

# INSPECTION REPORT

**ST MARY'S VA CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
LOWER SCHOOL**

Clophill

LEA area: Bedford

Unique reference number: 109617

Headteacher: Mrs C Spurgeon

Reporting inspector: Carol Worthington  
20609

Dates of inspection: 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> February 2002

Inspection number: 195541

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Lower
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	4 - 9
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Rev. Margaret Venables
Date of previous inspection:	28 <sup>th</sup> April 1997

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

This smaller than average Voluntary Aided Church of England Lower School in the Diocese of St. Albans has a close relationship with St. Mary's Church, Clophill and caters for 113 children in four classes - two of which have mixed age year groups - between the ages of four and nine years. There are currently more boys than girls. Seven children attend the reception class part-time. Children come from a variety of backgrounds, from professional to the lowest income bracket, in the local village and surrounding areas. Two are from an ethnic minority. Five per cent accept free school meals, which is below average. Eighteen per cent are identified as having special educational needs; one has a statement of need. These figures are below the national average. Attainment on entry to reception is well below the local education authority average, because children are tested up to a year earlier than others in the county. By the age of five, when they begin full-time education, attainment is average.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

This is a highly successful and effective school with its own self-evaluation process firmly embedded. Educational standards are high and have been improving every year since the last inspection as a result of good teaching. Children are well motivated and have a mature responsibility towards learning, testimony to the school's philosophy to educate the whole child. Leadership is strong and purposeful by the headteacher, senior staff and governors, who manage the school well. The school provides good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- High academic standards.
- Leadership, with its strong sense of purpose and vision.
- Teaching.
- Provision for children with special educational needs, including the gifted and talented.
- Provision for social and cultural development.
- Provision for extra-curricular activities.

#### **What could be improved**

- The teaching of spelling.
- Equal opportunity in the curriculum for children in Year 3.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school was last inspected in April 1997, since when it has made very good improvement. The key issues have all been fully addressed; provision for special educational needs - at both ends of the ability range - is now particularly successful. Early identification is well made and children's individual needs are efficiently met. Issues relating to English and homework have been superseded by new initiatives, such as the National Literacy Strategy and the home-school agreement, which have been fully implemented. The provision of furniture, accommodation and resources for the under-fives has improved, but the school has plans in hand for a new Early Years wing, to which more resources are being directed. Other resources have improved greatly, with a purpose-built room for information and communication technology (ICT) and a brightly furnished library. Standards in the school have been rising constantly; the attention the school pays to methods of teaching and learning is having a particularly good effect and enables all children to learn well. Older children are especially aware of how well they are learning through their discussion with teachers and peers and the setting of targets. Due to the corporate commitment, the school is in a good position to make further improvement.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 2 based on National Curriculum test results.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
Reading	B	A	A*	A*
Writing	A	A*	A*	A*
Mathematics	C	B	A*	A*

Key	
Very high	A*
Well above average	A
Above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E

Performance by seven year-olds in the National Curriculum tests in 2001 in English and mathematics and in teachers' assessment of science was very high, in the top five cent of the country. A high percentage of children achieved level 3 in all tests. Standards have improved over the last three years in excess of the national rising rate. The ambitious targets have been regularly met or exceeded. Currently, children are working at the same level in the top class; in Year 4, they are well above average in English and mathematics. At the end of reception, standards are average and children meet the early learning goals for the Foundation Stage of learning, but the current Year 2 is not as high achieving as last year's group. An above average proportion are achieving an average standard for their age, but there are currently fewer children reaching a higher level. An inability to appoint permanent staff for this class has left some gaps in provision. However, the successful annual enrichment groups run by the headteacher and her deputy began at the beginning of the academic year and are already proving to be effective.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Children are eager learners and keen to succeed.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Children behave well, particularly when motivated by their teachers. Sometimes in their enthusiasm, they are too noisy.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. This is a strength of the school; its pervading philosophy to educate the whole child has produced a maturity in children beyond their years, in caring for younger ones, doing jobs around the school and evaluating their own learning.
Attendance	Satisfactory, broadly in line with the national average. Unauthorised absence is nil, but many parents take their children away during term time, even though the school regularly reminds them of their responsibilities to make sure children are present for the end of year testing, especially in Years 2 and 4. Punctuality is satisfactory.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Reception	Years 1 – 2	Years 3 – 4
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Good

