

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MARY'S RC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Blackhill, Consett

LEA area: Durham

Unique reference number: 114248

Head teacher: Mrs C O'Brien

Reporting inspector: Miss W L R Hunter
3277

Dates of inspection: 18th – 19th February 2002

Inspection number: 195700

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant and junior
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	4 to 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Pemberton Road Blackhill Consett County Durham
Postcode:	DH8 8JD
Telephone number:	01207 502657
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Father M Whalen
Date of previous inspection:	May 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	4
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	9
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	12
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	15
FOCUSED INSPECTION OF THE WORK OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS TO SUPPORT LITERACY AND MATHEMATICS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS	16
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	17

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St. Mary's RC Primary School is an average sized school for four to 11 year olds, serving the Catholic communities in Shotley Bridge and Blackhill, on the outskirts of Consett in County Durham. There are 264 pupils at the school with a reasonably equal balance of boys and girls. The current Year 5 is a very large year group and, because the school can admit 40 children into reception, this has caused mixed age classes at various stages. The organisation of these changes each year. The level of free school meals (15 per cent) is broadly average. Forty pupils have been identified with special educational needs (this is below average) including five pupils with statements of need ranging from physical conditions to behavioural and learning difficulties. There are no pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and all pupils speak English as their first language. Pupils come into the reception class from various nurseries and play groups in the local area and this gives a very wide and mixed intake to the school. When children first start at the school most are working slightly above the levels typically expected for four year olds and have good social skills, although some struggle with their speech and language.

A new head teacher joined the school in September 2000 and there have also been significant changes on the governing body since the last inspection.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school with particular strengths in the way it supports the personal development of pupils. Children in the reception class are taught very well and get a very good start to their education. For other pupils, teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good, and they get a sound education. Standards in English, mathematics and science are just above the levels expected for 11 year olds by the end of Year 6, but standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are not high enough. The school's test performance compares favourably to other schools but the school has all the ingredients to challenge pupils even further, especially the more able, and to reach even higher standards. The head teacher and governors are leading and managing the school very well through a period of significant change. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The school provides very well for pupils' personal development. This helps pupils to develop excellent attitudes, behaviour and relationships.
- Children in the reception class get a very good breadth of experiences. This gives them a very good start to their education and sparks their curiosity for learning.
- The school's pastoral care is very strong and stems from the belief that the 'whole' child should be valued, nurtured and developed. This is supported very well by the caring ethos, high quality displays and links with parents and the local community.
- The head teacher and governors have established a strong and effective partnership. They have recognised the need to put as much emphasis on pupils' academic progress as their personal development and have begun to shift this balance by focusing more critically on the teaching and learning in the school.

What could be improved

- Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are not high enough.
- More able pupils are not being challenged consistently enough to make sure that they realise their academic potential.
- The school development plan needs to be more precise and to set a clear and workable agenda

for the school's continued improvement.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The last inspection was in May 1997. The school has made sufficient progress and improvement since then. Staff have received training in design and technology and information and communication technology (ICT) and resources have been updated and improved in both these subjects. There are still some gaps in ICT that affect standards but the school has completely replaced its old and redundant equipment and has clear plans to continue investment in this area. Practical aspects of mathematics and science have improved and pupils are more confident in these subjects.

There has been a change of head teacher and governors since the last inspection. The effectiveness of the school development plan lapsed prior to this and during the time it took for them to get to know the school. The school currently has a management plan that gives a broad overview of its priorities but there is now a need for a clear development plan to help identify and underpin future improvements linked to these priority areas. Despite this, the school has a good capacity for further improvement.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 6 based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
English	B	B	C	C
mathematics	B	B	B	A
science	B	B	B	B

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

Children start in the reception with a good base of skills. They progress well to the point that they are working above the levels expected by the time they are ready to move into Year 1. Most pupils make steady progress through Key Stage 1 and, by the end of Year 2, standards are still just above where they should be for seven year olds in reading and writing. Standards in mathematics and science are not quite so high but are satisfactory.

