

INSPECTION REPORT

**ST NICOLAS' CHURCH OF ENGLAND JUNIOR
SCHOOL**

Portslade

LEA area: Brighton and Hove

Unique reference number: 114560

Acting Headteacher: Mr Trevor Cristin

Reporting inspector: Terry Elston
20704

Dates of inspection: 4th – 5th February 2002

Inspection number: 196690

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Junior
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	7 to 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Locks Hill Portslade East Sussex
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body, St Nicolas' Junior School
Name of chair of governors:	Reverend R Rushforth
Date of previous inspection:	May 1997

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	5
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	10
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	16
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	18
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	19

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This is an average-sized junior school with 266 pupils on roll, 117 boys and 149 girls. It is in Year 4 where the greatest imbalance is found with 47 girls and 23 boys. The school is situated in the old seaside town of Portslade. There are nearly 15 per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals, which is around the national average. Over 16 per cent of the pupils are on the register for special educational needs, which is below the national average, and just over one per cent has a statement of special educational need, which is average. Very few pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds, or have English as an additional language. The national test results from the main feeder infant schools, and the school's own assessments, show that pupils' attainment on entry is below average. During the last school year, two pupils joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission and ten left it at times which were not those of the normal leaving or transfer for most pupils. This degree of mobility is low compared with other schools. The previous headteacher retired in December 2001. This school, in common with many others in this area, is experiencing difficulties in recruiting staff, and a new headteacher has yet to be appointed.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Nicolas' is a good school, where the very good quality of teaching leads to very good progress. The standards of the current Year 6 pupils are above average in English, mathematics and science. The school is led very effectively by the acting head and deputy headteacher who work well with other staff with management responsibilities to raise standards further. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good, and has a very good impact on pupils' behaviour and the relationships throughout the school. These significant strengths ensure that the school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils make very good progress in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.
- The quality of teaching is very good, and helps all groups of pupils to succeed.
- The provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is very good, and is an important part of the school's ethos.
- Pupils' attitudes to work and behaviour are very good, and ensure that they get the most out of lessons.
- The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher are leading the school very well through this period of considerable change, and, with the full support of staff and pupils, and the growing support of parents, this ensures that the school continues to improve.

What could be improved

- Pupils' standards in Year 6 in information and communication technology are below average.
- Links with parents are unsatisfactory, and the school has done too little in the past to develop this partnership.
- Pupils' attendance is well below the national average, and this affects the progress of those pupils involved.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvement since the previous inspection in 1997 and, overall, has addressed the main issues from that report well. Good schemes of work are now in place, and the more rigorous monitoring of teaching accounts for the improved quality of teaching found in this inspection. The school has made good improvements in the way it promotes pupils' aesthetic, creative and practical development, as can be seen from the high quality of much of the work displayed around the building. The quality of information to parents remains a weakness. Pupils' standards have risen in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, art and design, geography and physical education since the last inspection. Standards are similar in music and history, and those in information and communication technology remain below average. A significant improvement is the way the school uses assessment to identify pupils' strengths and weaknesses, and this is having a significant impact on pupils' standards in the national tests. In view of the strengths in teaching and pupils' rising standards, the school is well placed to improve further.

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	C	B	B
mathematics	D	C	C	B
science	E	D	C	C

Key	
very high	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E
very low	E*

This table shows that pupils do well at this school, particularly when compared with those from similar schools, and the rate of improvement since 1999 is above the national trend. Pupils' very good rate of progress can be seen when comparing their standards in 2001 with those when they came to the school, which were well below average in English and below average in mathematics and science. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. The school exceeded its targets in English in 2001, but fell short in mathematics. This year, the school is set to exceed its very challenging targets in both subjects as standards continue to rise. The standards of the current Year 6 pupils are above average in English, mathematics, science, art and design and physical education, and average in design and technology, geography, history and music. In information and communication technology, standards are below average, but improving as the benefits of additional staff training are making an impact. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language make very good progress, and nearly all attain, or come close to, national standards in English, mathematics and science by the time they leave.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	These are very good. Pupils enjoy their work and delight in their successes.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good, both in class and outside in the playground. Pupils listen very carefully to their teacher, and this ensures a very good rate of learning.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils' personal development is very good. They are keen to take responsibility, work independently when required and are quick to show initiative. Relationships are very good between all members of the school community.
Attendance	Poor, and well below the national rate. Unauthorised absence is above that of other schools. These absences have a negative impact on the attainment of the pupils involved.