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

Teaching is good overall throughout the school, resulting in good progress. Particular strengths lie in the provision for the older and younger children. There are very high expectations throughout the curriculum in the top class, so that well above average standards are being maintained. The teaching of children with special educational needs is of high quality and results in learning difficulties being overcome quickly. The enrichment provision for the very able, gifted and talented children – particularly in mathematics – enables these children to extend their gifts with a good deal of satisfaction. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is good overall, though of a lower standard in the current Year 2. During the inspection, teaching in the Year 2/3 class was not as strong as that throughout the rest of the school, and scrutiny of work shows some unsatisfactory features over the year. However, the headteacher and her deputy have this under control now, and a permanent teacher has been appointed from the beginning of next term.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a good, broad, relevant and well-balanced curriculum. All statutory requirements are met.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Children with special needs at both ends of the ability range are very well provided for.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall, especially for social and cultural development. Children develop a spiritual awareness through well planned opportunities throughout the curriculum. They have a good sense of right and wrong. Relationships are very good at all levels and children are very willing and able to take responsibility. The school provides very well for their cultural development through visiting theatre groups, for example, and has won an international school award through its efforts to make children aware of the diversity of cultures in Britain and abroad.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares for its children very well. Pastoral care and attention to health and safety are very good. Assessment is good, especially for older children who become very involved in setting their own targets for improvement.



## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher is a strong, effective leader who is supported well by her deputy and senior staff. This ensures that her very good vision for the development of the school is successfully realised through good teamwork, in which all staff play a significant part.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. The governors are very supportive of the headteacher and know the school well. A particular strength is the way in which governors monitor the school's provision through their close involvement with the children's progress.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. This involves the whole staff and governors. Educational priorities are clearly identified and targets set, monitored and evaluated regularly.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes very good use of all its resources and plans well ahead, ensuring it obtains best value from all provision, which is directed very well towards the raising of standards.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The standards the school achieves in all subjects.</li> <li>• Provision for all kinds of special educational needs.</li> <li>• The attitudes and values the school promotes.</li> <li>• Leadership and management of the school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The amount of homework given to younger children (too much).</li> </ul>

Inspectors agree with parents' positive views. The provision of homework is according to the school's policy, which obeys national guidelines, but the school could consider the importance of other activities children may like the time to do out of school.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