Steady progress through Key Stage 2 results in the standards that continue to be just above the levels expected for 11 year olds at the end of Year 6. However, the more able pupils are not challenged as well as they could be and this means that the standards could possibly be even higher if a greater emphasis was put on ensuring that this group achieved their potential. The school has continued to improve its test performance at a slightly faster rate than most other schools over recent years. However its targets are achievable and could be nudged a little higher to be even more challenging.

Standards in ICT have suffered because the school does not have sufficient equipment to teach the full range of skills needed and there have therefore been gaps in the curriculum offered to pupils.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils focus in very well on the work in their lessons despite distracting noise from other classes due to the open-plan nature of the building. They concentrate well and are really keen to learn. Pupils are proud of their school and want to do well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Pupils have a very clear sense of right and wrong and take great pride in their behaviour. They are extremely polite and courteous.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. This starts very effectively in reception and is then followed on throughout the school. Pupils feel part of a big family. They look out for each other and know that they are valued and important.
Attendance	Good. Rates of attendance are above average. Pupils enjoy coming to school.

Pupils' excellent attitudes, behaviour and relationships are key strengths. They reflect the caring nature of the school and the importance that is placed on developing pupils' personal characters.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Reception	Years 1 – 2	Years 3 – 6
Quality of teaching	Very good	Satisfactory and sometimes good	Satisfactory and sometimes 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 very good in the reception class and gives children a great boost when they first start at the school. This helps them to settle quickly and supports good progress in all areas of their learning. Elsewhere, teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good. Teachers give pupils a broad range of experiences and literacy and numeracy are taught effectively.

Teachers use questions particularly well when working with all the pupils as a whole class and this capitalises on the excellent relationships that exist in the school. When pupils are working in groups, teachers match activities sufficiently well to meet most of their needs but they are a little tentative when it comes to challenging the more able pupils, in case pupils fail to achieve every time. There is a tendency for these pupils to be given the same work as the majority of others in the class and be expected to finish faster before moving on to an extra task. Consequently, teachers do not always fine tune the original tasks sufficiently to stretch these pupils and maintain a consistently fast rate of learning.

Teachers make effective use of ICT to support pupils' learning, especially in English and mathematics. However, they neither have the equipment nor the time identified in their planning to teach pupils the skills they need to reach satisfactory standards in this subject.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. Children in the reception class get a very good range of experiences. The curriculum in Key Stages 1 and 2 is satisfactory with the exception of ICT, which is not currently meeting requirements and is hampered by a lack of equipment and sufficient space for pupils to use computers effectively.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory. Pupils have a combination of additional adult support during some lessons and some withdrawal for group work on literacy skills.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The school celebrates its Catholic nature very well and encourages pupils to grow spiritually. The curriculum makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development and the school's ethos of care and respect positively support this.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. The school is very caring and gives strong pastoral support to pupils.

The school actively and successfully supports pupils' personal development. There have been many new projects and activities introduced in the past year that are starting to broaden pupils' experiences. For example, older pupils go on a residential visit to France. The quality of display around the school is very high and celebrates pupils' achievements well. Links with parents and the local community make a good contribution to pupils' personal development.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the head teacher and other key staff	Satisfactory. The head teacher and Key Stage 1 co-ordinator provide very good leadership. They are clear about where the school can improve and have created a climate where change is starting to take place. However, this is being driven by these particular key staff and is not yet supported by an effective school development plan. Management is satisfactory. Co-ordinators are beginning to assume meaningful roles and are starting to be more actively involved in managing their subjects.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactory. Governors have had a steep learning curve recently but are coping well and are relishing the challenges facing them. They fulfil most of their responsibilities and have allocated additional funds to tackle the problem of ICT equipment in an attempt to improve provision and raise standards in this subject.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. Many staff and governors have little experience of analysing and evaluating the school's performance but they are learning and are starting to ask relevant critical questions, with an emphasis on teaching and learning.

