work in English, mathematics and science is similar to that of the previous inspection, but more pupils start at a lower level of attainment when they join, sometimes at a later stage than the usual time of entry, and so the results represent a higher level of achievement for many. The issues identified in the previous report have been addressed well: the governing body's control over the school budget is very good and ensures that improvements are supported well by financial planning; the school development plan has well defined priorities that are manageable; and investigative work and how to solve problems are taught well. The quality of teaching has improved a great deal.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 2 based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	All schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
Reading	C	C	D	D
Writing	C	C	C	C
Mathematics	D	D	D	D

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

The school identified the need to raise standards in mathematics because the pupils' performance in national tests was below average each year. In 2001 all pupils achieved the expected level which was an improvement on previous years, but too few pupils attained the higher level and so the school's results were still below average. A strong focus on providing challenge for those of higher attainment has had good results in the current year and the standard of work in mathematics in Year 2 is average. Each year pupils have maintained an average standard in writing. The school has begun to address the problem of girls performing better than boys in national tests. This year there has been a significant improvement in the number of boys reading at the level expected for their age and as a result standards in reading are also average. Pupils attain above average standards in history. In all other subjects standards are average.

The standards pupils achieve are high enough when compared to their prior attainment. The achievements of those with special educational needs are good. Those who speak English as an additional language make very good progress in learning to speak English and their progress in other subjects is similar to the other pupils. Children in the Nursery make very good progress as many start with attainment below what you would expect for their age. By the end of the Reception year children are on track to exceed the goals set for them in mathematics and to reach the goals for communication language and literacy, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical and creative development. However, a good number fall below the expected standard in forming their letters.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Children in the Nursery and Reception classes enjoy school and start every morning confidently. In Years 1 and 2 pupils are interested in their work and enthusiastic about their learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. At assemblies, playtime and lunch time, pupils behave very well towards each other and are polite to adults. In classrooms nearly all pupils behave well, although just occasionally a few need a reminder to behave as expected. There have been no exclusions.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. From the Nursery onwards, children learn to think of others and to share and co-operate as they work. They respond very well to the many opportunities to show initiative and to behave responsibly.

Attendance	Satisfactory. Nearly all pupils enjoy school and attend regularly. A few take more holidays in school time than is permitted and quite a number arrive at school late, sometimes because they come some distance.
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TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 – 2
Quality of teaching	Good	Good

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

In the Nursery the quality of teaching is very good because the Nursery team work exceptionally well together and have a very good understanding of how children learn through play. In other year groups teaching is good and ensures that pupils learn well. Particular strengths in teaching are:

- the very good methods used to teach pupils the basic skills in English and mathematics;
- skilful questioning helps pupils explain their calculations in mathematics and pursue investigations in science;
- high expectations of pupils mean that lessons are stimulating and relevant to pupils' interests;
- there is particularly well judged help for pupils with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language; and
- good management of pupils is founded on strong relationships and respect for pupils' self-esteem.

Points for development are:

- the teaching of letter formation in the Nursery and Reception year;
- the organisation of some play areas in the Reception year; and
- providing tasks well adapted to pupils' previous understanding and the objectives for the lesson.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. All the subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education contribute to pupils' knowledge and understanding. The local community is used very well to enrich pupils' experiences. The school makes sure that all pupils have equal opportunities to learn. However, teachers planning within a year group is not consistent.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good overall. Pupils' needs are identified promptly. Parents are involved from the start so they can help their child at home. Individual targets and plans for pupils' learning are very well thought out, and checked regularly to help them move on quickly in their learning. Occasionally lessons are planned that do not take sufficient account of the pupils' targets.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good. Staff who help these pupils learn English are very knowledgeable about the best methods to do this. Good checks on how well they understand and use English helps teachers provide well for their needs.

Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Provision for pupils' personal development is rooted firmly in the aims and values of the school. Assemblies set the tone, often drawing together the learning of the week within a moral framework.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school takes very good care of its pupils. In the Nursery and Reception classes, staff keep a careful watch on children's achievements. In other classes, a good check is made on pupils' achievements in mathematics and English, and in other subjects the checks on their progress are satisfactory.

The school provides parents with good information about their child's progress and what will be taught each term. While only a few parents come into school regularly to help, most support special functions, take a pride in the school uniform and help with reading and other activities at home.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and is ably supported by the deputy headteacher. Key members of staff have well defined roles and work hard to meet their responsibilities.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors are well organised and take great care in gaining a clear view of the school's work. Their expertise is used well to support and guide. They are conscientious in ensuring that statutory requirements are met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has good systems in place to check on its own performance. It carries out careful analysis of data from national tests and its own assessments. It compares its provision with other schools and challenges itself to improve.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The headteacher makes good use of the skills of staff and learning support assistants. There is excellent management of finances and the accommodation is used well. Better use could be made of computers to support administration and inefficiencies sometimes arise from teachers not sharing the work of planning.

The school is well served by having well-trained, experienced and settled teaching and non-teaching staff. Accommodation both inside and out is good and maintained to a very high standard. The outdoor area for the Nursery and Reception classes is excellent. Resources in all subjects are satisfactory or better.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their child is happy to come to school. • The good teaching helps their child make progress in all subjects. • Behaviour at the school is good and children are expected to work hard. • The school is well led and managed. • They would feel happy approaching the school with a suggestion or concern. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents felt that their child was not getting the right amount of homework. • Some thought that they were not well informed as to how their child was progressing. • Some felt that the school did not work closely with parents. • Some wanted a greater number of activities provided out of school time.

The inspection confirms all the parents' positive views. In the main, the inspection team did not agree with the negative views. The amount of homework set is similar for most pupils of this age in most schools. Parents are given good opportunities to find out about how well their child is progressing and end of year reports are informative. There are few activities provided outside of school but this is the case for most schools for pupils up to the age of seven. Parents are welcome in school to help in numerous ways, although currently not many do so.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The school's results in National Curriculum tests for pupils at the end of Year 2 in mathematics have been below average for four years. As pupils were achieving an average standard in writing and in some years in reading this indicated that mathematics was not being taught well enough. The school began to address the problem with the introduction of the national strategy for numeracy in 2000 and identifying the subject as a priority for action. Good provision in mathematics for pupils with special educational needs and those who learn more slowly than others meant that in 2001 every pupil achieved the expected level. The school was beginning to be successful in its efforts to improve the subject. The co-ordinator identified the need to focus attention on the achievements of those pupils with higher attainment. During the current year, pupils in Year 2 with higher attainment in mathematics have been given good help through extra teaching. Teachers have planned activities to provide good challenge for them during lessons. This focus has had good results and the current standard of work in Year 2 matches expectations overall, with a good proportion of pupils achieving the higher level.
2. In contrast to the situation in mathematics, the school has maintained standards in writing similar to the national average over a four year period. Pupils are given good encouragement to think of themselves as writers and in 2001 more pupils achieved the higher level than in most schools. However, in reading, results fell to below average in 2001. The school examined the reasons for this and took action to raise the standard of reading by several means. For instance, parents were involved more fully, the range of books was increased and teachers looked at what aspects of reading were giving difficulties, especially to boys. In common with other schools nationally, the standard of boys' work has been lower than that of the girls for several years and the school has begun to look for ways to address this. The useful reading sessions at the start of the afternoon are productive in helping those falling behind. The expertise of the visiting teacher helping pupils who speak English as an additional language was put to good use to raise standards for these pupils. She gives support to pupils in concentrated blocks of time which is a good way of boosting their confidence and improving their knowledge of spoken English quickly. She uses good strategies to develop their reading and writing skills as they learn to extend their knowledge of spoken English.
3. There is a wide range of attainment among the children when they start in the Nursery. Some know more than is expected for their age, and one or two are well ahead of others, but, overall their attainment is below average. A few children start with little or no English at their disposal. They make very good progress in the Nursery because the experienced and knowledgeable Nursery team provide activities that engage their interest and are well matched to their different needs. In Reception, their progress is very good in mathematics, good in reading but slows in writing and in some of the areas where children initiate their own activities in play. The Reception team have not worked for long together and although there are some very good features of provision, some areas lack clear objectives and the type of resources that result in children learning through play. All children know their

numbers well and most use addition and subtraction with confidence, for instance when saying that two 5p coins make 10p. Those of higher attainment read well and know many more words by sight than is usual for their age. Those of average attainment know some words by sight but have difficulty with some of the key words you would expect them to know. Children with special educational needs are given good support by classroom assistants and use letter sounds well to help them puzzle out words. Children learning English as an additional language benefit from the practical nature of many tasks and the use of resources such as soft toys to help them learn the sounds made by letters and the words. Children can make plausible attempts at writing words using the sounds they know. They write notices for the shop and some form simple sentences. Many make letters incorrectly and resort to using capitals quite frequently. Most are on track to achieve the goals set for them by the end of the Reception year and to exceed them in mathematics.

4. By the end of Year 2, standards in speaking and listening are above average. Pupils speak and listen confidently in exploring and communicating ideas using a good range of vocabulary, and adapting their speech well to the listener. They use vocabulary learnt in different subjects particularly well. For instance, when pupils explained in design and technology what would improve their work a pupil of average attainment said: "we need to solve the problem of the handle on our winding mechanism". In Years 1 and 2, pupils make good improvement to the shape of their letters and their orientation which were not developed well by the end of the Reception year. By the end of Year 2, most pupils form letters correctly and those of higher attainment achieve a joined hand. Pupils understand that there are different reasons for writing and that this will reflect the way the work is set out, for instance using a different format to write a book review to that of a poem. All write short sentences that follow a logical sequence and those of higher attainment often use a telling choice of words. Pupils of average or lower attainment use a more limited range of words and their ideas are not always fully developed. Those of higher attainment use capital letters and full stops well, but those of average and lower attainment do not always apply them consistently. Most common words are spelt correctly and, where not correct, spelling is usually plausible. Most pupils read fluently and confidently, and enjoy doing so both in school and at home. Standards in reading have improved significantly this year.
5. By the end of Year 2, pupils of average attainment are beginning to gain speed and accuracy in making mental calculations with numbers up to 20, while those of higher attainment add and subtract numbers that cross the tens boundaries. In a lesson on introducing the concept of fractions applied to numbers, pupils quickly understood that the halving process applied to shapes needed to be translated to numbers. Those of higher attainment could double and halve numbers with multiples of ten easily and could puzzle out the answer to a sum such as half of 34 using paper and pencil. Those of average attainment could find half of 12 and 8 without recourse to any aids for their work while those of lower attainment achieved this using practical aids such as counters. Pupils in Year 1 are working at a higher standard than you would expect for their age. Those of average and above average attainment confidently use doubling, near doubles and their knowledge of multiples of ten when working out sums such as $50+19$. Throughout the school pupils explain how they have solved numerical problems better than is usual for their age.
6. At the time of the last inspection the school was asked to improve the teaching of investigative work in science. Pupils are given good opportunities to learn through

practical activities and to explore and question for themselves. By the end of Year 2, they have a good understanding of the need to make a prediction and that when carrying out an investigation they have to consider how to make a test 'fair'.