#### **High academic standards.**

1. Performance by seven year-olds in the National Curriculum tests in 2001 in English and mathematics and in teachers' assessment of science was very high and in the top five per cent in the country; a high number of children achieved level 3 in all tests. Over the last three years, standards have been consistently high in writing and have shown considerable improvement in reading and mathematics. Although the school only enters small numbers for the tests and some fluctuation can be expected from year to year, the average points score, which more accurately charts the achievements of all children, also shows a remarkable rise in reading and mathematics – greater than the nationally rising trend – with no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls.
2. During the inspection, the standards of work seen in the top class, comprising children in Years 3 and 4, were high, reflecting their well above average achievements in the National Curriculum tests in previous years. The Year 4 children's standard of mathematics has improved since their Key Stage 1 tests, as a result of the school's focus and they are being particularly well challenged by competition from some very able Year 3 children in the same class, whose standard of work is well above average. Their teacher places great emphasis on pattern finding and the solving of mathematical problems, which are produced not only by her, but also by the children themselves and which show their developing love of mathematics. Children in the top class quickly double and halve large numbers, such as 260, 340 and 450, in their heads, and explain their methods well. They have a very good knowledge of mathematical vocabulary and concepts, looking for patterns, for example, in number grids when some children were heard identifying square roots and were confident in using methods involving near doubles to estimate an answer.
3. In English, they were very well motivated by the horror story genre, discussing in great detail how the author built up tension by using phrases such as 'the shadow moved', 'the soft chuckle' and 'the dummy's hand was humanly warm'. This and further discussion showed both boys' and girls' ability in speaking and listening to be well above average and the written work produced was also of a high standard, similar to that seen in their exercise books. Children were seen reading books by R L Stine, Roald Dahl and other similar authors with great enjoyment and using vocabulary gleaned from these and other books accurately in their own work.
4. This Year 2 is not such a potentially high attaining group as last year's seven year-olds and children have not done as well as they could this year. Most are working at the expected level for their age and, whilst this in itself is above average, there are not enough reaching the higher level, even though many are capable of doing so. This is because they have had a temporary teacher for part of the year who has not covered the programme of study in sufficient depth, nor planned to extend the capabilities of the more able either in literacy or numeracy. This is being dealt with by the headteacher and her deputy who are successfully providing enrichment classes to cater especially for the brighter children who are now having their intellect challenged. Children's ability in speaking and listening is above average, but in reading is about average. In writing and spelling it is barely average; the full range of writing is not covered. In numeracy, once again, there has been scant coverage of the programme of study, and whilst the overall standard is similar to that found nationally, it has been kept artificially low by their temporary teacher's low expectations of both level and productivity and his inadequate planning and evaluation of lessons. Standards are about average in science in Year 2; children predict and test which materials will be attracted by a magnet. In geography, they identify natural and man-made features on an aerial map of the locality, once again achieving average standards.
5. It was not possible to see lessons in all subjects during the inspection, but from children's work on display and from talking to them, standards in Year 4 are judged to be above average in science. Children apply their knowledge of friction to determine where on a bicycle it needs to be reduced in

order, for example, for wheels to move freely and where it is useful in braking. They have a good understanding of the structure and function of a human skeleton and muscles and compare the changes in size as children grow by measuring the arms and legs of their partner children in reception and comparing them with their own. Children also achieve high standards in history when studying the Ancient Greeks and Romans, in geography where there is good evidence of knowledge of Kenya, brought to life by postcards written from an imaginary holiday there and in the design of a promotional T-shirt in design and technology. The use of information and communication technology is obvious in many examples of children's work, such as the design of posters to advertise Kenya and in the making of two-dimensional 'nets' to be used to produce a three-dimensional shape in mathematics. They have good skills which they utilise well whenever possible. Standards in art are well above average in both key stages.

### **Leadership, with its strong sense of purpose and vision.**

6. The headteacher has very good vision for the development of the school and has brought about very good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in the standards achieved by the children, which have improved each year since then. The underlying philosophy of the school is to develop children as independent learners, capable of taking individual responsibility for learning and for evaluating it. The headteacher has been successful in melding staff into a competent and effective team whose work reflects this philosophy. In turn, the children are very confident in deciding how well they have learned, and how they could do better. The head teacher is very well supported by her deputy and the special educational needs co-ordinator who are both responsible for putting in place and assessing many of the enrichment and remedial methods, crucial to the raising of standards.
7. A strong system of school monitoring and evaluation has grown up since the last inspection and this is regularly reviewed by all staff to keep up with current initiatives. The headteacher reviews short term planning and then monitors its realisation by observing its quality in the classroom. Subject co-ordinators monitor the medium term plans of all staff, checking for progression of skills and knowledge and teachers themselves evaluate how successful their own planning is in the effectiveness of children's learning. In this small school, subject co-ordinators competently take on responsibility for several subjects and when one of theirs comes up for review, they disseminate expertise well by teaching alongside colleagues to ensure common high standards throughout the school.
8. The governing body is very supportive of the school and plays a full part in monitoring the curriculum through classroom observation by designated governors, who then write a report to the full governing body. Governors with responsibility for literacy and numeracy carry out this monitoring every term; the governor for special educational needs does so annually. The curriculum committee liaises well with the subject co-ordinators, receiving their completed evaluation sheets from their monitoring and raising any concerns which governors may have. Governors also play a crucial part in monitoring the development of the whole child and this provides an effective mechanism for recording this important process. Governors make this a focus for their visits to school; they are all attached to a certain number of children in the school and visit them to discuss their personal 'book of achievement'. These books are a good measure of children's growing confidence, self-esteem and maturity. The governors' contribution of notes to the book produces a good record of the child's progress in this area.
9. The majority of staff participate in the whole school self-evaluation, which is having a very good effect on the teaching and learning process. At the heart of this lies the goal of the production of excellent lessons leading to excellent achievement and high standards, reflecting the high expectations of the headteacher's vision. She has led staff very well into consideration of different learning styles, with planning for clear learning objectives at its heart, concentrating on outcomes of what children learn now and will do in future. This is proving most successful in raising standards.
10. All the school's targets on its improvement plan relate to the raising of standards and all available funding is used very well, particularly in the deployment of teaching assistants to focus on specific