The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory. The school uses grant funding and adult support appropriately and considers best value in its spending decisions.
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The school has undergone significant change in the past year and a half and is continuing to evolve. The head teacher and governors have worked very well together to promote developments that are starting to give a better balance between pupils' personal and academic performance. They have a clear understanding of what the school needs to tackle over the coming years but this is not laid down sufficiently well in the school development plan. Consequently, this is not an effective strategic planning document. It does not set a clear enough agenda for the whole school and does not have sufficiently tight links to the finances available.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school is approachable. They feel welcome and their children enjoy coming to school. The teaching is good and their children make good progress. The school is well led and managed and the head teacher keeps them well informed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A small number of parents are not satisfied with the arrangements for homework. Many parents queried the range of activities outside lessons.

Inspectors agree with parents' positive comments about the leadership and management of the school and the welcoming atmosphere. Most pupils are making steady progress during their time in the school. Inspectors do not agree with parents' criticism of the arrangements for homework; this is very well organised and supports pupils' learning effectively. The range of extra-curricular activities is adequate although they tend to be seasonal in nature and are often only open to the older pupils.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The school provides very well for pupils' personal development. This helps pupils to develop excellent attitudes, behaviour and relationships.

1 The school has a clear policy for the personal development of pupils and this underpins its work in all areas of the curriculum. Its provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good and this is a key feature in its success.

2 The focus on personal development starts in the reception class where children are given time to talk about and appreciate what they are learning. For example, the teacher uses time well at the end of each lesson to talk about which parts of the work had caught children's imaginations and why. Excellent behaviour also starts in the reception class. Children regularly move around the open-plan area between their classroom and the adjacent class during lessons with minimum disruption. For instance, when moving from their classroom up a flight of stairs to a small satellite room (the eyrie) where they can work quietly.

3 There is a strong sense of community in the school. Everyone knows that they are valued and feels part of one big family. Older pupils are encouraged to look after younger pupils, for instance as 'special friends' (buddies) when Year 6 pupils sit with reception children at lunchtime, mix and play games with them outside and read with them. A similar 'mini-bud' system operates with Year 2 pupils beginning to take responsibility. Consequently, the school is a welcoming and happy place to be. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their time there and develop excellent attitudes to their work. Pupils concentrate well and are really keen to learn. They work very well together, share and take turns. For instance in the mixed reception and Year 1 class children settled very quickly to their tasks to identify and sort different two and three-dimensional shapes and happily helped each other to build models using building bricks. Similarly, in a Year 2 literacy lesson, the pupils interacted very well when asked to take different roles (punctuation and words) as parts of a 'living sentence' and to rearrange themselves into the correct order.

4 The school's discipline systems are very effective. They encourage pupils to care for each other and to behave in the way they would want others to treat them. Pupils delight in others' successes and they know that there are clear and secure procedures to help them for reconciliation should anything go wrong. All pupils are involved in agreeing their own class rules and, because of this, they respect and follow them carefully. Consequently, pupils' behaviour is excellent. They focus in very well on the work in their lessons despite distracting noise from other classes due to the open-plan nature of the building. For example, in a mathematics lesson in Year 6, pupils were attentive and very keen to solve the 'square number' problems set by their teacher. They listened carefully to questions and could hardly contain themselves sometimes as they put their hands up to respond. Pupils behave just as well outside and take great pride in looking after their school.

5 The school places a particular importance on making sure that pupils are prepared for life after they leave and move into secondary education. For instance, pupils are taught to have respect for themselves and others through a comprehensive programme of health and sex education. They are taught the difference between right and wrong and are given responsibility for their own moral responses and choices. Pupils regularly raise money for charities and think about others less fortunate than themselves. The 'school council' is another way in which pupils are given opportunities to express their views and ideas, and are encouraged to have 'a say' in the running of their school. This

helps to develop their skills of citizenship and, through links with other schools and the local council, pupils are broadening their experiences and becoming mature and responsible individuals.