Pupils' very good attitudes to learning are important reasons for their very good progress, and only marred by the poor attendance rate of a few. Parents see the development of pupils' attitudes and values as a great strength of the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Years 3 – 6
Quality of teaching	Very good

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

The quality of teaching and of pupils' learning is very good. There are no weak links in teaching in this school and the standards attained in the national tests show the very good rate of learning by all groups of pupils. The teaching of the basic skills of literacy is very good, and pupils quickly develop good ways of reading new words so that they read fluently. The teaching in numeracy lessons is very good, and develops pupils' number skills well. A great strength in the quality of teaching is the challenging expectations of pupils' work and behaviour which result in their acquiring new knowledge and skills quickly. It also motivates them to put considerable effort into their work and to strive for even higher standards. Other strengths are the high quality of planning, skilful questioning directed appropriately at pupils of all abilities and teachers' good subject knowledge. Thorough assessment of pupils' attainment and progress enables teachers to plan challenging work so that the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs, pupils with English as an additional language and the gifted and talented, can be met.

Strong features of pupils' learning include their initiative in problem solving, the breadth of their knowledge, and their keenness to learn from mistakes. As a result, they make significant headway in a short time.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is good. It gives pupils a rich variety of experiences, and has a very good focus on literacy and numeracy. There is a good range of extra curricular activities. The high quality of the personal, social and health education gives pupils very good ideas on how to live healthily, express their feelings and value the opinions of others.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	This is good. Pupils are supported well, have clear targets set for them and their very good progress is monitored systematically.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. The few pupils with English as an additional language are integrated well into all school activities, make very good progress and soon gain a good use and understanding of English.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good provision for pupils' personal development contributes significantly to the school's caring, friendly and inclusive ethos. Good spiritual provision across the curriculum includes many opportunities to appreciate the beauty of art, music and nature. The very good provision for social and moral development is reflected in the sense of community and respect for others in the school, and clear sense of right and wrong. The cultural provision is satisfactory. There is a good range of opportunities for pupils to visit places of interest, take part in the creative arts and learn about how other cultures live and worship. However, there is too little evidence in the displays around the school that pupils live in a multicultural society.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares for its pupils well. Their academic progress and personal development are monitored carefully and this helps teachers provide good support for pupils. The monitoring of pupils' attendance, however, is not developed well enough to have a significant impact on the high levels of absence.

The well-balanced curriculum ensures that pupils develop a broad range of skills. All subjects meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. There is a very strong link between the provision for pupils' personal development, their very good behaviour and the very good relationships between all members of the school community.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher lead and manage the school very well, and have created a strong team spirit where all pupils and staff strive to aim for high standards in their work. Very good support from all staff with management responsibilities ensures that standards continue to rise as the school awaits the appointment of a permanent headteacher.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactory. Governors take a keen interest in the school, and have a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. All statutory requirements are met apart from the information sent to parents in the school's prospectus and governors' Annual Report. Governors work effectively with staff on the targets for the school improvement plan, but they are not sufficiently involved in putting forward their own priorities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good, particularly in the way pupils' results in the national tests are examined to see where improvements can be made.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The school makes efficient use of all its resources to promote pupils' progress and maintains a good balance between cost and effectiveness. The forward planning has appropriate targets that are helping to raise pupils' standards. The high amount of under-spend in last year's budget is being used well this year to increase the number of computers.