groups of pupils during any one week. These groups vary from those with special educational needs, including the gifted and talented, to the average, thus ensuring that the best value is obtained. Financial planning is very good; the school funds its development well, and has at present a large sum earmarked for the proposed Early Years wing.

## Teaching.

11. Teaching is good overall throughout the school, resulting in good progress. Of the 12 lessons observed during the inspection, eight were good or very good. Particular strengths lie in the provision for the older and younger children in the school. There are very high expectations throughout the curriculum in the top class, so that their well above average standards are being maintained. In a very good lesson on horror stories, for example, the teacher led the class in discussion so well that a tense excitement was generated not only about a particular story, but about the genre itself. Children were motivated to reach their teacher's high expectations in the production of inspirational pieces of art work, for example, based on 'The Snow Queen' or of a winter landscape. In the reception class, there are many good opportunities for learning, based on teachers' good knowledge of how young children learn, with great emphasis on practical activities such as sand and water play, and role play in the Travel Agents in which children practised their emergent writing on travel tickets. In a good lesson with reception children, the teacher successfully encouraged independent learning by putting some interesting objects by the water tray, expecting children to predict which would float and which would sink. Having successfully triumphed here, the children were then able to compare heavy and light objects.
12. Teachers have a good knowledge of the National Curriculum and its requirements. Their expertise is particularly good for the juniors in all subjects, shown by the great depth and breadth of work produced by all children in the top class. In their preparation of the promotional T-shirts for Kenya, for example, children researched materials and different methods of applying paint; they also worked with great understanding when showing how muscles and bones work together in supporting the body and enabling it to move. At the other end of the school, the teacher's good knowledge of the National Literacy Strategy was demonstrated for infants in Year 1 by comprehensive planning with a practical focus on spelling, vocabulary and grammar; clear learning objectives for children of all capabilities guided them as they worked in their groups, writing sentences about where a particular character might live. The planning of literacy in Year 2 was satisfactory, but the teacher did not stick to it and therefore did not cover the work planned; the children were consequently unsure of what they had to do for their group tasks. Conversely, the depth of planning in the Year 4 literacy lesson was detailed enough to include specific reference to use of classroom assistants, one of whom took a group of children off to the library while the other consolidated the knowledge of another group by guiding them well in reading additional texts. The class teacher had carefully chosen 'response partners', enabling a lively and evaluative discussion to take place as they excitedly read the openings of their own stories to each other.
13. Numeracy is taught well and reinforced daily through simple activities such as those seen in reception after the register had been taken; the children counted forwards and backwards from the number of children present in the class. The very good resources in this class, for example a large snakes and ladders game, 'compare bears' and multi-link cubes and shapes – squares, triangles and circles – showed the breadth of the curriculum covered, as did the pictograms children made of their favourite fruits. Mathematics is developed particularly well for older children, especially in the top class, where there are some gifted boys who have a real talent in this field. They are served well by their teacher issuing tough challenges, setting each other problems to solve and by the enrichment courses provided. These children extend their gifts with a good deal of satisfaction.
14. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are developed well by relevant use in all areas of the curriculum. Data analysis, for example, is used in science measurement, literacy is extended in the writing of history and geography and ICT is used well in research. Many homework projects reinforce literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.
15. Assessment is a great strength of most teachers. They mark books well and regularly, with

targets for improvement. However, the school aims for its children to be self-evaluative and to be able to set their own targets. Teachers begin this process in the younger classes by making sure that all know the lesson objectives and understand if they have met them by the end of the lesson. As children get older, they discuss their progress with their teachers, agree how far they have gone towards National Curriculum levels and acknowledge what they have to do to improve. They also become proficient at assessing their own work through group and paired discussions with their chosen 'response partner'. This was seen as a very important means of assessment in an art lesson, where children showed great maturity in discussing their work and suggesting how it could be improved.