6 The school's strong provision for pupils' personal development lays a solid foundation and gives them a very good start in life. The excellent attitudes, behaviour and relationships that result underpin the welcoming and supportive atmosphere in the school and create a positive climate for learning.

Children in the reception class get a very good breadth of experiences. This gives them a very good start to their education and sparks their curiosity for learning.

7 The physical design and layout of the school building does not lend itself naturally to providing the type of environment expected for young children. Despite this, staff work very hard to make sure that children are given the best possible range of experiences they can and they make excellent use of the space that is available. For instance a small satellite room up a flight of stairs in the middle of two classes is used very well to bring children together at the start and end of lessons. At present, there is no suitable outdoor play area for children to use but the school is tackling this and has clear plans in place to develop the outside areas.

8 The reception classroom is bright and stimulating. Displays encourage children to investigate and explore for themselves. For example, a collection of bulbs, batteries and wires are available for them to try and 'light a bulb' by making an electrical circuit. Similarly, photographs and children's own paintings of the different birds visiting their feeding table are displayed alongside questions, such as "what was their favourite food?" The walls are literally covered with interesting and exciting work that captures children's attention and imagination. For instance, they have tasted different foods, such as honey and ketchup, and recorded their likes and dislikes using 'smiley' and 'frowning' faces. They have looked at different materials to decide which would be best to keep the rain out, have used computers to create 'robot' pictures using basic shapes, and have written simple sentences about the 'best' parts of the stories they have read. The quality of creative work is very high and this is displayed carefully and attractively. For example, children have mixed shades of blue, roller painted background effects then used white paint and glitter to print snowflake patterns using matchsticks. They have also looked carefully at the work of famous artists, such as Lowry, then tried to capture this style in their own paintings.

9 Teaching is very good in the reception class and gives children a great boost when they first start at the school. This helps them to settle quickly and supports good progress in all areas of their learning. Teaching is so good because the teacher and nursery nurse work very well together and make a strong and effective team. They plan their lessons very carefully and share the purpose of each lesson with the children. This means that children know what they are doing, why they are doing it and, importantly, what they are trying to learn. For example, in one lesson some children proudly announced that they were "learning to get their numbers in the right order". Children respond very well to tasks that are carefully matched to their individual needs. For instance, in another lesson, the whole class spent some time singing songs about objects starting with 'c' and 'ch' then the class split into five groups, each with a different activity to follow on their language work. One group pulled objects out of a bag then identified what letter they started with, such as a 'clock' and 'chopsticks', while other groups concentrated on reading, writing and painting linked to rhyming words.

10 The curriculum for reception aged children is managed extremely well by the reception class teacher who is supported very well by an experienced nursery nurse. They work together as a very effective team to provide children with a very good start in the school and to capture their interest for

learning. Consequently, children make good progress and are working above the levels expected for their age by the time they transfer into Year 1.

The school's pastoral care is very strong and stems from the belief that the 'whole' child should be valued, nurtured and developed. This is supported very well by the caring ethos, high quality displays and links with parents and the local community.

11 The school celebrates its Catholic nature extremely well and this underpins its philosophy that all aspects of a child are important and should be developed. Staff have all had training in promoting pupils' spiritual and moral development, and this has started to work its way into many aspects of the school's work. For instance, teachers now actively use opportunities for personal reflection and prayer to encourage pupils to develop personally and spiritually. Time for reflection on thoughts and feelings is built into all areas of the curriculum because the school sees this as an important part of raising pupils' spiritual awareness and developing their confidence and self-esteem. Every classroom has an area set aside as a focus for class worship. Displays in these areas help pupils to think about others and give opportunities for them to contribute their own thoughts and feelings, for example by writing their own prayers.