There are significant strengths in the leadership and management of the school, that explain why teachers teach well and pupils learn quickly. The school has satisfactory procedures for securing the best value from its spending and monitoring the impact this has on pupils' 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"> • The good progress that their children make. • The consistently good teaching. • The way the acting headteacher and deputy are managing the school so well. • The very good standard of behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consistency with which homework is set. • The quality of information about the school and about their child's progress. • The overall links with parents.

The inspection team agrees with parents' positive views. Of the others, the inspection finds that the amount of homework set is appropriate, and increases suitably as pupils get older. The links with parents are unsatisfactory, but are improving. The quality of information to parents is unsatisfactory, and the school does not keep them well enough informed about the work their children do, or the progress they make. Few parents help in school, although the number has doubled with the encouragement of the acting headteacher.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils make very good progress in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.

1. The analysis of pupils' scores in the national tests shows that this school is very successful in raising pupils' attainment, and this inspection finds that the overall standards have risen further since the 2001 national tests. The extent of pupils' progress can be judged when comparing the current Year 6 pupils' attainment on entry, when they were well below average in reading and below average in writing, mathematics and science, with their standards now, which are above average in English, mathematics and science. The school gained an Achievement Award from the Department for Education and Employment for the way results improved from 1997 to 2000 and standards have continued to improve significantly since then.

2. When pupils enter the school, few speak clearly and confidently, and many have weak listening skills. Due to effective support and encouragement, pupils make very good progress as they move through the school and, by Year 6, their standards are above average. Nearly all listen attentively and speak willingly in small groups and to a wider audience. Pupils' progress is accelerated by the many very good opportunities that teachers provide for them to discuss issues and air their views. Role-play is a particularly effective strategy that teachers use to help pupils speak with confidence, and this was illustrated very well in a Year 4 lesson as pupils were put into groups to act out a 'moral' situation. Faced with the problem of a friend being upset because he did not want to play the same game as others had chosen, pupils talked with maturity about 'negotiating' a solution and 'resolving' the problem. This represented very good progress for these pupils who were responding very well to the high expectations that the teacher had of them.

3. Standards in reading are above average by Year 6. Year 6 pupils show great enthusiasm when reading the shared text in the literacy hour and they read with good expression and understanding. Teachers are very successful in imparting a love of books to pupils, and this explains why they enjoy reading so much. They are keen to name their favourite authors, such as Roald Dahl, J. K. Rowling and Shakespeare. A significant number of higher attaining pupils read challenging material, and use the more advanced reading skills of inference and deduction very well. Pupils develop good research and reference skills by regular dictionary and thesaurus work, and reinforce these skills in similar work using word processing programs on computers. Teachers help pupils improve their reading by including lots of practice in subjects other than English, paying great attention to the language of science, for example, when studying rocks and soils, and asking pupils to, "be precise!" when reading description of shapes in mathematics.

4. Pupils show a good degree of confidence and flair in their writing. They write in a wide range of styles including poetry, reviews and instructions. Pupils' 'newspaper' reports on the Marie Celeste show a particularly good appreciation of how to write to different audiences. One pupil illustrated this well, writing:

The parents of the crew are worried sick, and are so upset that they cannot comment

5. Pupils organise their writing in a logical sequence, and show a good understanding of grammatical structure. They use paragraphs appropriately and consistently in their writing. Their extended writing

is interesting, and shows a good understanding of how to develop characters in a story. Pupils are encouraged to plan, draft, edit and refine their written work, which is helping them to achieve well. They discuss and appraise their own and other's writing, which is good, and helps them to develop and extend their ideas. They respond sensitively to classical works of literature, and enjoy experimenting with language. Their poetry is written with great sensitivity, and was exemplified well by one pupil who compared a gnarled tree to an old man:

*A bare body, lonely,
Very lonely,
Crooked fingers up in the air,
Every time it is his birthday,
There is no-one to spend it with*

6. In mathematics, a significant number of pupils enter the school with weak basic skills and poorly developed strategies for solving problems. Teachers work hard to improve these skills in Years 3 and 4 so that, by Years 5 and 6, pupils easily work out sums in their head using a range of different methods.