16. During the inspection, teaching in the Year 2/3 class was not as strong as that throughout the rest of the school and scrutiny of work shows it has had unsatisfactory features over the year. In this class where a temporary teacher is currently employed, there was little planning and consequently, children are not learning as well as others in the school. Notwithstanding, the head teacher and her deputy have this under control now and a permanent teacher has been appointed from the beginning of next term.

### **Provision for children with special educational needs, including the gifted and talented.**

17. Provision for special educational needs is very good. This was a key issue at the last inspection and the school has fully dealt with it. Children's special educational needs are identified early in their school life and measures are immediately put into place to address their specific problems. This very often results in the children coming off the register before they leave this school, or even sooner. Although the co-ordinator is only part-time, she leads very well. The full-time assistant is a very good practitioner and central to the provision. She is always trying out new methods of helping children's literacy to develop by, for example, writing letters in the sand tray before putting them on paper, or the use of computer software to motivate and challenge children. A particularly successful method of teaching children letters and sounds was seen through the use of the 'Animal Alphabet' with infants and reception, which has motivated some children so much that they have progressed well enough to come off the register in Year 1 and are now reading well above their chronological age.
18. Teachers write individual education plans (IEPs) for children in their class in liaison with the special educational needs co-ordinator. The IEPs seen were of good quality, with clear, measurable targets known to the children and the adults who work with them. A few IEPs have been written for gifted and talented children: the co-ordinator includes special educational needs at both ends of the scale in her brief. This is particularly helpful in keeping a check not only on the academic progress of the gifted children, but also emotional difficulties which may be as a result of children often working with others older than themselves. The 'enrichment' sessions for the most able – especially in mathematics – are very successful in that they enable children to devise and use their own methods of solving problems. Children in Year 1 were seen concentrating hard on the pattern they were trying to find. They were all able to count on in fours from a random starting point. Several pointed out that starting on an odd number would finish on an odd number and similarly with evens. Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to extend the capabilities of these children, for example by providing random number squares to be blanked out and numbers put back in using the correct sequence. The patterns generated by one young boy were exceptionally complex for his age and showed considerable talent.
19. Very good use is made of withdrawal sessions – even ten minutes before lessons start in the morning has a very beneficial effect – though it is the school's policy for most of the special educational needs teaching to go on in class. This is at its most successful in literacy and numeracy sessions where classroom assistants concentrate on small groups for a particular purpose. It is not necessarily only children on the register who receive such specific help. In a good literacy lesson, an assistant reinforced the learning objectives with a particular group of children who were then better able to produce plans for their stories on the rain forest. In another literacy lesson in Year 2, however, a class assistant was leading a group of average children well

in guided reading, but previously, she had not been deployed well in class by the teacher and time was wasted.

20. Provision for all aspects of special educational need is highly dependent on the very well trained and professional classroom assistants, who carry out their role very well indeed. They are a strength to the school's provision.