12 Teachers know the pupils very well. They give their time freely and help pupils to realise that they genuinely care about them and want them to feel important. The positive relationships between the staff and pupils pave the way for a climate of openness and trust. This helps pupils to be comfortable and confident when expressing their thoughts and innermost feelings, for instance when saying personal prayers for members of their family during class worship. This is followed up by opportunities for pupils to think about the effects of their actions and to write their own prayers. They clearly take this very seriously; for instance, one pupil asked for forgiveness by saying, *'I am very very sorry for hurting my sister by calling her names'*.

13 Parents and other community members make a strong contribution to the life of the school. For instance, they share their experiences of life in the local area during World War II and help pupils to understand how Consett has changed significantly since the demise of the steelwork industry. Links with the local parishes are particularly strong and these support pupils' development and preparation for important events in their personal lives, such as their First Holy Communion. Pupils make regular visits into the local community, ranging from visits to sheltered housing communities to carol singing in the local area and trips to local woodlands to support their studies. Links with other schools also contribute well to pupils' development. For example, the 'school council' was formed after video-conferences and debates with other schools to see how they had tackled this.

14 The quality of display in the school is extremely high. Pupils' work is celebrated well and shown to very good advantage. This shows that they, and their efforts, are valued. For example, in the reception class, a photograph of each child is accompanied by a sentence explaining why 'we are special', such as *'my family love me'* and *'I help my mum to put her socks on when her back is sore'*. In Years 1 and 2, pupils continue this theme by stating why God made them special and describing their talents, such as *'God made me special and I love running'*. Older pupils show their growing maturity by writing about 'new beginnings'. For instance, by stating, *'Try to make a fresh start by not judging people unless you want them to judge you'*.

15 The head teacher has a very strong commitment to broadening pupils' awareness and introducing an international and global dimension to their lives. This is supported well by the school's

geography curriculum, a programme of modern foreign language teaching in Year 6, a residential trip to France for older pupils and charitable activities linked to CAFOD.

16 The school's ethos of care and respect underpins all its work. Pupils are secure and confident in the knowledge that they are valued and that the staff are there to help and support them. Parents recognise this and are very happy with this aspect of the school's work.

The head teacher and governors have established a strong and effective partnership. They have recognised the need to put as much emphasis on pupils' academic progress as their personal development and have begun to shift this balance by focusing more critically on the teaching and learning in the school.

17 The head teacher was appointed in September 2000. At the same time, there was a significant change and turnover of governors with the result that, in effect, a completely new governing body was formed.

18 Many of the staff and governors are going through procedures for the first time this year. Governors have had a steep learning curve recently but are coping well and are relishing the challenges facing them. For example, governors had no experience of setting or monitoring a school budget until last April, and neither staff nor governors had any experience of analysing or interpreting the school's performance data. The head teacher has supported them all very well in these areas. She has led them patiently through each step in the process and has kept them fully involved in these fundamental areas of school life.

19 The process of school development planning is not well established in the school and is an area requiring further improvement. Governors and staff know what the school does well and where it could develop further, but they are not yet up to speed with the processes of planning and monitoring to the extent they should be. Again, the head teacher is supporting this well and is helping staff and governors alike to develop and grow into their roles. They have learnt a lot in the past year and are now much more aware of what needs to be done.

20 The head teacher is playing a pivotal role in leading the school and is being supported very well by the Key Stage 1 co-ordinator. Together, they are developing a framework for monitoring teaching and learning effectively and are helping curriculum co-ordinators to assume meaningful roles and be more actively involved in managing their subjects. In this way, they have introduced a critical edge to the school's self-evaluation of its own work at the same time as providing a support structure to help staff meet their own personal and professional needs. However, the role of deputy head and co-ordination for Key Stage 2 is yet to develop to the same degree.