7. In Year 6, pupils have a good understanding and knowledge of the multiplication tables up to ten, convert percentages to fractions and decimals confidently, and explain their mental strategies well. Pupils are good at working out challenging problems, to do with timetables, for example, and working out the cost of holidays. They divide numbers by tens, hundreds and thousands accurately, and have a good understanding of the use of the decimal point. Pupils use non-calculator methods for long multiplication and long division, including the multiplication and division of decimals. They use their knowledge of percentages well in relation to everyday life in, for example, their work on calculating percentages of sums of money. Pupils' work on shape and measurement is of a particularly high quality. When working with two-dimensional shapes and angles, they label the various shapes with confidence, and have a very good understanding of acute and obtuse angles. They understand rotational symmetry very well, and draw their shapes accurately on squared paper. Their work on bearings is excellent, and shows a very good awareness of how to use bearings to locate towns from a given point. Pupils have a good grasp of databases, and how to compile data using frequency tables to produce a graph.

8. Teachers give pupils many opportunities to develop their numeracy skills in other subjects, when measuring temperature and using force-meters in science, for example, and using spreadsheets on computers to calculate columns of figures. These well-planned activities, starting in Year 3, all help to consolidate pupils' confidence and knowledge and to develop gradually a 'feel' for mathematics as they progress through the school.

9. This confidence is also found in science, where teachers' emphasis on experimentation and discovery helps pupils see challenges in a scientific way. When, for example, they were asked to find out whether the amount of water in a bottle affected the sound made when they blew over the neck, pupils behaved like young scientists. They compared ideas, put forward hypotheses and tested systematically until they had resolved the problem with cries of triumph. Pupils have a good understanding of the human body and, through links with personal, social and health education lessons, have a very good knowledge of how exercise and a balanced diet are necessary elements of a healthy lifestyle. Their work on micro-organisms is of a high quality, and shows a very good understanding of how bacteria can be useful and harmful.

10. Pupils have a good knowledge of how forces affect objects, and conduct their own, well-structured, experiments to show how friction affects a toy car's speed. In their work on materials,

pupils show clearly how heat or stirring affects the rate that some substances dissolve, and talk knowledgeably about reversible and irreversible changes.

11. Standards in English, mathematics and science show a marked improvement since the previous inspection. The school has done this by raising teachers' expectations of all groups of pupils, improving the way the curriculum is planned and giving subject co-ordinators the skills and time to monitor their area of responsibility.

The quality of teaching is very good, and helps all groups of pupils to succeed.

12. Parents feel strongly, and with justification, that the key to pupils' success at this school is the high quality of the teaching. In the school's previous inspection, the quality of teaching was 'mostly satisfactory' but suffered from inconsistencies brought about by weaknesses in the monitoring by senior staff. The school has done much since then to support teachers by regular monitoring of their work, and this has ensured a consistency in the way that lessons are planned and taught. The planning of lessons is thorough, and profits from the useful joint planning meetings in each year group. These result in well-informed plans, which are clear about what the lesson will teach specific groups of pupils and how their progress will be measured. Teachers show a very good knowledge of the subjects they teach, and this gives pupils the confidence to ask questions to gain a deeper understanding of the subject.

13. Teachers are very good at introducing new work to pupils. Their explanations are clear, and they make sure that all pupils have understood the concept. Importantly, teachers tell pupils clearly what they should have learned by the end of the lesson. This is very good practice because it helps pupils to focus on specific skills to be mastered, and enables teachers to assess their learning at the end. Teachers use these assessments very well to put greater emphasis on areas of need, and revisit topics that pupils find difficult. In this way, pupils' strengths are built upon, and their weaknesses addressed in a systematic manner.

14. All teachers have high expectations of pupils' attainment. They teach lessons which are always challenging but, because their assessments gained through testing are accurate, all pupils succeed at their own level. Teachers' insistence on pupils being very precise in their answers, and providing evidence to support their views, is very effective in raising pupils' attainment. It makes them think very carefully when responding to a question and encourages them to make the best use of their previous learning. In one science lesson, for example, about how materials change, the teacher asked pupils about their previous work on micro-organisms, insisting that their answers were given using the correct scientific vocabulary. Once the teacher was sure that the pupils had remembered the main points, she felt confident to move on to the topic about dissolving substances. Pupils learned the new material very quickly because they were very well prepared and could build easily on their previous knowledge. .

15. Teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour are very high. In all classes, teachers make it absolutely clear what pupils are expected to do, or not to do, and they are consistent in their approach. This means that pupils learn at an early stage that they do not call out, for example, and that they should always respect the views of others. As a result, lessons are calm, no time is wasted getting pupils to behave and progress is swift.

16. Teachers maintain pupils' enthusiasm and concentration by providing interesting lessons that make the best use of stimulating resources, and give opportunities for pupils to be creative in their work. In the previous inspection, this creativity was often lacking, but now teachers encourage pupils to take risks without fear of failure, and experiment with their ideas. This explains, for example, why standards have risen since the previous inspection in art and design and design and technology.

17. In science and mathematics in particular, teachers put great emphasis on setting pupils challenges and giving them responsibility for the way they explore a topic. This results in very good progress and high attainment because pupils enjoy their work and remember what they have learned. One challenge that worked very well started with the teacher asking Year 6 pupils to interrogate him about a number in his head. Pupils had to come up with different questions, such as, “*Is it a multiple of three?*” to narrow down the possibilities until they had the answer. Pupils found this very difficult to start with, and worked at very basic levels. With carefully pitched questions and prompting, however, the teacher refined their skills until, by the end, all pupils were asking more precise and creative questions to arrive at the answer.

18. Teachers use questions carefully to ensure that all pupils are thinking hard about the topic. To make this even more effective, teachers pitch questions at appropriate levels to different groups of pupils; this is excellent practice because, while it stretches gifted pupils, it also enables those with special educational needs to make equally valid contributions.

19. The teaching of literacy is very good, and develops pupils’ reading skills effectively. In Years 3 and 4, literacy lessons have a very clear focus on teaching pupils how to tackle new words, and this gives them confidence and fluency when reading. In Years 5 and 6, teachers ask pupils to use these skills increasingly to gain facts from a text by skimming and scanning, for example, or research a topic in books or on the Internet. In this way, pupils enjoy reading, develop good skills and begin to understand the value of being able to read well.

20. The teaching of numeracy is also very good, and ensures that pupils are confident with number by the time they leave. Teachers are especially skilled at developing the speed of pupils’ calculations. They use the mental mathematics session at the start of lessons very effectively to build up pupils’ basic skills, and then give them different strategies to work sums out quickly. This works very well, and enables pupils to approach new challenges with confidence.

21. The quality of teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good, and these pupils make very good progress towards their targets. In class lessons, pupils with special educational needs are served well by the way that teachers plan carefully to ensure that they are set appropriately challenging work. Classroom assistants provide good, well-informed support in many classes, and this ensures that pupils with special educational needs are included in every part of the lesson. Some pupils are withdrawn for specialist work on their particular difficulties. Although this works well in terms of the progress towards their targets, it does mean that they miss work in other subjects, such as science. Importantly, a few pupils also miss personal, social and health education lessons. This is unsatisfactory, because while others in the class are learning about relationships, and building self-esteem, the group of pupils most in need of these experiences are being denied them.

The provision for pupils’ personal, social and health education is very good, and is an important part of the school’s ethos.

22. The acting deputy headteacher is the co-ordinator for personal, social and health education in the school, and has done much to improve the provision in a short time. In the past, few staff were confident about teaching personal, social and health education, and the co-ordinator started well by carrying out an audit of the staff’s feelings about the subject. Staff identified areas in which they were confident, and those where they felt insecure in their knowledge. This provided a very good basis for the development of a personal, social and health education curriculum, which the co-ordinator did by starting with the local education authority’s guidelines and then adapting them to the needs of the school. This worked well, and provided a well-balanced curriculum addressing issues such as

tolerance, relationships, including why they sometimes break down, and moral responsibilities. The staff find this scheme of work very helpful, because it provides a rich supply of ideas and resources for them to use.