7. Pupils use their skills in reading, writing and mathematics well when they do work in other subjects. For instance, they record investigations in science and write about how they will carry out their plans in design and technology. In history, they use descriptive writing, for instance, to explain the work of Florence Nightingale. In information and communication technology, pupils attain the standard expected by the end of Year 2 because they use computers in most subjects. Pupils attain above average standards in history because it is taught imaginatively and there is a close attention to improving pupils' skills as they move up the school.
8. Overall, pupils' achievements are good in mathematics and English. Of those currently in Year 2, who have been in the school since Reception, nearly all have achieved the targets set for them at the beginning of the Reception year. A good proportion, however did not start their education in the school and a few joined the school very late in Year 2. Pupils' achievements in other subjects are at least satisfactory and very good as in the case of history. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress when they are given help in small groups, and when they work on specially planned programmes. Because teachers do not always take account of their individual plans in every lesson, work occasionally does not match their needs and so overall their achievements are similar to those of others, as are the overall achievements of those who speak English as an additional language. Pupils of higher attainment make good progress when they are given extra help in mathematics to extend their learning. In other lessons, their progress is satisfactory.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

9. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are good and their personal development is very good. Pupils play well together in the playground and behave particularly well in assembly.
10. Although pupils often listen very attentively to their teachers and have very good attitudes both to their work and to their fellow pupils, on occasions when teachers' explanations are over long, some pupils start to lose interest and to engage in a small amount of fidgeting or other time-wasting activity. There is a small amount of documentary evidence linked to occasional challenging attitudes and behaviour being displayed in the classroom and in the playground. No challenging behaviour was observed during the inspection. There have been no recent exclusions from the school. Where the teaching element of a lesson was good, or very good, pupils were quick to respond to the challenges set and demonstrated a very positive attitude to their work both in the classroom and around the school.
11. During the inspection there were many examples of pupils displaying positive responses to teachers' instructions. In physical education lessons, pupils get ready for lessons very promptly, line up sensibly to go outside or to the hall and are ready to start work immediately, the good teaching matched by pupils' good attitudes and behaviour. Good behaviour was also observed in a whole school assembly in which one class of pupils demonstrated very positive speaking skills to the rest of the school and to a small number of parents who had been invited to support their

children. Pupils walk around the school in a sensible and orderly manner, even when not directly supervised by adults. Pupils enjoy lunchtime. They eat together in the dining area in a sociable way, and behaviour in the playground is very good.

12. Relationships between pupils and teachers, and pupils and their peers, are very good. Pupils work in collaboration with each other, sharing resources and ideas as demonstrated in a Year 1 mathematics lesson in which children studied 3D shapes together. The school provides many opportunities for pupils' personal development, a good example of which is the energy monitoring teams who have successfully saved many hundreds of pounds in fuel and other running costs. Pupils take responsibility for switching off lights and closing doors in the winter to save energy. When asked to carry out errands, pupils in Year 2 respond very responsibly, for example, going to search on the playground for those who had forgotten to come to recorder group at lunchtime. Pupils give out and pack away equipment responsibly and take good care of school resources.
13. The overall attendance at the school is satisfactory. However, there is more lateness than would be expected for a school of this type. This is partly explained by the very wide area from which pupils travel to attend this school. Teachers start lessons promptly but interruptions do occur from those arriving late.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

14. The quality of teaching is good in all year groups, except in the Nursery where it is very good. Throughout the school, very good relationships and teachers' high expectations are responsible for pupils' good attitudes to their work and enjoyment in learning. Teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection in 1997, particularly in the fact that no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. More than three quarters of the lessons were good or very good and one lesson was excellent. The school was asked to improve the quality of teaching by providing better opportunities for pupils to learn to solve problems and to extend their skills in investigative work. This has been addressed well; teachers are skilful in helping pupils gain confidence in solving problems in mathematics and suggesting ways to carry out investigations in science.

Nursery and Reception classes

15. In the Nursery, the teachers, Nursery nurses and teaching assistants work exceptionally well together as a team. The role of each member of staff is well-thought out in order to provide help to the best advantage. There is a good balance between focused class teaching and the opportunities for children to explore, investigate or devise their own learning through play. Teaching sessions and routines, such as tidying away, are very well timed so that children's attention and concentration is maximised and a calm happy atmosphere is maintained. Staff use a wide range of strategies to capture children's interest and develop their understanding in all areas of learning. Displays and resources provide focal points for talking, touching and exploring both inside the classroom and in the outside area. Simple themes are used to link activities together, and as a consequence children often make progress in more than one area at the same time. For instance, in one session children learnt to feel and identify differences in dress materials. Sitting in a

small group round the teacher, each child chose a piece of cloth to touch and describe while the teacher helped by providing a word such as “smooth” if one was not forthcoming. The teacher explained that some cloth was better for winter clothes while others were appropriate for summer, linking language development with knowledge and understanding of the world. Another activity elsewhere on offer linked this learning with physical development when children dressed a peg doll; they learnt to use scissors and glue correctly, but then the Nursery nurse reinforced their learning by asking, when the doll was finally dressed to the satisfaction of its maker, whether its clothes were for winter or summer.

16. In the Reception classes, teaching in mathematics and reading is very good and activities are very well matched to children’s level of attainment, maturity and interest. For instance, in a very good mathematics session, the children learnt to tell the time on a clock by forming the hands of the clock with their own bodies as they lay down in the correct position on a large circle of numbers set out on the floor to represent a clock face. This imaginative way to make their learning come alive held the attention of all children so that they quickly learnt that the number six fell opposite to the number 12 and that the three was opposite to the nine. Good subsequent activities to write, draw and say these numbers and times helped those with special educational needs and those who learn more slowly than others to grasp the concept of the measurement of time as well as those of average and higher attainment. Teachers develop children’s reading very well by having clear objectives for reading sessions both in whole class groups with a big book and in individual sessions when teachers guide the learning for a group on the same book. However, on occasions, the methods and strategies recommended in the national guidance for this age range are not always well translated into activities. For instance, at the outset of activity sessions, the teacher allocated all children to a particular activity and staff are enlisted to focused support. As a result, no member of staff is free to watch children’s play in places such as the class ‘shop’ and writing area. So staff often fail to intervene with well timed questions or suggestions to move children’s learning on in these play areas. Some areas lack sufficient structure from their resources to provide the support needed to develop children’s negotiations with each other and their fruitful participation. This is most noticeable in the ‘shop’ where roles and activities are not well defined. The writing area provides resources for children to write notices and their own messages, but few children choose to write independently because teachers have not motivated them well enough or provided well-thought out reasons for them to write.
17. The teaching of letter formation in both the Nursery and the Reception classes is not as well developed as other areas of learning. Children are encouraged to write using the letters they know or the marks that they feel represent writing. This good practice gives children confidence in what they want to express. Teachers generally build effectively on this early start by encouraging an understanding of how to shape letters correctly and by teaching the letter sounds so that children can start a word with the right letter. However, some children in the Nursery need more opportunities to make the shapes that help them achieve a successful letter, for instance gaining the skill to make an anti-clockwise circle. In the Reception class, some children spend too much time copying underneath the words that have been written by the teacher, and lessons focusing on the skill of forming letters are not always organised well. For instance, in one lesson in the Reception class, the use of wipe boards with a whole class group was not an effective strategy because adults were not able to help those who made the letter incorrectly before they had wiped it off.

Years 1 and 2

18. Teachers have a good knowledge of the methods recommended in the national strategies for literacy and numeracy. The basic skills are taught well. In literacy, for instance, teachers slip in timely reminders on punctuation, without detracting from the main purpose of the lesson. In a lesson aimed at teaching the use of words starting with the same sound to gain an effect, the teacher drew attention to an aspect of spelling (words that sound the same but are spelt differently), because this was noticed by a pupil. In mathematics, teachers are particularly skilful at helping pupils explain how they have arrived at an answer to a problem and expectations are well-matched to the age and level of attainment of pupils. In Year 1, when enquiring, for instance, how the addition of ten and 13 was carried out, the teacher posed a question with part of the answer included, such as “did you double ten and then add three?” While in Year 2 a more broad and challenging question was put to those of higher attainment: “can you explain how you worked that out?”
19. In general, teachers have good subject knowledge and so plan activities that are stimulating and relevant to pupils’ interest. Explanations are made more relevant by using practical methods and stimulating resources. For example, in a mathematics lesson in Year 2, the teacher helped pupils gain an understanding of the difficult concept of sorting data by such things as ‘those with brown eyes’ and ‘not brown eyes’ by going out on to the playground and using themselves as objects to sort into the rectangles laid out on the ground. Pupils were full of attention to the matter pointing out anyone who got into the wrong section. In science in a lesson in Year 1, comparing an artificial branch to a similar but living branch focused pupils’ attention well on the attributes of living plants.
20. Teaching is good for pupils with special educational needs and for those who speak English as an additional language. Classroom assistants are knowledgeable and skilful at helping pupils with difficulties in behaviour and in understanding while class session are in progress. They support by making additional explanations and posing specific questions to those who are too reticent to respond in the whole class group or to those who find it difficult to wait their turn. The skill of these sessions is that all pupils take for granted these extra asides while still paying close attention to the class teacher.
21. In some lessons, activities provided for pupils to consolidate their learning in independent work are not as successful as the earlier part of the lesson. Sometimes this is because they do not take enough account of the differing levels of pupils’ attainment. For instance, in the Reception year, children identified the initial sounds of words from the story they had been reading. While this was a good activity for those of average and lower attainment, it presented very little challenge for those of higher attainment. In a science lesson in Year 2, pupils all recorded their findings in the same way. Those of lower attainment, however, needed more support, particularly for spellings, and those of higher attainment were not challenged sufficiently. On occasions, the activity is not well matched to the objectives of the lesson as happened when pupils spent too long copying drawings in a mathematics lesson. Teachers provide effective praise and comments to help pupils understand or improve their work during lessons. Sessions at the end of a lesson are generally used effectively to check how well pupils have understood the objectives of the lesson. When work is marked, some teachers give useful points for improvement, but often marking relies too heavily on a word of praise or a tick that provide little constructive feed back. Teachers sometimes fail to evaluate the effectiveness of activities because they do not plan together.

22. The good organisation of the timetable often helps the quality of teaching and learning. Physical education lessons and music lessons are planned so as to provide contrast to lessons when pupils have to sit still or concentrate for lengthy periods. The afternoon session starts with group reading times that are very well planned and therefore very productive. Those with special educational needs, pupils who have fallen behind in literacy in Year 1, and those who speak English as an additional language all benefit from being withdrawn to a small group but without missing part of the curriculum during these well-planned sessions. The teacher for pupils who speak English as an additional language has a wealth of knowledge and expertise in developing pupils' knowledge and use of English. She builds on what pupils know, extending their knowledge systematically, so that their self-esteem increases and they enjoy their learning. The organisation of books for pupils to read at home is good and many parents make a significant contribution to pupils' progress in reading. Other homework is given, sometimes on an ad hoc basis but pupils' enthusiasm and interest is well supported by work done at home, for instance in mathematics pupils have a small booklet with mathematical problems to complete every half term. In subjects such as science, history, geography and information and communication technology pupils are encouraged to find out information or to write about the topic at home which is a good way of increasing the knowledge they gain in lessons.