21 The head teacher and governors are rightly proud of the school's strengths in developing pupils' personal characters and attributes. There has been a subtle shift over the past year with a greater understanding that academic standards are just as much part of the 'whole child'. Staff are now realising that they can challenge pupils slightly more aggressively academically without detracting from the already strong climate and relationships surrounding their work. This balance between academic and personal development is starting to reach a better equilibrium and places the school in a very strong position to continue to raise academic standards.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are not high enough.

22 The school has several problems surrounding ICT that affect standards in this subject. Despite this, teachers are aware of the importance of this subject and make every effort to use ICT whenever possible in the day-to-day teaching. As a result, pupils develop some basic skills, particularly in word processing and graphics, and do get some meaningful experiences.

23 The school has made significant progress in ICT since the last inspection and has clear plans to continue developments in this area. It has completely replaced its old and redundant computers. This has taken a large amount of the money earmarked for ICT but now means that all classes have access to reliable and up-to-date equipment. However, there is still not enough to give pupils the regular access they need to develop their ICT skills. The school recognises this and governors are investing further money to provide a set of laptops and some additional equipment, such as sensors and appropriate software. Another problem for the school is that there is nowhere really suitable for ICT equipment to be set up. The layout of the building does not provide sufficient space to group computers together in a suite and classrooms also have limited space for more than one computer to be used at a time. This means that teachers are trying to teach ICT skills to all pupils with one computer in their classroom. This is not ideal and is not working well enough. Pupils get the chance to use the computers, often linked to their work in literacy and numeracy, but this does little to develop their actual ICT skills and limits their opportunity to practise the skills they do have.

24 The school has a good scheme of work for ICT that clearly identifies what needs to be taught in each year group and gives precise detail about the skills pupils should develop. Teachers do their best to fit some of these activities into their work but they do not identify specific time in their planning where ICT will be taught as a discrete subject. Although this not strictly necessary, because of the other factors influencing the use of ICT in the school, it means that pupils are not getting the curriculum they deserve. There are gaps in what they are taught and this shows in their knowledge and understanding, and their level of skill. Consequently, the curriculum is not meeting statutory requirements and pupils' standards are suffering. There are particular gaps in the areas of spreadsheets, use of multimedia software, sensing and controlling and communication by electronic mail.

25 The school has a group of staff currently sharing responsibility for managing and co-ordinating ICT in the school. This is a positive feature because it means that the subject is being given a high priority and it also helps staff to share their knowledge and expertise. Teachers are generally comfortable and confident with ICT but it is that lack of sufficient equipment, space and specific teaching of ICT skills that are the key factors for the school to tackle.

More able pupils are not being challenged consistently enough to make sure that they realise their academic potential.

26 The school recognises that there is a wide range of abilities in all classes but also recognises that children start in reception with a slight advantage that should be capitalised on and developed as they move through the school. There has been a big push recently on making sure that pupils with special educational needs are given the support they need and this is starting to be effective. At the same time, the head teacher has recognised that more able pupils are not always being given the same degree of attention and support. She is now starting to target this as an area for development with a view to raising standards further.

27 Teachers identify the different groups in their classes when they plan their lessons but they rarely identify different activities or specific objectives for each of these groups. Consequently, teachers do not always fine tune the planned tasks sufficiently to match the different needs of pupils.

They compensate for this by their good use of questions and by focusing their own efforts, and those of the teaching assistants, to work with specific groups. However, this is often aimed at the pupils with special educational needs. Teachers do not provide the same degree of challenge for the more able pupils to stretch them and maintain a consistently fast rate of learning.