23. The scheme starts in Year 3 with a strong focus on relationships, which is good because these pupils have recently come into the school and are making new friends. Pupils respond well to questions such as, “*What makes a good friend?*” because teachers make it clear that there is no right or wrong answer, and every idea is valued. This explains why Year 3 pupils have the confidence, when making up a ‘recipe for a perfect friend’, to write:

‘A spoonful of love

A bottle full of humbleness

Mix for one minute

And it will make the best friend you could ask for’.

24. In Year 4, the scheme moves on to safety issues, but still includes valuable work on relationships and how to manage everyday situations. In one lesson, for example, pupils were considering the plight of someone who comes new to the school and has no friends. By acting out different scenarios, pupils could see how hard it must be when you are alone, and they showed great awareness, not only of loneliness, but also of what they should do to help.

25. Assemblies are an important part of the personal, social and health education provision, and link very well with the scheme of work. These are planned experiences that benefit from having the whole school present, and sharing feelings. One particularly good example was when pupils were considering ‘big decisions’ they have to make, and these ranged from ‘resisting temptation’ and ‘handing in money they have found on the street’, to more complex questions, such as ‘how to decide who to live with if your parents separate’. Pupils’ responses were excellent. They shared their own experiences with the whole school, and listened carefully as others spoke. They showed a very good awareness of moral issues, and also of the importance of God, and your conscience, when making important decisions.

Pupils’ attitudes to work and behaviour are very good, and ensure that they get the most out of lessons.

26. Parents see the very good attitudes and behaviour of pupils as important reasons for them sending their children to this school. Pupils are courteous, interested in what others have to say and proud to show visitors around their school. In class, they show great respect when teachers and other pupils are speaking, and delight in other pupils’ successes. When speaking to adults, they are confident and self-assured. Parents, in their responses to the questionnaire and in discussions with inspectors, speak very highly of the way their children grow in maturity at this school.

27. Pupils enjoy learning. In class, they hurry to prepare themselves for work, and sit eagerly as the teacher begins the lesson. When the teacher starts speaking, all pupils listen carefully, and respond immediately to any questions. When working in groups, pupils quickly organise themselves and rarely have to be reminded to concentrate. Pupils respond particularly well when they are set challenges, and much of their mathematics and science work involves them in tests of their ingenuity, which they relish. In one of their biggest challenges, pupils entered a competition to design and make a ‘showcase’ for a hotel on a Christmas theme. They worked feverishly, and produced a stunning showcase that won the competition and was displayed in the hotel foyer.

28. Pupils’ behaviour is very good, and is significantly better than that reported in the school’s previous inspection, mainly because the quality of teaching has improved and teachers’ expectations of pupils’

behaviour are higher. Pupils learn the rules for good behaviour quickly in Year 3, and know what is expected of them. They learn to walk around the school sensibly, speak quietly, not to call out and to listen carefully to the teacher. They soon realise that only their best behaviour will be good enough. Consequently, teachers can trust pupils to work independently, hold discussions in the knowledge that pupils will respect each other's views and have fun with them without fear of losing control. This makes lessons enjoyable and very productive. Their behaviour is equally good in the playground, where small groups stand chatting, or play games sensibly.

The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher are leading the school very well through this period of considerable change, and, with the full support of staff and pupils, and the growing support of parents, this ensures that the school continues to improve.

29. The previous headteacher left in December 2001 and, despite two rounds of advertisements the school has yet to make an appointment. The governing body's decision to use existing senior staff to act as headteacher and deputy has been a very good one. The acting headteacher has risen to the challenge with considerable enthusiasm and professionalism, and leads and manages the school very well. The school runs smoothly and efficiently, and staff and pupils are firmly behind him. What is striking is the very strong team spirit in the school, with all its members pulling together and determined to do their best.