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

23. The school provides a good range of opportunities for learning in Years 1 and 2 and in general has improved in this aspect since the last inspection. Good care is taken to make sure that the curriculum is relevant to the interests and stage of maturity of the pupils. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught together with religious education, personal, social and health education. Planning from the viewpoint of the two year period from Years 1 to 2 ensures a good development of skills and knowledge from one year to the next. However, the school has not yet checked to see whether the skills and knowledge taught in Year 1 build on those of the Nursery and Reception years to the best advantage. This is because Reception planning has changed during the current year and there has been no opportunity to review this in the light of Year 1 planning. The school has built on strengths identified at the last inspection in its curriculum planning. It has successfully addressed the main area for development and planning for problem-solving and research skills is now good.
24. Nursery planning makes particularly good use of the nationally recommended guidance to devise a stimulating curriculum well matched to the needs of children of this age. Planning in the Reception is often good. It takes account of the same guidance and includes the national strategies for numeracy and literacy when necessary. However, on occasions in the Reception year, planning fails to provide sufficiently for children to learn and improve their skills through play activities, and in particular to develop confidence and independence in their own writing. In both the Nursery and the Reception classes, planning for children to learn the correct way to form letters does not fully reflect the guidance. There has been a significant improvement in the links between the Nursery and the Reception since the last inspection.
25. Each subject co-ordinator makes certain that planning matches the National Curriculum requirements by monitoring teachers' plans in advance each half term. Nationally recommended schemes and other good schemes are in place and are generally modified to suit the needs of the school. Modifications are undertaken on an annual basis. However, because teachers do not plan together in year groups, the

school does not have a good system in place to check the way in which teachers need to change plans to suit the needs of pupils week by week. As a result, co-ordinators are not in a good position to know if permanent changes need to be made.

26. Provision for developing the basic skills of literacy and numeracy in all subjects is good. For example, pupils tally the number of catches in a games lesson and write their findings during a science investigation. Planning makes satisfactory use of information and communication technology so that pupils learn to display and record their work through the use of computers. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to use information and communication technology for pupils to gather and find information from CD ROMs and the internet.
27. The school is successful in ensuring that those pupils with special educational needs, those who learn English as an additional language and those from different ethnic backgrounds have the same opportunities as others. The special educational needs co-ordinator and the teacher responsible for organising extra help for pupils who speak English as an additional language oversee the planning for their needs very well. Extra help, such as the additional help for literacy, provided by a well trained teaching assistant, for pupils in Year 1 follows the nationally recommended guidance very well and takes good account of their individual needs. However, the school has not yet formally identified those with special gifts and talents, although teachers provide activities with extra challenge, and opportunities such as working with a higher year group for those in their class in the category. Occasionally work in lessons does not take enough account of pupils' individual plans.
28. Through links with the community and with parents, the school provides a very good range of extra learning opportunities for the pupils. A good example of this is the way in which the English co-ordinator has promoted a love of poetry. The school has visits from a local poet and a poetry appreciation club encourages parents and pupils to write poems together. The school's participation in a project to promote the conservation of energy in public buildings by the local council has resulted in six and seven year old pupils understanding that by switching off lights, closing doors and checking for draughts that energy and money are saved. The Nursery's garden flourishes. Pupils learn first-hand that food is produced in this way, with a range of vegetables grown each year which have been entered into the local garden show. The school's potatoes carried off first prize in 2001.
29. The links with the junior school are similar to those at the time of the last inspection when it was noted that a closer partnership in curriculum and assessment was needed. Pupils visit the junior school on one occasion so that they should become familiar with their new school and records are passed up. However, the school has been unable to pursue closer links because there have been a series of changes in the leadership of the junior school.
30. Overall, the school's provision for pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. Provision for their spiritual learning is satisfactory, as at the time of the last inspection. Cultural development, which was satisfactory has improved and is now good.
31. During assemblies and religious education lessons pupils are encouraged to reflect on their own feelings and attitudes and how these might affect others. Assembly themes are often focused on thoughts suggested by pupils themselves. For example a pupil invited the school to think about the help they receive from others and how that impacts on one's own actions. The school develops a climate and ethos in which all

pupils' achievements are recognised. Teachers value pupils' contributions to lessons and assemblies so pupils are confident and honest in their opinions. Pupils experience the creativity of learning in science lessons, for example while observing natural objects at first hand or when teachers encourage pupils to imagine how a story character might feel. Pupils are reflective during quiet moments in assemblies and are thoughtful in their responses to stories such as the good Samaritan which they discuss in lessons.

32. Pupils' moral and social development is good. It is rooted in the ethos and expectations of the school. Pupils develop a sense of moral responsibility by adhering to the 'Golden Rules' which guide them as to how they should behave around the school. Pupils also contribute to their own class codes of conduct and consequently develop a strong sense of what is fair or unfair. The system of team points and rewards encourages pupils to strive to do their best. Pupils learn from role models in stories about the lives of saints for example, or tales of outstanding courage and responsibility. By sharing achievements during assemblies and time at the end of lessons pupils are helped to develop their sense of community. This is also developed when pupils take their turns to be 'energy monitors' for the day, at which times they have the responsibility for turning off unnecessary lights and taps. Milk monitors distribute cartons in the playground at breaktimes and see that they are collected afterwards. Pupils eat in social groups at lunchtime showing proper respect for others in the way that they behave.
33. The school satisfactorily provides opportunities for pupils to develop their awareness of multi-cultural communities. There is a recognition of many faiths and cultures through the religious education curriculum. Visitors who promote the arts of minority cultures are invited to work with pupils. Nevertheless it is recognised that more could be done to celebrate the growing richness in the diversity of cultures within the school.
34. Pupils gain good insights into their own cultural heritage by, for example, visiting Stevenage Museum and St. Alban's cathedral. Theatre groups in school explore environmental issues with pupils and music and poetry workshops are a feature of the school's provision.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

35. The procedures for child protection and welfare are very good and those for the monitoring of pupils' academic performance and personal development are good. The educational and personal support and guidance for pupils' is also good.
36. Child protection procedures are in place and are very effective. The school staff, very well supported by a range of external agencies, provide a high degree of welfare support to individual pupils as exemplified by the provision for pupils with special educational needs and also for those who speak English as an additional language. The day-to-day pastoral and welfare provision for children at the school is particularly strong. In the classroom, teachers are quick to observe any personal difficulties and to take appropriate and remedial action. Teachers are well supported by an effective range of classroom assistants and lunchtime supervisory staff. The school carries out regular health and safety audits of the site and full records are maintained. Fire drills and alarm system tests are also a regular feature of school life and detailed records are kept. There is a little inconsistency in the number of drills carried out each year. Accident records are detailed and well maintained.
37. The school, together with the regular assistance of external agencies, is proactive in the monitoring of individual levels of pupils' absence although insufficient use is made of the computerised records. The monitoring and promoting of attendance levels of pupils are handled sensitively and with a high degree of resourceful management by senior staff at the school. This applies particularly to the occasional lateness of a number of pupils and to a small minority who have poor levels of attendance. The school has developed a range of strategies for the monitoring and control of behaviour and although not needed very often, they are effectively implemented when required. Pupils' academic performance and personal development is monitored both formally and informally by the school and steps are taken to identify individual problems with a range of strategies which may include the preparation of individual education plans for some pupils.
38. The school provides a good level of educational and personal support to pupils, which is aimed at raising their individual achievement. The school acknowledges pupil's individual achievement through the praise given to pupils in the classroom and, more formally, in assembly presentations and in the preparation of annual reports to parents. The very high level of child protection and welfare support to pupils at the school has a significant impact on their learning and personal development and it is a major strength of the school.
39. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and monitoring their progress are good. The school carries out its own tests when children start in the Nursery, and use these as a guide for planning their learning. When children start in Reception, their skills in language, mathematics and personal development are assessed in accordance with national requirements. From these assessments, predictions are made as to pupils' likely achievements by the end of Year 2 and against this a higher target is set to ensure that expectations are raised. There are good procedures to check pupils' progress in the different elements of mathematics and those for English are satisfactory. In science and other subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education a system is used based on identifying all those pupils who achieve above or below the expected standard. Information from different assessments provide a clear overall picture of individual pupil's progress, and is used by the headteacher to monitor the progress of pupils as they move up the school. In science, information from teachers' assessments is not used rigorously enough to guide planning so that

groups of pupils are challenged at the right level. The achievements of pupils with special educational needs are monitored very carefully as are those of pupils who speak English as an additional language. The school has not, however, formally identified those with special gifts and talents and so is not yet able to systematically check their achievements.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

40. Parents' views of the school are good and the school's links with parents are very good. The impact of parental involvement with the school is good.
41. The parents' meeting with the inspectors was well attended and the parental questionnaire was returned by a moderately high percentage of parents. Based on this return, most parents are very supportive of the school and of its aims and objectives. Parents feel that their children like school and that they are making good progress. Parents also feel that the teachers are good and that the school is well managed. Some parents feel that they are not always kept well informed by the school and that the level of homework is not always appropriate. The information provided by the school through the prospectus, annual report to parents and via regular newsletters is, in fact, of a high quality. The school reports, in particular, provide a wide variety of both academic and personal development information about each child in the school. There were a few examples in which the targets stated on the reports were not written in an appropriate language for parents to easily grasp the meaning.
42. A few parents are occasional visitors to the school both in terms of providing very welcome classroom support and in attending school assemblies. All parents have been invited to enter into a home/school agreement which is designed to promote improved relationships between the school, parents and children. The school opens its doors to all parents and the headteacher is proactive in her endeavours to further develop the home/school partnership. At the start of each year, parents receive a welcome booklet which includes very helpful information about the curriculum together with advice for parents on work which children can be encouraged to do at home in order to enhance their learning experience at school. A further very useful booklet is provided with targets and this includes some suggestions for parents of possible 'fun' learning games to be played with their children at home. There is also a good level of additional support provided to the parents of pupils with special educational needs and where English is not the first language. This support extends to home visits for new parents of Nursery children to the school who are also provided with a very useful 'home pack' with suggested games.
43. Some parents also play an important part in their children's education by listening to them read or in assisting them with occasional project work which is related to a particular topic being studied at school. Discussions with a few parents during the inspection supported the view of the majority in the positive message which was portrayed.