28 Teachers use questions particularly well when working with all the pupils as a whole class at the start and end of their lessons. In this way they assess and evaluate pupils' learning effectively and, during this time they pitch their questions effectively to make sure that pupils are challenged effectively. For instance, in a mathematics lesson in the mixed Year 4 and 5 class, pupils were asked to find the 'difference' between two numbers, one of which was often a negative number. Most of the class were asked questions such as 'the difference between -7 and 2 ' but more able pupils were given tough questions, such as 'the difference between -14 and -25 '. However, when pupils are working in groups during their lessons, teachers are a little tentative to challenging the more able pupils to the same extent. There is a tendency for these pupils to be given the same work as the majority of others in the class and be expected to finish faster before moving on to an extra task. This is particularly true from Year 3 onwards. For example, in one literacy lesson all pupils were given the same task to find words ending with 'ing' and the more able pupils in the class achieved this without any real effort. They already had a good range of vocabulary and understood the spelling rules that the lesson was based on. Similarly, in another literacy lesson, pupils were all working on finding out what adjectives were and what some of them actually meant. Although the more able pupils in this lesson often tried to use a dictionary or thesaurus to help them, they did not actually achieve any more than the rest of the class.

29 The relationships between teachers and their pupils are excellent. Pupils are secure and confident in their work and are really keen to do well. Despite this very positive climate for learning, there is a tendency for teachers to be too reticent to set high enough challenges for the more able pupils in case they give them an opportunity to 'fail'. These pupils are perfectly capable of learning from their mistakes as long as they know what they are aiming for.

30 Teachers need to have greater confidence in the pupils' abilities to take some responsibility for their own learning, especially by the time they are in Years 5 and 6. They need to raise their expectations of what can actually be achieved and share this information by setting clear and precise targets for individual pupils to aim for in their work.

The school development plan needs to be more precise and to set a clear and workable agenda for the school's continued improvement.

31 The school has undergone a period of significant change over the past 18 months. During this time, there has been a big shift with the head teacher and governing body starting to involve other staff in identifying what the school does well and where it could improve and develop further. Although this is happening in practice, it is not yet underpinned by a clear or effective school development plan to set the future strategic direction for the school.

32 The school currently has a 'management' plan that gives a broad overview of its priorities and identifies the organisation and structure for the current year. This is important and provides sufficient information about the use of the budget, the organisation of mixed age classes and details of staffing. However, it does not include sufficient precise information about the school's planned developments or how these will be funded. For instance, the head teacher and governors are already acutely aware of the issues surrounding ICT in the school and have taken steps to invest in more equipment to support this subject. However, this is not shown sufficiently in the school's strategic planning. Similarly, the head teacher has analysed the school's performance in tests over recent years

and, coupled with information gleaned from her observations of lessons, has identified that more able pupils could be achieving better. Again, although this is accepted as a high priority for the school it is not reflected anywhere in its strategic planning.

33 The head teacher and governors are now established and have been in the school long enough to have a clear picture of what needs to be done. They have recognised the need to put in place a school 'development' plan that sets a clear and workable agenda for the school's future improvement and includes the key priorities that are fundamental to its development. It is important that this keeps pupils' learning and standards at its heart and it also needs to make sufficient links to the finance available to the school to be sure that the planned developments can be afforded and provide the best possible value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

34 The school should now:

- (a) Raise standards in information and communication technology (ICT) by:
- increasing the range of hardware available to support pupils' learning;
 - identifying precisely where, when and how pupils will be taught their ICT skills;
 - making sure that the curriculum meets requirements by giving pupils opportunities to:
 - use spreadsheets to handle, manipulate and present information;
 - use multimedia software to bring together text, graphics and sounds;
 - use computers to sense, monitor and control the physical environment;
 - use electronic mail.

(Paragraphs 22 – 25)

- (b) Improve the rate of learning for more able pupils by:
- raising teachers' expectations of what these pupils can achieve academically;
 - making sure that teachers' planning clearly identifies what they expect these pupils to learn;
 - providing these pupils with more challenging activities when they work in groups during lessons, rather than expecting them to complete the same work as others at a faster rate before moving on to additional tasks;
 - setting high and challenging targets for these pupils to aim for, and sharing them with the pupils so that they have a better understanding of their own learning.