30. Many parents, in letters to the inspection team and in discussions, have said how well the acting headteacher manages the school and communicates with them. One parent's comments were typical:

" He was an excellent choice. He is well-liked and respected by both pupils and staff, and is extremely popular with parents"

31. One of the hardest parts of his job has been to see what needs to be done to improve the school, yet take into account the temporary nature of his post. He manages to strike a good balance here. Realising that links with parents are not good enough, the acting headteacher has already made some important improvements. Newsletters are now more frequent and informative, and he has already encouraged more parents to help in school. Determined to maintain the high quality of teaching, the acting headteacher has introduced a very good system to monitor teachers' work. This involves appointing a 'Teacher of the Week' whose planning, assessment and teaching is monitored, and feedback given on the strengths and weaknesses found. This is a very good initiative that staff support fully, and it provides a clear picture of how the whole school is performing.

32. The acting deputy headteacher works closely with the acting headteacher, and they form a very effective team. The deputy has already had meetings with members of the Parent/Teacher Association, and has quickly put in place new ways to have them more involved in the school. She makes a good input into the monitoring of standards of teaching and learning, and works effectively with subject co-ordinators to raise standards in their subject. Importantly, the deputy headteacher sets a very good example by her own teaching, and by the way she supports the teaching and learning of mathematics. As the mathematics co-ordinator, she has monitored all the planning in each year group, and has given staff key points as to how this can be improved. This proved to be very effective, and has resulted in lesson plans that meet the needs of all groups of pupils more effectively.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

Pupils' standards in Year 6 in information and communication technology are below those expected.

33. Standards in information and communication technology were also below average in the last inspection. In Year 6, pupils are about a year behind the levels expected of them. Most are slow on the keyboard, and struggle to locate the keys. Their unfamiliarity with computers leads to mistakes when entering information, and the results on the screen are often not as expected. Pupils are, however, responding well to more effective teaching, and are developing reasonable skills in isolated areas. They use, for example, presentation programs effectively to produce posters about baptism and marriage, and combine text with graphics with average skill. They have not introduced sound into these presentations as would be expected of pupils this age. Year 6 pupils have a basic grasp of the computer language 'LOGO' and direct the cursor to create simple shapes. They use spreadsheets well to add columns of figures, and search databases methodically to produce graphs of pupils' physical characteristics. They make good use of the Internet to research topics in science about animals' habitats, and in history about the Ancient Romans.

34. The school is responding positively to weaknesses in the provision of information and communication technology, and the evidence of pupils' work in Years 3 and 4, which is at a similar standard to that found in most schools their ages, shows that standards are improving. The co-ordinator has helped to provide training for teachers to improve their skills, and the school has built well on this by requiring teachers to use computers to write reports and lesson plans. These developments are proving effective, and are improving teachers' confidence and competence. The school has brought the ratio of computers to pupils to a level approaching that found nationally over the past year, and introduced a good scheme of work to ensure that teachers have a clear structure on which to base their lesson plans. It was not possible to observe any information and communication technology lessons during the inspection, but teachers' planning and the scrutiny of pupils' work show that the quality of teaching is satisfactory, and that pupils are learning at a reasonable rate.

35. Despite these positive moves to raise standards, there are still weaknesses in the provision that prevent pupils making the best progress possible. The school has no set times for the teaching of information and communication technology on the timetable, and this means that teachers are attempting to teach important skills when there is some 'spare' time in the day. This leads to inconsistency from class to class, as some teachers give more time to teaching information and communication technology skills than others. In addition, the school has no consistent ways to assess pupils' progress and move them on to the next step, and this, again, slows down the rate of improvement.

Links with parents are unsatisfactory, and the school has done too little in the past to develop this partnership

36. The last inspection report also was critical of the school's links with parents, and too little has been done since then to improve this partnership. The questionnaire sent to parents before the inspection identifies important weaknesses in the way the school works with parents. Only 69 per cent of parents, for example, feel that the school works closely with them and only 65 per cent consider they are well informed about their child's progress. Only 63 per cent of parents have signed the Home/School agreement. Although the staff have always been willing to see parents if they have a concern, few parents felt comfortable about informal meetings, and some, including members of the Parent-Teacher Association, express feelings of 'not being made welcome in school in the past'. Until very recently, few parents helped in school or felt encouraged to do so.