44. The school's links with parents provide a very good contribution to pupils' learning and personal development and it is a strength of the school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

45. Overall leadership of the school is good. The headteacher and deputy headteacher lead by example, taking full responsibility for their decisions. All staff and governors are fully committed to the aims and values of the school and to its improvement. At the time of the last inspection it was found that the staff did not fully share a common purpose. Much has been done to improve on that situation and in the main the staff represent a good working team. However, it is still a factor that has some bearing on the management and efficiency of the school. Teachers do not always share their knowledge and expertise, and classroom practice is not jointly evaluated and reviewed. As a consequence, common goals are sometimes missed.
46. The headteacher and deputy headteacher work very well together and their roles and responsibilities are clearly defined so that they accomplish tasks efficiently and effectively. The organisation of the senior management team is relatively new, but it is beginning to have a significant impact on the work of the school and in bringing the staff together as a team. For example, the teacher responsible for leading and overseeing the provision for those with special educational needs has taken very good steps to ensure that the provision for these pupils is as good as possible, working with outside agencies, parents and classroom support assistants to a very high standard, despite being part-time and a class teacher. She has identified the need to ensure that these pupils' individual education plans are used more effectively by teachers in their day-to-day classroom planning because, on occasions, teachers do not plan work at the right level using the pupils' individual education plans as guidance. The member of staff responsible for the organisation and quality of learning in the Nursery and Reception classes (the Foundation stage) who was appointed in September has worked hard to create an effective team. While being a successful teacher and co-ordinator, she was relatively inexperienced in this stage and in the methods recommended in the national guidance for this age range. Her strength has been in using the expertise of the Nursery staff who have worked successfully together for many years to develop and improve the planning for the Reception year. At the time of the last inspection, links between the Nursery and Reception year were insufficient and there was little joint planning. This has improved significantly, although there is room for further development.
47. From September, the deputy headteacher's role has included the overseeing of the work of subject co-ordinators. She has established a good time frame for them to work within, provided support and guidance for their decisions and a clear understanding of expectations for raising pupils' achievements in their subject. This has helped subject co-ordinators to build effectively on their previous practice and all have identified good plans for development. They promote their subject well, often by involving the community or parents, and provide good support and guidance to colleagues. Although classroom observations to judge the quality of teaching are only carried out by the English and mathematics co-ordinators, those responsible for other subjects monitor pupils' achievements in a variety of ways. For instance, the art co-ordinator interviews a cross section of pupils from each class and works with

them to judge the level of their knowledge in one particular skill. Although there is much being achieved, co-ordinators would be more effective if class teachers planned and reviewed work together, making use of co-ordinators' expertise when appropriate.

48. The school analyses data from its own assessments and tests taking the pupils' base line assessments as a starting point. Predictions and targets are set for each pupil and the headteacher checks carefully to see whether these are reached. If they are not, she asks for explanations. The school takes note of how well boys and girls perform and analyses the results of those from different ethnic groups. However, the systems in use for this are not computerised and are therefore time consuming. The headteacher takes care to check the quality of teachers' work and to support and guide when needed. There are appropriate systems in place to implement the process of performance management and teachers are responsive to training and guidance to improve their practice. The training offered to classroom assistants has been taken up very enthusiastically and several have improved their skills in their own time.
49. The governing body is effective in its work. It is well organised, particularly in the way it carefully identifies work for the committees and the areas of work for each governor. For instance, those on the health and safety committee each have a section or item from the policy as their special responsibility so as to ensure that work is not duplicated or overlooked. Governors are very well informed about the school. As well as all the usual systems for providing insight into the school's performance, each governor is linked to a subject and meets with the co-ordinator each term. Priorities are discussed, and the action plan reviewed. This is then reported back to the curriculum committee. In addition teachers provide information about the standards achieved by two pupils in their class, one of average and one of higher attainment, with reference to National Curriculum levels in each subject. Governors are conscientious in ensuring that all legal responsibilities are met.
50. The school's development plan is tightly focused and identifies appropriate priorities. It is much improved as a useful planning document to the one in use at the time of the previous inspection. There has also been significant improvement in the quality of financial planning which is now very good. The governing body is fully involved. The finance officer has a very good grasp of accounting principles and of the priorities for budget planning and management. Financial systems are very good and ensure that educational priorities are well supported. Specific grants are used very effectively for their designated purposes. The current greater than usual carry forward figure has been planned for over a period of time so as to cushion the school against the effects of the significant fall in numbers in Year 1. This means that the current level of staffing can be maintained for the benefit of the pupils. The finance officer works in close co-operation with the headteacher and school administration assistant in providing efficient systems which are responsive to development needs and effective in ensuring that all monies are spent judiciously to support teaching and learning.

51. The school makes efficient use of the teachers on its staff. Those who share jobs work together very effectively. The time and nature of support given by classroom assistants are carefully considered so as to provide the best value. Occasionally, where teachers and classroom assistants are new to their role, classroom assistants' time is not used to best advantage. Teachers do not always take advantage of the open plan aspect of the classes as displays are sometimes duplicated and the efficient use of teachers' time is undermined through the lack of joint planning. The accommodation has some good features such as the large and attractive hall, and it is maintained to a very high standard. Teachers are skilful at ensuring that the open plan nature of the classrooms does not detract from pupils' learning. The Reception year area is large but the many doors and openings make it difficult for staff to create areas for different activities. Some work bays are small and soon become airless. The outdoor play area is exceptionally well developed for the Nursery and Reception year and all of the school's grounds are attractive and stimulating for pupils.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

52. *In order to continue to raise standards, the headteacher, governors and staff should:-*

- 1) improve the consistency with which teachers plan and evaluate their work so as to provide activities that are well-matched to pupils' needs by:
 - planning tasks and evaluating their effectiveness for the future, together in year groups to make best use of teachers' time, strengths and expertise; (paragraph references: 21, 74, 89, 99, 117, 122)
 - ensuring that marking provides clear guidance to pupils on how they can improve their standards; (paragraph references: 21, 74)
and
 - checking that tasks relate to pupils' individual targets when possible; (paragraph references: 27, 80)

- 2) improve the teaching of:
 - letter formation in the Nursery and Reception by a closer match of activities to the steps set out in the national guidance; (paragraph references 17, 61)
and
 - the way in which children are encouraged to write independently in the Reception year by greater consistency in the methods used and a wider range of opportunities to do so. (paragraph references: 16, 24, 61)

In addition to the key issues above, the following minor area for improvement should be considered by the governors for inclusion in the action plan:

The number of pupils who arrive late to school at the start of the morning and afternoon sessions is greater than you would normally expect for a school of this type. (paragraph reference: 13)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	42
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	24

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	1	11	20	10	0	0	0
Percentage	2	26	48	24	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Nursery	YR – Y2
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	31	159
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	n/a	17

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

	Nursery	YR – Y2
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	0	28

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	34

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	8
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	4

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.5

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	26	29	55

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	20	22	26
	Girls	26	27	28
	Total	46	49	54
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	84 (90)	89 (84)	98 (95)
	National	84 (83)	86 (84)	91 (90)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	22	26	22
	Girls	27	29	29
	Total	49	55	51
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	89 (90)	100 (92)	93 (89)
	National	85 (84)	89 (88)	89 (88)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	0
Pakistani	13
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	1
White	76
Any other minority ethnic group	2

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y2

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	8.0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	19.4
Average class size	25.8

Education support staff: YR – Y2

Total number of education support staff	6.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	135

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	1.0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	31.0
Total number of education support staff	3.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	78
Number of pupils per FTE adult	7.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	3.3
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	1.7
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0.0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0.0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0.0

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
	£
Total income	460,398
Total expenditure	435,750
Expenditure per pupil	2,225
Balance brought forward from previous year	45,836
Balance carried forward to next year	52,484

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	186
Number of questionnaires returned	74

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	62	36	1	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	45	49	4	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	38	54	3	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	58	14	4	4
The teaching is good.	57	38	3	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	36	45	19	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	68	27	1	3	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	49	47	1	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	36	43	18	0	3
The school is well led and managed.	54	42	1	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	47	46	3	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	24	27	15	5	28

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

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

53. When they first enter the Nursery, children have a wide range of attainment. Some are very articulate and have a good knowledge of the world around them, but overall most have skills below that expected for their age. Children's progress in the Nursery is very good in all areas of learning. In the two Reception classes, they continue to make very good progress in mathematical development, so that most are on track to exceed the goals for their age in this area of learning by the end of the Reception year. In communication language and literacy, personal and social development, creative and physical development, their progress is satisfactory and most should achieve the goals set for them. However, children do not make sufficient progress in forming their letters correctly and many write words with letters that are badly shaped, and confuse capital and lower case letters when writing their name.
54. Children with special educational needs are given the help they need to learn alongside others. They make similar progress in both Nursery and Reception classes to other children. A few children start in the Nursery speaking very little English and have parents who do not speak English at home, and a quarter come from ethnic backgrounds different to most. All children are helped to settle quickly into the Nursery through the system of home visits and bilingual staff are a particular help those children whose parents speak Urdu. The teachers, Nursery nurses and the bilingual assistant have built very good relationships with parents and their children so that children grow in confidence and make very good progress. Children of higher attainment are given work that is adapted well for their stage of learning in mathematical development and in reading but in some of the other areas of learning in the Reception year work is sometimes too easy for them.
55. The staff in the Nursery have worked together for some time so that there is now very good organisation in which the strengths of all staff are fully utilised. The quality of provision was good at the time of the last inspection and is now very good. Attractive and intriguing resources and effective methods of teaching are underpinned by very good relationships between adults and children. The teachers and classroom assistants in the Reception year are at an early stage of building a team as both teachers started in this year group in September and the classroom assistants have joined even more recently. A good start has been made, particularly with the relationships which are of the same high standard as in the Nursery. Teachers and classroom assistants plan together productively to provide activities that interest and motivate children but some resources and methods are not always well-judged.
56. Teachers in both the Nursery and the Reception assess what children are learning well. Targets are set for each child and all staff contribute daily observations that help check how well children are moving towards their targets. This is a good system to ensure that children can move on to new learning as soon as they are ready and is an improvement on the systems in place at the time of the last inspection which were cumbersome. The links between the Nursery and Reception, which were unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection are now good. A member

of staff has been given responsibility for checking that the national guidance, introduced two years ago, is implemented in both Nursery and Reception years. Some areas have been developed particularly well for joint use, such as the stimulating and well-thought out outdoor play environment. Staff share knowledge and expertise well in the main but there are still some aspects that would benefit from more joint planning, in particular class routines for personal and social development and the organisation and use of writing areas.

Personal, social and emotional development

57. Children make very good progress in developing their personal and social skills in the Nursery, and good progress in the Reception classes. The Nursery is particularly well organised to develop children's independence and routines are well established. Children feel secure in them and very quickly learn to select activities, play sensibly with each other, work at a task until they have finished it and tidy things away when asked to do so. For instance, when working at the painting table which was not directly supervised by an adult, children used brushes, water and dry paint properly to mix their own colours. They chose the right amounts of water and paint and applied the paint to the paper successfully, making decisions that often defeat those much older than themselves. At the end of the activity they left it ready for another to use. Staff use praise and encouragement but firmly insist on the standards expected and children respond accordingly.
58. In the Reception classes, children know what they have to do for themselves at different times of the day. For instance, they know that their change of clothes for physical education is kept in a bag in the cloakroom and they take care to ensure that all their kit is safely stowed away after a lesson. Similarly, they know where to put their book bag that goes home and what needs to be done to change a book. As in the Nursery, staff have high expectations of behaviour and offer praise and encouragement rather than sanctions. In whole class teaching times, very good short sessions on personal and social skills and knowledge help children develop their understanding of such as matters personal hygiene. For instance, in a short ten minute session, the Reception class teacher made skilful use of a big book to help children discuss the importance of washing our bodies and other things such as clothes. Children contributed their own ideas very well and it served as a timely reminder just before lunch time of hand washing. However, simple routines, such as methods to signal tidy up time or the number of children that can play in one area, are not shared between the Nursery and Reception which is a missed opportunity to develop children's understanding by building on previous experiences.
59. The monitoring of children's personal development is very good. Staff discuss children's needs and their progress towards their targets which are in place for each child. Records of their development are made by all staff in the same way as for other areas of learning. Children who speak English as an additional language are encouraged to talk to the bilingual assistant in their own language, if it is the same as hers, when they are upset or too shy to make a contribution in English.