### **Provision for social and cultural development.**

21. It is the school's philosophy to educate the whole child and it is very successful in putting this into practice. By the time children leave school, they are confident, able to speak with clarity and self-assurance in front of their class or in assembly. They unselfconsciously discuss their work with their teacher, their peer group and their 'response partners' and evaluate their own progress in a remarkably mature manner.
22. This practised philosophy begins in reception when children are encouraged to be independent; the teacher and classroom assistants lose no opportunity to encourage them all to take part in every activity. They provide many activities each day which stimulate children to learn; as they become accustomed to the routine, the children happily and confidently choose which they will do and the teacher keeps a careful check on their progress. When coming in from a physical education lesson, children showed strong independence in getting themselves changed, ready for a social drinks time with a story.
23. Children in Year 1 also showed good social skills, encouraged well by their teacher as they participated in an action song. They showed a strong awareness of the effects of their performance as they unhesitatingly did the associated actions. In Year 2, there was no shortage of volunteers to demonstrate the early morning exercises done in class – nearly all children wanted to go to the front and demonstrate.
24. Children in the top class are very mature and confident for their age as a result of the programme for personal development which they have been part of for some years. They are used to discussing their work with different members of their class at different times; they take responsibility around the school, preparing for assemblies, for example, or taking charge of younger children during assembly. Assemblies also provide a good platform for children to speak: in one seen on the school's Lent appeal, some spoke clearly and confidently about the children at the special school playgroup for whom they are raising funds, describing their problems in a way which showed sympathetic understanding. Later on, these speakers were seen running their Lent games, which they had made themselves for fellow pupils and parents in the hall. They did this with great aplomb, confidently giving change and explaining the rules of the games.
25. Cultural education is much enhanced by visits and visitors to the school, such as a theatre group who recently performed 'The Snow Queen', which inspired so much imaginative poetry and art work in the school. There is much musical activity, too, with a Christmas production, singing in church and the choir performance at the cathedral.
26. The school is in a countryside area where there are few people from ethnic minorities, so it makes a concerted effort to prepare its pupils for life in the European Community by having a French club and a French exchange visit for Year 4 children. Registers are often taken in French and children showed their understanding of the language particularly well when the headteacher gave an assembly in French, without warning. The children participated in French, throughout, showing their great self-confidence and ability to take matters in their stride.
27. The school is the only one in Bedfordshire to win an International School award from the British Council for its work in helping children gain understanding of different races and cultures across the world. There have been many exciting events and visits as a result of the project. The school

has had visits from overseas students and teachers, who have shown children various aspects of other cultures. A Japanese student, for example, came for two terms, during which all children had a chance to learn about Japanese culture, such as preparing and eating sushi and making origami bookmarks, which they did with great interest. Swedish teachers visited the school and prepared the way for Swedish pen-friends to be established. The St Mary's 'travelling Teddy' has been to some exotic places, like Sydney and Hong Kong, Switzerland and Africa, creating a great interest and encouraging the writing of imaginative stories.

28. The culmination of the work for the International award was International Day in which the school became a make-believe airport and children were transported to various 'countries' (other rooms in the school) enabling them to find out about the food, culture and costumes of people in Asia, Europe, Africa and America through practical activities – such as designing and making boomerangs of Aboriginal Australia - and all coming together at the end for a feast of all foods.
29. Children also learn, through some work on the Heartstone project, about different cultures, racial harmony and tolerance at their own level, which prepares them well for life in Britain's multi-cultural society.

### **Provision for extra-curricular activities.**

30. The school makes very good provision for extra-curricular activities, which enrich the statutory curriculum and enable children to gain confidence and self-esteem by taking part. Particularly notable is parental involvement in the out-of-school clubs. They run a very successful football club, for example, on Saturday mornings with three teams that play in the mid-Bedfordshire league. Another parent runs a popular writing club for older children. She has already produced two beautifully illustrated booklets and is currently producing another for the school website. Parents are also involved in SMEEE – St Mary's enjoyable environmental enterprise.
31. Music and drama play a large part in the life of the school and there is a very successful choir, which has recently sung in St Alban's Cathedral with the Bishop present. Many of the older children have instrumental lessons from the violin teacher who comes once a week. The whole school takes part in the Christmas concert and productions; notable this year was Baboushka. In the summer, there is maypole dancing. A plethora of magnificent art work has been produced in response to a visiting theatre company's performance of 'The Snow Queen', showing artistic skills well above average for all ages.
32. At any lunchtime, children are seen in the computer room. A club is run by a student teacher who is very helpful with individual research projects, such as that about Roman Britain. There is also 'Mega-maths', which parents believe is invaluable for helping their children to acquire a love of mathematics.
33. Probably the most adventurous activity is the French exchange visit made by children in Year 4 who much enjoy visiting their French pen-friends and spend one day in school with them.