37. The information sent to parents is inadequate. The annual reports of pupils' progress say something about what pupils can do well, but little about what they should do to improve. The school's prospectus is reasonably informative, but does not meet the statutory requirements to inform parents about admission arrangements, withdrawal from religious education and collective worship, results of pupils' national tests in Year 6 or levels of absence. The governors' Annual Report to parents omits comments on the progress of the school's action plan following the last inspection, and says nothing of teachers' professional development. In addition, the section on the provision for pupils with special educational needs gives too little detail on the effectiveness of the school's policy.

38. The acting headteacher has the strengthening of these links as a priority, and parents at the pre-inspection meeting and in letters to the inspection team said how impressed they were at the way he has encouraged them to become more involved in the school. Already, the number of parents helping in classes has doubled, and the newsletters are sent out more frequently.

Pupils' attendance is well below the national average, and this affects the progress of those pupils involved.

39. The level of pupils' attendance has varied over the past three years, but the current rate of 92.7 per cent is well below the national average of 93.9 per cent, and significantly lower than that reported in the last inspection. Much of the unauthorised absence, which at 0.9 per cent is above national levels, is unexplained. These figures indicate a decline in levels of attendance and affect the progress of these pupils.

40. The monitoring of pupils' attendance has been unsatisfactory in the past, with no-one having specific responsibility for investigating, for example, whether pupils have been absent through illness or holiday. Neither has there been any indication in the school's records to show whether there was a pattern of absence that the school could investigate and act upon.

41. The acting headteacher recognises the problem, and has put in good measures to improve attendance. The school has drawn up an attendance policy, and the education welfare officer, who used to come to the school termly, now visits every two weeks. New monitoring procedures give responsibility for monitoring absence to a member of the administrative staff. These are positive moves that have, however, to have an impact on levels of absence.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to maintain the school's good rate of improvement, and raise standards further, the governing body, acting headteacher and staff should:

- (1) raise standards in information and communication technology by:**
 - ensuring that time is allocated on the timetable for the teaching of these skills; and
 - developing assessment procedures that evaluate pupils' standards and show what they need to do to improve. (Paragraphs 33-35)

- (2) continue to forge stronger links with parents and keep them better informed by:**
 - encouraging more to help in school;
 - ensuring that documents sent to them include all the statutory information; and
 - making pupils' annual reports more informative, particularly in terms of how they can improve. (Paragraphs 36-38)

- (3) improve pupils' attendance by using the information gained from the new monitoring procedures and working with parents to reduce rates of unauthorised absence.**
(Paragraphs 39-41)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	17
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	32

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	7	7	3	0	0	0
Percentage	0	41	41	18	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 four percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery	Y3 – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)		266
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals		39

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	Y3 – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs		3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register		44

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	2
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

Attendance

Authorised absence	%	Unauthorised absence	%
School data	6.4	School data	0.9

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 2 (Year 6)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	2001	39	20	59

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	29	25	33
	Girls	19	16	19
	Total	48	41	52
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	81 (77)	69 (75)	88 (80)
	National	75 (75)	71 (72)	87 (85)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	27	27	30
	Girls	16	15	15
	Total	43	42	45
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	73 (70)	71 (71)	78 (83)
	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	1
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	261
Any other minority ethnic group	1

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: Y3 – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	11
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	24
Average class size	33

Education support staff: Y3 – Y6

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	215

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
	£
Total income	525133
Total expenditure	505784
Expenditure per pupil	1901
Balance brought forward from previous year	52756
Balance carried forward to next year	72105

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	7
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	7
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
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)	1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	266
Number of questionnaires returned	49

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	53	45	0	0	2
My child is making good progress in school.	45	55	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	41	57	2	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	49	18	0	2
The teaching is good.	49	51	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	43	27	2	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	43	49	6	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	47	53	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	22	47	27	0	4
The school is well led and managed.	45	49	6	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	41	55	0	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	41	41	14	2	2