Communication, language and literacy

60. In both the Nursery and Reception classes planning is strong to develop children's skills in speaking and listening and so children achieve well. In the Nursery teachers use a wide range of very good strategies to develop children's confidence to use

language. From nursery rhymes and songs that have a repeating pattern, which are developed and altered by staff and children, to quiet discussion times, language development is inter-woven into the other areas of the curriculum very successfully. A good example was when a member of staff worked with one or two children to help them make a wooden clothes peg into a doll. One very shy child had to be encouraged to participate in the activity. She worked quietly on her own for some time and only when the Nursery nurse could see that the child needed a little help, with the glue to stick the material dress, did the member of staff ask a question or prompt the child to speak, judging the moment just right so that the child began to talk about her doll. In the Reception classes, children talk confidently and freely both in small groups and in whole class discussions because staff promote and value their contributions. Teachers make very good use of stories and books to present language as fun. The week's story about animals had a repetitive sentence, which children enjoyed changing to make their own. Higher attaining pupils thought up lots of changes whilst those of lower attainment were pleased when they described one animal in a different way. A pupil who spoke English as an additional language offered, "They sent me a cat, but he was too scratchy," repeating another child's idea but nevertheless making good gains in his understanding of English.

61. By the end of the Reception year, children reach the expected standards in reading and writing. Reading is taught well in the whole class sessions when a big book is used and particularly well in the group reading sessions. Children enjoy these sessions and are proud of their efforts. During these times, teachers set clear objectives, and take care to check how well children achieve them. Teachers have a satisfactory knowledge of strategies to help children remember and say letter sounds. However, Reception teachers sometimes fail to build sufficiently on the skills and knowledge children already have. For instance, in one lesson, the teacher spent too long checking that children all knew the single sound made by each letter of the alphabet, and missed the opportunity to challenge children to learn two sounds joined together to make another, which many were ready to do. In the Nursery, the teaching of letter sounds is very good. The letter for the week was a matter of much interest and excitement. Children all knew that the name of the witch in their story began with the letter "w" which was the letter for the week. Good opportunities are provided for children to write their name and letters and words that they know, when they are keen to do so, in the Nursery. Children in Reception were keen to write labels and messages for the dress shop, working hard at using the letters they knew to spell words. However, few responded to the request to write a letter to the zoo-keeper because it was not sufficiently linked to their play activities and they could see little reason for the letter. The writing area has some useful resources but not enough support for those who have few words or letters at their disposal. Some resources lack appeal. As a result, children often colour or cut out rather than try to write a message. In both the Nursery and the Reception year, there are insufficient good quality activities that help pupils gain control of up and down strokes and anti-clockwise movements and staff do not check how well children have achieved this so that they can successfully make all letters. In the Reception class, activities often rely too heavily on children copying underneath words written by an adult. This sometimes results in children making less effort.

Mathematical development

62. Children exceed the standards expected of them by the end of the Reception year because the very good teaching in this area of learning is based on high

expectations and work that builds on previous learning. In the Nursery, children enjoy using numbers in their play and staff try to include counting and mathematical activities in other areas of learning. For instance, when printing with blocks the Nursery nurse helped children recognise the repeating pattern that was produced. Work on insects and spiders provided good opportunities for children to check the legs on the models they made. When playing outside in the sand, the activity to build a very high sandcastle encouraged both Reception and Nursery children to use terms such as “taller than” and “much taller than” accurately. Teachers’ high expectations were shown during registration. The children all knew how many were on roll. After considering that one child was absent, the teacher asked them to calculate how many were present. After several tries one higher attaining child achieved the correct number, and they all counted to verify it. In the Reception class, teachers plan activities that build on this good start so that by the end of the year many are confident in making additions of number to ten and have a good understanding of subtracting from a set of number below ten. When playing in the shop two children of average and higher attainment enjoyed sorting the coins in the till. They had a good knowledge of the different value of the coins. They understood that a 20p coin was worth more than a 10p coin and that two 5p coins were needed to make 10p. Children made good progress in learning to tell the time in a lesson in which they used small clock faces to match the time on the large clock face laid out on the hall floor and on which children moved themselves to represent the hour and minute hands. Nearly all, including those with special educational needs, could tell the o’clock times and a good number could recognise half past the hour which is usually not learnt until Year 1. Children learning English as an additional language are helped by practical activities to learn the language of mathematics and they make good progress.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

63. This aspect is taught very well in the Nursery and well in the Reception classes. The very good planning of daily activities in the Nursery helps to ensure that children learn about the world around them from many incidental areas of play and from classroom displays. The tank containing two large African snails is a constant source of wonder to the children who are fascinated by the snails’ spiral shells and large bodies. They watch them feed and know about their needs. In the outdoor play area, children learn about plants from the Nursery vegetable plot which at this time of the year had flowering beans growing up sticks and potato plants almost as tall as the children. While playing in the small patch of earth which represents the garden for the play house, children dig and use wheel barrows as if caring for a real garden: “we need to mix the earth up – it is good for the plants,” explains one child, filling a wheelbarrow with soil. The topic on clothes shared by both Nursery and Reception provided ‘wash-day’ for the Nursery with the emphasis on hanging socks on the line to dry in pairs, and an investigation for Reception into what gets clothes the cleanest – warm, soapy or cold water. Good opportunities for children to make a prediction of which would be best, enabled them to gain greater insight into what was happening when they enjoyed the fun of scrubbing the clothes clean and hanging them out to dry. This planning showed really good progression from Nursery through to Reception, not always present in some of the other areas of learning. They use computers to play games and have begun to write simple words and phrases. Good links with the topic on telling the time provided children with opportunities to

develop an understanding of the different ages in human life and how we respond to them. Children could explain, for instance, the different kind of clothes worn by an older person and a teenager. Almost all children will attain the expected standards and some will exceed them.

Physical development

64. Good teaching in both the Nursery and Reception classes results in children making good progress in this area. Most will achieve the goals set for them by the end of the Reception year. Teachers provide very good opportunities, both in the hall and in the outdoor area, for children to develop confidence in moving about in large spaces. Outside on the short grass, they wheel barrows to an appointed spot and negotiate unusual obstructions on an obstacle course. They judge distance well when running or skipping, avoiding collisions and negotiating their own pathway. In a dance lesson they found ways to use their hands, arms and whole bodies to mimic the movement of a chosen animal, prowling like a tiger or swinging a trunk like an elephant. In a demanding activity in the Reception class, children worked very hard to reproduce a creature from a commercial design using interlocking cubes. In the Reception year children build on their skills from the Nursery when using paint brushes, scissors and pencils. However, a few do not handle small tools such as a pencil as well as expected for their age and need more help than others at learning to manipulate small objects and materials. Teachers give them support during writing activities but have not devised additional activities to help them improve in this aspect.

Creative development

65. This area of development is very well taught in the Nursery and satisfactorily taught in Reception. By the end of the Reception year children achieve the goals set for them. In both the Nursery and the Reception class the topic on clothes meant that dressing up clothes were a feature of provision, and children were encouraged to participate in the role play areas. In the Nursery the clothes rack was there because a fashion show was to be staged. This was an exceptionally good activity, encouraging children's creativity and language. The children all understood their roles, either as a model or as audience. They enjoyed the drama of the moment, trying on their outfits and then parading down the catwalk to the accompanying music. The 'audience' clapped enthusiastically while the Nursery nurse played the part of the commentator. Children's imaginations were all in tune with the impromptu event. In the Reception class role-play took place in a 'clothes' shop. Children took on roles of customer and shopkeeper but they were not fully engaged in the pretence as there was not enough information for them to extend their imaginations or help them devise an event. As a result, no one 'bought' anything and the shopkeepers did not busy themselves looking after the shop. Children are taught very well how to mix paints and know what colours they make. In both classes, there is ample room for them to explore paint and other kinds of picture making. Children sing songs from memory and respond sensitively to music in dance lessons.

ENGLISH

66. Pupils reach standards at the end of Year 2 which are average, apart from in speaking and listening, where standards are above average. National Curriculum test results have varied over the last four years. Those in 2001 were below average

overall, being average in speaking, listening and writing, but below average in reading. Boys did significantly less well than girls in both reading and writing. The results of the 2002 National Curriculum tests that pupils have just sat, although not yet compared to those attained by other schools nationally, show a distinct improvement, especially in boys' attainment. The improvement for both boys and girls, is particularly marked in reading, with a very good increase in the proportion of pupils gaining the higher level. Similar standards were seen in the pupils' work during the inspection and they represent good achievement when compared with the pupils' attainment on entry to the school. Currently there is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls. Pupils with special educational needs, and those with English as a second language, are achieving well. They both benefit from the skilled support and guidance of both teachers and teaching assistants. There has been good improvement in the subject since the last inspection, because although standards are average now, as they were then, more pupils start with lower levels of attainment.

67. Pupils become confident and effective communicators. They listen attentively and respond well to the teacher and to the ideas of other pupils. Both boys and girls, speak and listen confidently in exploring and communicating ideas using a good range of vocabulary, and adapting their speech well to the listener. In class discussion they are lively and imaginative in their response, as they were in a Year 2 lesson where, with great enjoyment, pupils engaged in a lively discussion on the use of words that start with the same letter to achieve an effect in writing.
68. Pupils also learn to communicate well by writing for different purposes. Teachers provide tasks that help pupils form letters correctly, sometimes repeating work covered less successfully in the Reception year. From Year 1 onwards pupils begin to write letters facing the correct way so that they can join letters correctly. By the end of Year 2, pupils of higher attainment write with a joined hand. Those of average and lower attainment achieve well-formed letters of a good size, but many do not achieve a joined hand. Pupils write confidently and independently in short sentences which convey clear meaning. They understand the purpose of capital letters and full stops, but many average and lower attaining pupils do not always use them accurately. Most common words are spelt correctly and, where they are not correct, a good guess is usually made so that the word is readable. Pupils are beginning to use tense correctly, and imaginative, creative writing is developing very well. However, pupils of average and lower attainment do not extend their ideas well enough to achieve the higher levels.
69. Pupils enjoy experimenting with words. They enjoy writing stories and poetry. Year 2 pupils for instance, had great fun writing tongue twisters using words that start with the same letter very effectively. The work of higher attaining pupils was particularly impressive using a wide range of appropriate words. All pupils made good progress, albeit with a more limited range of vocabulary in the case of some average and lower attaining pupils. All had a good understanding of the effects achieved by using a string of words starting with the same sound. They also have a good understanding and recognition of how words can be spelt differently but sound the same.
70. Pupils of higher and average attainment become confident readers of both fiction and non fiction. Most enjoy reading both in school and at home. One higher attaining pupil for instance, said that the enjoyment of his reading at home had led him to write

his own stories. He read fluently from a non-fiction book on Ancient Egypt coping well with long unfamiliar words, using a range of strategies to help with unknown words, and self-correcting with confidence. The reading skills of average and lower attaining pupils also develop well. From Year 1 the great majority of pupils have positive attitudes to books and reading, and most learn quickly to read fluently, understand alphabetical order and the difference between fiction and non-fiction.