## **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

### **The teaching of spelling.**

34. The school itself has identified spelling as an area for improvement, as the spelling marks for National Curriculum tests have been lower than the overall grades for writing and reading. In books from Year 2 to Year 4, it was obvious that spelling mistakes are common and not corrected, even amongst the older children. They were not observed using dictionaries to check spellings during the inspection.
35. Children in Year 2 do not appear to be using phonic methods to attempt spellings. In a literacy lesson, they were observed to have 'word books' and to ask adults to spell a word for them instead of trying to build them from phonics before asking an adult. Discussion with children indicated that

they do not know many methods of trying to spell words independently, but can use letter sounds if they are strongly encouraged. The special educational needs co-ordinator says that spelling has always been a problem and whilst resources such as 'Animal Alphabet' and computer spelling games are used, the school does not use a phonics scheme as such.

### **Equal opportunity for children in Year 3.**

36. There are seven Year 3 children in the Year 2 class and ten in with Year 4, placed according to age and capability. Those in the top class are being taught at the same level as the Year 4 children and following the correct literacy and numeracy programmes for their year. Their teacher has high expectations of them and they experience a rich curriculum, having studied, for example, the skeleton and muscles at a high level. They have looked at the geography of Kenya and designed and made a promotional T-shirt, discovering methods of weaving fabrics. Their mathematics and English are well above average.
37. In the Year 2 class, the Year 3 children are not given the same opportunity. Their science is a Key Stage 1 study of magnets; in geography they do the same local study as the Year 2 children and their literacy and numeracy is at infant level. The amount of work seen in their books is much less than that seen in the books of their counterparts with Year 4 and it has not been rigorously marked, neither is there evidence of discussions with their teacher about targets in the same way as the others have. They are not receiving the same opportunity as the Year 3 children in the top class. Their teacher's planning does not specifically take them into account and they are therefore not achieving as well as they could.

### **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

38. In order to improve further, the headteacher and governors should:

(1) improve the teaching of spelling by:

- exercising higher expectation that children will spell correctly and correcting them every time they misspell a word;
- making sure children build up words phonically;
- encouraging the use of dictionaries to check spellings;

*(paragraphs 34 and 35)*

(2) ensure equality of opportunity in the curriculum for children in Year 3 by:

- rigorous monitoring of provision for children currently in Year 3 to ensure that they receive their full entitlement to the curriculum for their age group.

*(paragraphs 36 and 37)*



## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	12
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	16

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	2	6	3	1	0	0
Percentage	0	17	50	25	8	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 eight percentage points.

### Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	YR – Y4
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	113
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	YR – Y4
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	17

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	8
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.8

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0

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	12	7	19

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	11	10	11
	Girls	6	6	6
	Total	17	16	17
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	89 (100)	84 (100)	89 (100)
	National	84 (83)	86 (84)	91 (90)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	12	11	11
	Girls	6	6	6
	Total	18	17	17
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	95 (100)	89 (100)	89 (100)
	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	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	2
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	78
Any other minority ethnic group	0

*This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.*

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

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

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

### ***Teachers and classes***

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y4**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	4.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	22
Average class size	24.3

#### **Education support staff: YR – Y4**

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	84

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	2001/2
	£
Total income	267575
Total expenditure	240111
Expenditure per pupil	2266
Balance brought forward from previous year	44053
Balance carried forward to next year	71517

### ***Recruitment of teachers***

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	3.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	2.4
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0.4
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

*FTE - full-time equivalent.*

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

92

Number of questionnaires returned

70

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	53	43	3	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	43	50	3	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	49	9	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	50	9	0	4
The teaching is good.	50	43	0	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	57	11	3	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	70	21	4	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	64	33	0	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	41	44	13	1	0
The school is well led and managed.	57	33	1	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	53	40	4	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	40	39	13	1	6

### Other comments

The size of the reception class.

Very good support for children with difficulties.