(Paragraphs 26 – 30)

- (c) Establish a school development plan that sets a clear and workable agenda for the school's future improvement, includes the key priorities that are fundamental to its development, and makes sufficient links to the finance available to be sure that this can be afforded.

(Paragraphs 31 – 33)

Note:

The head teacher has already identified all the above areas and has informal plans in place to tackle them.

FOCUSED INSPECTION OF THE WORK OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS TO SUPPORT LITERACY AND MATHEMATICS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The inspection evaluated specifically the contribution of teaching assistants to the teaching of literacy and numeracy and how well they are managed in the school.

35 There are three teaching assistants in the school. One of these staff works exclusively in the reception class while the other two work in different classes across the full age range of the school. One of the teaching assistants was absent during the inspection. Two lessons were seen where each of the remaining teaching assistants worked specifically to support groups of pupils in literacy and numeracy.

36 In the reception class, the teaching assistant is a qualified nursery nurse. She has worked with the reception teacher for nearly 15 years and they have established a very strong and effective partnership that works extremely well. Together, they plan all the activities that the children will experience and share the responsibility for assessing and evaluating how well the children are doing. The key to the success of their partnership is mutual trust and respect for each other and the breadth of experience they share. As a result, the support is extremely effective and contributes positively to children's learning.

37 The other teaching assistants have a different role in the school. One has been in the school for three years while the other only started in September 2001. They help teachers with general welfare and special educational needs issues along with specific support for additional literacy work and 'Springboard' mathematics. Because of their more roving roles, these teaching assistants do not have the same degree of contact with teachers for planning and assessment as the nursery nurse does, but they are still briefed carefully before each lesson and know what they are trying to achieve. Consequently, support is effective and pupils gain from their work.

38 The work of teaching assistants is managed initially by the head teacher and then, on a day-to-day basis, by the class teachers. This arrangement is satisfactory but, again, works particularly well in the reception class where there is a strong partnership in place. Teaching assistants are valued and are included in all aspects of the school's work. For instance, they are invited to attend staff meetings and to take part in training events. The nursery nurse is trained in many areas, including early literacy skills, ICT, counselling and first aid, and is a great source of support for the less experienced staff. Hence, the teaching assistants make an effective contribution to the work of the school.

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	23

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	1	2	4	5	0	0	0
Percentage	8%	17%	33%	42%	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 eight percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	264
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	40

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	5
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	40

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	14
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1

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	13	18	31

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	11	13	13
	Girls	17	18	18
	Total	28	31	31
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	90% (81%)	100% (88%)	100% (98%)
	National	84% (83%)	86% (84%)	91% (90%)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	11	13	12
	Girls	17	18	16
	Total	28	31	28
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	90% (84%)	100% (91%)	90% (93%)
	National	85% (84%)	89% (88%)	89% (88%)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	21	18	39

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	17	18	20
	Girls	14	15	17
	Total	31	33	37
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	79% (89%)	85% (87%)	95% (97%)
	National	75% (75%)	71% (72%)	87% (85%)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	12	16	16
	Girls	12	12	12
	Total	24	28	28
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	62% (87%)	72% (92%)	72% (92%)
	National	72% (70%)	74% (72%)	82% (79%)

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	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	224
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 – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	10.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	24.4
Average class size	29.3

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	97.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000 - 2001
	£
Total income	444,308
Total expenditure	438,251
Expenditure per pupil	1,680
Balance brought forward from previous year	6,615
Balance carried forward to next year	12,672

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	3
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	3.6
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	267
Number of questionnaires returned	121

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	65	31	3	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	60	39	1	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	66	32	2	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	46	44	7	1	2
The teaching is good.	74	26	1	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	51	36	12	0	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	75	22	3	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	74	26	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	54	39	6	2	0
The school is well led and managed.	77	23	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	64	34	2	0	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	26	33	22	8	10