71. Pupils' good achievement in English and in the development of their literacy skills, benefits their work in all subjects. It is evident for instance, in their writing and clarity of explanation in history and geography, and also in the ability of higher attaining pupils especially, to access information.
72. Pupils respond very well in lessons and participate with enthusiasm. They are attentive, eager and engage in tasks very quickly. They work hard and concentrate well, working productively in groups and supporting each other in their learning. They behave well and classroom relationships are very good.
73. Pupils' good achievement and very positive attitudes, reflect the good quality of the teaching which has significantly improved since the last inspection. Teaching was good and at times, very good and excellent, in all of the lessons seen. The evidence from inspection shows that teaching is consistently good with major strengths in teachers' good subject expertise, clarity of explanation, consistently high expectations and skilled behaviour management.
74. Lessons are well organised, and most are well structured. Clear learning objectives, stemming from teachers' good expectations of pupils, are shared at the start of each lesson. Teachers provide concise explanations, well focused questioning and imaginative teaching strategies. This was shown clearly in a Year 1 lesson where pupils made excellent progress in developing their reading and writing as a result of the teacher's challenge to them to complete writing a 'big book' which she had started but not finished. Highly skilled questioning enabled them to make excellent progress in developing their ideas, use of words, and in writing independently and confidently. In this lesson and in many others, progression and coherence in learning are strongly promoted by reading and writing activities which are well interrelated. Brisk, purposeful approaches and well-timed activities, attract and sustain pupils' interest and active involvement from the outset in most lessons. There are a few however, where too long is spent on the first part of the lesson so that pupils becoming restless and lose attention. Pupils' contributions are strongly encouraged and often used well as teaching points. For instance, the remark made by a Year 2 pupil that the same sounds could be spelt in different ways was very well developed by the teacher to develop pupils' spelling skills further. All tasks are clearly explained and teachers reinforce key learning points, for instance, the use of capital letters, systematically. Independent activities when pupils' practise and develop their skills are generally well organised. However, on some occasions, tasks do not relate sufficiently to previous learning. One reason for this is that teachers do not always evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching. Another is that written work is marked regularly but marking is not always accompanied by formative guidance for improvement. Often the comment is restricted to a single word of praise with no suggestion about how work could be improved further. These were issues raised at the time of the last inspection and have not been addressed yet.

75. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils, and a good working atmosphere are sustained by positive feedback, encouragement, and skilled and unobtrusive management of behaviour. The support provided for pupils with special educational needs by learning support assistants is very good, and in some instances, outstanding. They work well with these pupils both in class and when pupils are given support in special groups. It enables pupils to work well and with confidence. Pupils' personal development is well supported, and teachers use satisfactory methods to check pupils' individual progress and understanding in different skills, such as their knowledge of letter sounds. Longer term assessment procedures are good. They are used to track and monitor pupils' progress against prior attainment and National Curriculum levels, and to set targets for improvement. There are very good procedures for the assessment of progress made in reading by pupils with English as an additional language. Similarly good tests are in place to check the rate at which these pupils acquire fluency in speaking and understanding English.
76. The curriculum provides a good range of learning opportunities and is strongly enhanced by the strong emphasis on language development especially through speaking and listening, poetry and drama. The regular visits from poets in residence and poetry work shops involving parents, significantly enrich pupils' language development. Schemes of work are based upon the guidance and requirements of the National Literacy Strategy. However, teachers are not consistent in the way they evaluate their work, and they do not make enough use of the information gained from these evaluations to plan future work. As a result, the level of work provided does not always match the needs of pupils, especially those of higher or lower attainment.
77. There is good leadership of the subject because the curriculum co-ordinator provides clear direction for work in English especially through her enthusiasm for language development through poetry and drama. Both standards and teaching have improved since the last inspection. The procedures introduced to address the issue of boys' underachievement have been particularly effective. Teachers are well supported through training and guidance.

MATHEMATICS

78. The school has made significant improvements in the standards achieved in mathematics in the last two years. In 2001, all the pupils achieved the expected level in the National Curriculum tests. However, in that year, the school did not do as well as other schools because too few pupils achieved the higher level. The co-ordinator identified the need to provide more challenge for pupils with higher attainment after the National Curriculum test results for 2001. This was achieved by making sure that a support assistant provided extra work for this group. As a result, a good proportion of pupils achieved the higher level in the National Curriculum tests at the end of this year.
79. Overall, the standard of pupils' work currently in Year 2 is average as it was at the time of the last inspection. However, this does not reflect the improvements that have occurred as there has been good improvement since the last inspection. More pupils are now attaining both the expected level and the higher levels than at the time of the last inspection. The school was asked to improve pupils' skills in problem solving and in using their knowledge in practical investigations. There has been a

great improvement in these aspects. Pupils' explanations of how they have arrived at a calculation are very good. They set about solving problems with confidence. In Year 1, for example, a higher attaining pupil was able to explain several different ways of arriving at the same answer to the addition sum of 50 plus 23. Pupils are given good opportunities to use their mathematical knowledge to solve problems involving money and the measurement of time, length, weight and quantity.

80. The school keeps a close check on how well pupils achieve each year and this shows that those pupils currently in Year 2 who have been at the school from the start of their education achieve well. A significant proportion of pupils in Year 2 did not start their education at Parkgate, and of these, a few joined during Year 2, working at a much lower level than others in the class. These pupils did not have time to catch up and do well in the national tests. The achievement of pupils who speak English as an additional language is good because teachers are knowledgeable about the best ways to support their learning. They are often given an extra explanation or are helped to understand the meaning of what is being taught through a picture or practical example. In a similar way, pupils with lower attainment are helped to develop their skills. Just occasionally, work is not set at the right level for them because teachers have not paid enough attention to their individual plans. Nevertheless, overall their achievements are good.
81. In Year 1, pupils respond well to simple quick-fire addition and subtraction problems using numbers up to 12. Pupils of higher and average attainment can respond accurately to questions such as "what is the difference between 7 and 12, turning the numbers round to make a subtraction sum. Those of lower attainment sometimes confuse the operations of addition and subtraction, but when reminded can add and subtract numbers up to five successfully and can add or subtract in ones or twos to 20. One or two pupils with special educational needs still need counting aids to add numbers such as 3 and 2. Through working with numbers set out in a square to 100, pupils are able to count on or back in tens. Their understanding of the value of different digits according to which place they are in the number is good. For example, a pupil of average attainment said that it was easy to add units to numbers with tens "because the first number stays the same, you just add the units".
82. Pupils in Year 2 explain how they have arrived at an answer to a calculation very well. This provides a very sound basis for pupils to develop and improve their mathematical skills and it is as a consequence of the very good questions that teachers pose to help pupils develop this skill. All pupils realise that there are a variety of ways of working a sum out. Pupils who speak English as an additional language use mathematical terms such as, 'I doubled ten to make twenty' successfully. However, some pupils of average and lower attainment are slower than expected in responding to simple mental calculations because they know too few number facts without recourse to working out them out with an aid such as counters or their fingers. Most pupils, especially those of higher attainment, use the strategy of doubling a number well. For instance, while most of the class could tackle doubling numbers such as 30, 50 and 100, higher attaining pupils doubled 150 quickly. Pupils can estimate numbers they are familiar with well and understand that estimation is a helpful tool and does not have to be exact. In a Year 2 lesson, pupils learnt to classify objects according to one criterion. This is a difficult concept that involves pupils understanding the terms 'those who are seven' and 'those who are

not seven'. They used their knowledge and previous experience of organising information in different ways very well and so were able to tackle work that is usually done in Year 3.

83. Pupils learn at a good rate because the quality of teaching is good overall. Teachers present mathematics as an interesting and enjoyable subject, taking the lead from the subject leader whose good organisation of a mathematics week led to mathematics being linked to every subject in the curriculum. Good knowledge of the subject and the methods recommended by the national guidance for numeracy ensure that teachers pose questions skillfully. Pupils are keen to start their mathematics lessons and pay close attention throughout the mental arithmetic sessions. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' concentration and use of correct mathematical terms. For instance, in a lesson on fractions when the teacher asked the pupils to clarify their understanding of what constituted a half, she was able to ask "what is the critical thing about a half?" when the word 'equal' was not forthcoming. The pupils understood the word 'critical' and it helped them arrive at the required answer. Lessons move at a good pace, but teachers are sensitive to those who need a few extra moments to answer. Classroom assistants and extra teachers for the support of those who speak English as an additional language are organised very well so that their skills can benefit the pupils as much as possible. Occasionally, mental practice sessions are rather short and do not provide enough time for those of average and lower attainment to practise their skills. There are a few occasions when activities do not quite match the learning identified in the objectives for the lesson and as a result do not advance pupils' learning as well as the class sessions. Teachers do not plan together in year groups. This means that they miss the benefit of discussing what went well and what was less successful.
84. The subject is well led. The co-ordinator correctly identifies areas for development through the end of year national tests, and as a result the school's recent well-judged action has brought about improved results. Although not carrying out classroom observations, the co-ordinator has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching through monitoring the pupils' work. She identified the need to improve the quality of activities and purchased a good commercial scheme to address this problem. The scheme has been partially successful but because teachers do not always evaluate the success of lessons well enough there is still a need for development in this aspect. The recent mathematics' week resulted in pupils, parents, staff and visitors enjoying a range of stimulating activities that raised the profile of mathematics in the school and the parents' contribution to pupils' learning at home.

SCIENCE

85. Teachers' assessments of the standards attained by pupils at the end of Year 2 show them to be in line with expectations for that age. They are similar to the national averages for 2001 and have been maintained since the previous inspection.
86. Over time pupils achieve well because of the quality of teaching they receive. They develop good attitudes, show interest in science and work hard. Since the last inspection, a programme of in-service training has consolidated teachers' subject knowledge and there is now more practical investigative work that helps pupils' knowledge and understanding of the life processes, materials and forces.

87. By the end of Year 2 most pupils understand that living things grow and reproduce and that there are similarities such as the need for water and nutrition between plant and human growth. Pupils know that proper care and a healthy lifestyle are important to a child's growth.
88. They make good progress in their learning when, for example, they discover the extent of the root systems of potted plants and break open the seed pods to search for new seeds. Pupils know that materials are suitable for different purposes, and some can be changed by heating or cooling. For example, pupils understand that the process of freezing can be reversed, but changes to materials as a result of baking are irreversible. They know there is a range of electrical appliances and can construct simple electrical circuits. Pupils investigate pushing and pulling as forces to work out what makes objects move, or what causes them to slow down.
89. The quality of teaching throughout Years 1 and 2 is good. The unsatisfactory teaching previously reported has been eliminated. This is a good improvement since the last inspection. Good learning is underpinned by the quality of the relationships established. Teachers create a calm and supportive climate for pupils, and value their contributions to discussion so they express their views confidently. Resources to help pupils' learning are used well. In one lesson pupils expressed their amazement on seeing the network of roots grown by a small flower. Pupils had the opportunity to handle plants and to observe them closely using their senses to gain good first hand experiences. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. They know pupils well and work closely with teachers to provide the best support for their groups. Pupils who learn English as an additional language are given very good help in acquiring the scientific vocabulary they need to record their views. Teachers' subject knowledge is sound and helps them to plan satisfactorily. There are some inconsistencies, however, between classes in the depth to which topics are taught. This is because teachers do not sufficiently share their knowledge in order to plan and evaluate pupils' learning. Where written lesson evaluations are done, they are often not followed up in subsequent weekly plans. There are also inconsistencies in teachers' marking where too often it does not indicate what needs to be done in order to improve the quality of work.
90. Literacy skills are promoted well through science. Teachers encourage pupils to record work clearly, using the correct terminology. A good example of this was the work of pupils of higher attainment in Year 1, who kept good records in their 'bean diaries' when their seeds germinated, and the root and stem began to appear. Although there is some use of information and communication technology to record work, this is limited and opportunities are missed for more imaginative use of computers in order to challenge particularly the recording skills of higher attaining pupils or to help those who learn more slowly than others record their work without adult help.
91. The subject is managed satisfactorily. The co-ordinator, who has been in place since September, has checked standards attained in National Curriculum tests and usefully identified areas in need of extra attention. The school has adapted recent national subject guidance to support planning and resources have been bought to ensure learning needs can be met. The school's pond and 'wild-life' garden provide effective resources for the study of life processes and there are plans to develop a 'science trail' around the school. The co-ordinator gains an overview of the work in the school through planning, displays of work and informal discussions with colleagues, but the

outcomes are not evaluated rigorously enough in order to plan strategies for further improvement.

ART AND DESIGN

92. Standards seen in art meet the expectations of pupils at the end of Year 2, and have been maintained since the previous inspection. The curriculum provides a satisfactory range of experiences overall but the exploration of three-dimensional media is not a strong feature in the school.
93. In painting and drawing, pupils use a variety of tools, including charcoal. By the end of Year 2 pupils control pencils and paint brushes well and skillfully copy the small details of objects they observe. Pupils draw a selection of fruit and plants delicately, and use colour sensitively to highlight their features.
94. Collage skills are developed throughout Years 1 and 2. In Year 1, for example, pupils learn to curl, twist and crumple paper in order to create different textures, which they use as features for the pictures of ducks they make. Pupils in Year 2 discuss Matisse's work 'The Snail' and adapt the 'spiral' concept from the picture to develop their own collage using paper, fabrics and wool. Pupils were further inspired by the presence of a pair of African snails which the teacher had brought in to the lesson.
95. Pupils learn basic printing techniques and are given good opportunities to explore their understanding pattern in a variety of media. They had made, for instance, repeating patterns on coloured paper, patterns in paper and wool weaving, and clay tiles imprinted with patterns found on buildings. Pupils in Year 2 are encouraged to draw on personal experiences. This was seen in the attractive stained glass window designs which they made following their visit to St. Alban's Cathedral.
96. The quality of teaching overall is satisfactory. Art lessons are prepared well so that there are enough resources to engage all pupils fully in the work. Teachers make an effort to stimulate interest by providing interesting tasks which give pupils a sense of achievement. As a result, pupils concentrate and strive to finish their work. Teachers and assistants are supportive and use encouragement and praise well. This gives pupils the confidence to evaluate what they have done and try to improve their work. Teachers' half-termly planning is satisfactory in that it maps out the areas to be covered and some approaches to be taken. However, what pupils are expected to learn is too often confused with what they will do. This results in art skills not being clearly identified and taught in a systematic way throughout the school.
97. The co-ordinator has good subject knowledge and expertise, and endeavours to maintain the profile of art in the school through organised art weeks, with a particular emphasis on the art of minority ethnic cultures. Good links with the community are fostered through contributing to local displays of children's art, for instance, in a nearby supermarket. There has been some monitoring for progression in painting skills in all classes. The outcomes of planning require more rigorous monitoring in order to build on pupils' current achievements. Currently the school does not identify those with special gifts or talents in the subject.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

98. Pupils reach the standard expected by the end of Year 2, although in some aspects pupils' exceed the expectations for their age. There has been good improvement since 1997, when the school was last inspected. Teaching is now better and the subject's links with literacy and numeracy are good. There is adequate scope for pupils to develop their knowledge of the design stage and their making skills are satisfactory. Teachers' help pupils evaluate their work particularly well and so pupils have a better understanding of this aspect than in most schools. The good feature of the teaching in this aspect was seen in one lesson when evaluation took place during the making process rather than waiting until the product was finished. This was effective because it is often difficult for pupils of this age to attempt to identify ways in which they could have done better. The subject is used well to develop pupils' confidence in their own efforts. In lessons, adult support is targeted well at those who need it most. As a result, the achievements of those with special educational needs are of the same satisfactory standard as that of others. Those who speak English as an additional language make good gains in learning English by participating in the group activities and the enjoyment of practical tasks.
99. Teaching is good and whole school planning provides a framework for skills to be developed systematically. The good relationships that teachers promote and the consequent good attitudes of pupils to their work promotes their interest and learning well. In Year 2, pupils made good gains in their understanding of mechanisms by learning about the properties of an axle and drum in a winding mechanism. They had learnt examples of this mechanism in the real world, both in historical terms, citing the bucket and rope pulley of a village well and in modern terms in explaining how the mechanism is used in a crane. They build on the skills they have learnt in Year 1 to cut, glue and stick, although some do not make good choices about what to choose to join card together, often going for the quick solution of using sticky tape when glue would be more suitable. In a good lesson in Year 2, pupils' enthusiasm was tangible about the task they had in hand. It was to work in a small group to make a scene in a box with a moving figure using a winding mechanism. Their enthusiasm stemmed from having been given the opportunity to interpret their own ideas. Every group had produced a different idea, and from a boat tossing on a stormy sea, to a boy bouncing on his bed, the ideas showed a high level of creativity. Most groups worked well together, but in a few groups, those who were diffident, spent too much time watching others. The teachers' well targeted support helped to improve this and to generate a good level of discussion on how to solve the problems presented by the task. Through sensitive comments and questions such as "how could you improve ...?" the teacher skilfully helped pupils develop their skills in evaluating their own efforts. In the other Year 2 class, pupils produced a toy but all followed the same idea, to make 'Insey Winsey spider' climb up a 'spout'. The focus of the work was improving the pupils' skills and the finished products were of a good standard. However, because teachers do not plan together in year groups inconsistencies in provision occur. The aspect of design was missing from the work of one class while making and finishing skills could have been improved in the other.
100. The leadership of the subject is satisfactory. A programme of work based on the nationally recommended scheme for this subject has been adapted well to meet the needs of the school. The co-ordinator checks teachers' plans to ensure that the elements of the subject are planned for adequately. However, without recourse to discussions with teachers in year groups, she is not in a position to evaluate how well each element is taught. The assessment of pupils' achievements is carried out by checking the level of attainment of one average and above average pupil for each year

group against the requirements of the National Curriculum. This is reported to governors, and while it is an effective way for them to oversee the subject it does not provide a clear enough picture of pupils' strengths and weaknesses in each class.

GEOGRAPHY

101. As at the time of the last inspection, pupils reach the standard expected by the end of Year 2. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls.
102. By the end of Year 2, pupils have good knowledge and understanding of the topics being studied. They have good knowledge and understanding of places for instance, and are able to recognise similarities and differences between those in different locations such as Watford and the Orkneys. Their geographical skills develop well from Year 1 onwards. For example, in addition to making comparisons, they learn to trace routes and develop good map skills using key symbols confidently to identify features. In the Year 2 lesson seen pupils made very rapid progress in identifying features on a map of Poole, using a good range of geographical terminology to describe both those on land and on the coast. For instance, they quickly identified the coastline, quays, harbours and the location of the coastguards. Higher attaining pupils especially, were knowledgeable in describing the function of coastguards and the purpose of signals such as red flags. All pupils learn to produce clear maps and diagrams with good labelling and annotation, but those produced by many average and lower attaining pupils are significantly less clear than those of higher attaining pupils.
103. Pupils enjoy geography. They are very attentive and listen carefully. They are well behaved and keen to contribute, work hard and concentrate well. They work productively together supporting each other's learning.
104. Teaching is good. This was evident in the lesson observed where teaching was very good, pupils' work and displays, and in teachers' planning all of which clearly indicate appropriately high expectations and good levels of challenge Pupils learn well as a result of lessons being well planned, structured and clearly focused. They are helped to deepen their knowledge and understanding through clear explanation and skilled questioning which tests and extends their learning. Pupils are appropriately challenged through activities being well paced and matched to their learning requirements, and high expectations that they should work accurately as geographers. Year 2 pupils for instance, made good progress in their exploration of natural and physical features as a result of clear explanation, probing questioning and a constant challenge that they should work accurately. Their knowledge and understanding of different locations were significantly enhanced by the skilled use of a toy Bear called Barnaby, who accompanies pupils on their travels, to identify routes and features. Literacy and numeracy skills are both well supported and used to enhance pupils' learning. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because of the very good support by both teachers and teaching assistants which significantly enhances pupils' access to learning.
105. Pupils' progress is monitored through the regular marking and assessment of their work, and formal end of year summative assessments linked to National Curriculum levels. Not all marking, however, provides sufficiently clear guidance for improvement.

106. Pupils' good achievement and the good teaching are strongly influenced by the good leadership of the subject that provides clear direction for work in geography. Teaching is well supported by clearly focused schemes of work and policy for the teaching of geography, both of which are kept under review in terms of their effectiveness in meeting pupils' learning needs. The curriculum provides a good range of learning opportunities and is fully inclusive, but, as at the time of the last inspection, the school does not use the locality of the school enough to provide field work, especially in Year 2. The use of information and communication technology to foster geographical investigation skills, particularly through the use of geographical web sites, is being developed well. There has been good improvement since the last inspection in the quality of teaching, the focus on geographical skills and the provision of schemes of work.

HISTORY

107. By the end of Year 2 pupils reach above average standards in history. This is an improvement since the last inspection when standards matched the average. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and those pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve very well over time in comparison with their attainment on entry.
108. From Year 1 onwards they develop good historical knowledge, understanding and skills, and learn to understand differences and similarities between the past and present. In a Year 1 lesson on changes in railways, for instance, pupils quickly identified the changes in the shape, construction and powering of trains over the last 150 years and placed the changes in the correct sequence. Higher attaining pupils confidently made links between steam trains and the Victorian period, and could recognise and describe similarities in the trains at different stages. Higher attaining pupils especially have a remarkably good sense of time and chronology. Those in Year 2 readily dated photographs of seaside holidays from scrutinising dress and activities, confidently distinguishing between those of 50 and 100 years ago. They thus make impressive progress in the development of the key historical skills of interrogation and interpretation of historical evidence. Skills of empathy also begin to develop well as shown in their work on the diaries of Samuel Pepys and the study of the Fire of London. Most written work is factually accurate and, as in their work on the life of Florence Nightingale, shows the beginning of good historical explanation and description. Literacy skills are well supported and used, and numeracy skills drawn upon effectively in for instance calculating the passage of time. The use of information and communication technology to support enquiry is being developed mainly through the location of historical web sites.
109. Pupils respond very well in history lessons, often with great enthusiasm. They are attentive during plenary sessions and work very hard individually and in groups where they work productively together often helping each other with their work. They concentrate and behave well. The good classroom relationships are strongly supportive of learning.
110. Pupils' interest and very good achievement stem from the good teaching, and especially from the strong emphasis on the development of historical skills which is highly effective in enabling pupils to develop well-advanced skills at a relatively early stage. Teaching was good in both the lessons seen during the inspection, and a pattern of consistently good practice is evident from the scrutiny of pupils' work and displays, and teachers' planning. All reflect consistently high expectations especially of the development of historical skills. Teaching has significant strengths in the clarity

of teachers' explanation, the introduction of evidence-based research, the challenge of questioning and guidance of group work. All work, tasks and learning objectives are explained very clearly, helping pupils to develop a very sound basis of knowledge and understanding. Pupils know what is expected of them, and are thus able to work confidently on the tasks set. Questioning is used very effectively to enable them to scrutinise evidence closely. In the Year 2 lesson on the Victorian seaside, for instance, pupils were constantly challenged to look closely at pictorial evidence and to explain how we know about the past. Group work was very well guided to test and extend pupils' understanding, and to encourage pupils to look for clues in their interpretation of photographs. There are good opportunities for pupils to share their findings, as in the Year 1 lesson when pupils were encouraged to think and share their findings about how trains were built and powered.

111. Pupils' progress is closely monitored and tracked through the regular marking and assessment of their work, and formal end of year summative assessments linked to National Curriculum levels. Not all marking, however, provides sufficiently clear guidance for improvement.
112. Work in history is very well supported by the very clear direction provided by the curriculum co-ordinator. Provision is monitored and kept under review. Teaching is well supported by clear schemes of work. The curriculum provides a good range of learning experiences and is significantly enhanced by the focus on living history and the use of local museums. The annual Victorian day organised by a local museum is particularly valuable in deepening pupils' understanding and empathy with life in the past. Skills and understanding are also significantly strengthened by the use of artefacts and well chosen resources. There has been good improvement since the last inspection especially in standards, and in the quality of teaching and resources.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

113. By the end of Year 2 standards are typical for pupils of this age in most schools. This is similar to the standards reported previously and indicates that the school has kept pace with developments in information and communication technology since the time of the last inspection. Overall improvement since the inspection in 1997 has been good.
114. Most pupils in Year 2 have satisfactory skills in word processing. They use function keys on the computer to check the spelling of their work and know how to save, retrieve and print. They practise these skills, for example, when writing their own stories and poems. Pupils gather and enter simple data which they later represent in graphs. When seeking information pupils confidently use CD-ROMs and some are beginning to gain experience of using internet. They learn that robotic toys can be controlled by a series of instructions and use directional language effectively when building control procedures.
115. Teachers plan work so that all pupils have an equal opportunity to use equipment and to develop their knowledge and understanding. As a result, the achievements of all pupils, including those with special educational needs, are satisfactory. In literacy lessons, computers are used to help pupils improve their spelling and punctuation. Picture story programmes are used effectively to help those who learn English as an additional language extend their vocabulary. Pupils in Year 1 improved their understanding of how to construct a sentence as a result of using a programme linked to the books that they regularly read in class. However, in mathematics, science and design and technology, opportunities to use computers and to develop

ideas further through the use of information and communication technology are sometimes missed. The school recognises the need to use information and communication technology more effectively across all subjects and this is reflected in current plans for improvement.

116. A small proportion of pupils acquire skills at home which are beyond the expectations for their age. Although their talents are recognised, little is done to build on what they know and can do, for example by planning a more challenging learning programme for them.
117. The leadership of the subject is sound. National funding has been used effectively to upgrade resources and enable whole staff training. The school has recently gained access to the internet but there has not been time to integrate its use into planning in different subjects. The curriculum is planned thoughtfully to ensure a steady progression of skills and there is an effective system for recording progress and attainment which is linked to key learning objectives. However, there are inconsistencies in the way in which information and communication technology is used in different year groups and teachers are not pooling their knowledge of which programs work well and which could be improved to enable the co-ordinator to gain a clear view of what needs to be done to improve provision.

MUSIC

118. Music plays a good part in the life of the school. Pupils enjoy singing in assembly and in their lessons and there is a good programme of work to develop their skills and knowledge in all elements of the subject. By the end of Year 2, all pupils attain standards expected for their age, while those who attend the weekly classes for recorder playing exceed them, as was found at the time of the inspection in 1997. This is similar to the findings at the time of the inspection in 1997.
119. In Year 2, pupils are familiar with a wide range of percussive instruments and can play them in different ways to produce a musical effect. In a lesson using a range of instruments, both tuned and untuned, they quickly learnt that sounds can be represented by symbols. In response to the mood created by a poem about the sea, they made good suggestions about which instrument best represented the different parts of the poem. About a third of the pupils in Year 2 attend the lunchtime recorder group. They read simple lines of music using traditional notation and play tunes in unison with each other. They understand that if it is blown too harshly the instrument goes out of tune, and they have a good understanding of the rhythmic elements of the pieces. In dance, pupils listen to music well and have a good knowledge of how different styles of dance reflect music from different cultures and times.
120. Teachers follow a commercial scheme that provides a range of musical experiences so that pupils' skills develop while participating in the enjoyment of music. In a very good lesson in Year 1, for instance, the teacher's own strong musical skills promoted a lively lesson in which pupils developed an understanding of the difference between beat and rhythmic patterns while enjoying performing and singing. In another lesson the objective for the lesson was achieved but there were few opportunities for pupils to express themselves musically or to experience the enjoyment of song.
121. The leadership of the subject is sound, as is improvement since the previous inspection. The co-ordinator has good knowledge in the subject and can provide guidance to colleagues. An overview of the standards achieved by pupils is maintained by identifying those who are at the highest level and those who fall below

the expected level. However, currently no record is kept of those with particular gifts or talents. Because teachers do not plan and evaluate their work together, teachers with expertise in the subject do not share this with those colleagues who are less musical.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

122. Physical education is used well to provide pupils with a healthy lifestyle and to contrast active periods of the day with more sedentary lessons. This promotes learning and good levels of concentration both in physical education and in other subjects. By the end of Year 2, standards are in line with national expectations and pupils' achievement are satisfactory, as was found at the time of the previous inspection. Because teachers have very good relationships with pupils, all the pupils are keen to participate in physical education activities, even those who have newly joined the school and have little English at their disposal.
123. Teachers have good knowledge of how to plan lessons that promote pupils' understanding of the part exercise plays in a healthy life. For instance, in a Year 1 lesson on outdoor games, the pupils warmed up their bodies by choosing for themselves from a range of stretching exercises, showing good awareness of the need to start gently and then progress to more rigorous stretching. By the end of Year 2 pupils' respond very well to the stimulus provided by music in dance lessons. For instance in a good dance lesson, the teacher chose music based on the sailors' hornpipe dances of earlier times. Pupils were very familiar with the rhythm of these traditional dances and so fitted their actions and dancing into the timing of the music very well. In this lesson pupils' skills in individual movements were good but they needed help from the teacher to find patterns to create simple dances. In games their skills in running and using a ball were good but they did not have the opportunity to try simple competitive games.
124. Teaching is satisfactory in the most part with some aspects that are good. Teachers and pupils dress appropriately and care is taken that any jewelry is safely dealt with. All lessons are well prepared, well organised and mostly move at a good pace. Teachers' good control and expectations of pupils' participation are communicated well so that pupils' behaviour is very good and all are attentive. All lessons were characterised by some good strategies and other aspects that were weaker. For example, in a lesson on outdoor games, the teacher made good use of those pupils who succeeded well at a task to demonstrate their skills to others, but opportunities were missed to help pupils use their good ball skills in a simple game. In a dance lesson, the teacher provided timely guidance to pupils when they worked together in groups to devise their own dance but did not spend enough time in the initial part of the lesson improving the quality of pupils' work.
125. There is satisfactory leadership of the subject as the headteacher has temporary responsibility for the subject. Planning takes good account of the breadth of study and the best way to organise the timetable so that pupils have as many opportunities as possible to develop their skills and learn the importance and pleasure of being active. Currently teachers' checks on standards achieved identify those who have particular strengths and those who struggle which is a satisfactory system. However, records are not kept of those with particular talents.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

126. Standards in religious education have been maintained since the previous inspection and remain in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus.
127. Pupils gain satisfactory knowledge about Christianity and other faiths and from their knowledge gain insights into some of the values which guide people's lives.
128. By the end of Year 2 most pupils know of the significance of some religious symbols in Christianity and other world religions such as the crucifix, the Q'ran and Muslim prayer mat. They learn about important religious leaders and the special responsibilities of those in authority, as well as how Muslim, Jewish and Christian festivals are celebrated. Pupils discuss common principles such as 'it is better to give than to receive', and to talk about the differences between right and wrong.
129. Teaching and learning are good overall. It was very effective in a lesson for Year 1 pupils because the teacher introduced role-play into the story of the Exodus. This added to the interest of the lesson and helped pupils remember the account of how the Israelites escaped and the pursuing Egyptians were drowned. There was also some good learning in a lesson for Year 2 pupils because of the teacher's skilful questioning which encouraged pupils to talk about 'special people' and the use of photographs to prompt those who needed more support. Literacy skills were also promoted well in the lesson when the teacher explained terms such as 'immediate family' and the 'extended family' so some pupils could use them appropriately in their writing. Teachers generally provide good opportunities for pupils to talk about their own feelings or share their views about the importance of kindness or making difficult decisions.
130. The subject is led and managed satisfactorily. The curriculum is relevant and has been thoughtfully adapted to suit the needs of the school. Resources have improved significantly since the last inspection and are used well to support learning. The headteacher, who co-ordinates the provision for religious education has a clear overview of the subject's strengths and areas for development which include a more effective use of information and communication technology to record the pupils' progress both in writing and speaking. Pupils in Year 2 benefit from their visit to St. Alban's Cathedral where they gain valuable insights into the Christian heritage including the making of stained glass as well as the story of the first Christian martyr in England.