

INSPECTION REPORT

ST LOUIS CATHOLIC COMBINED SCHOOL

Aylesbury

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110480

Headteacher: Mrs Margaret Louisy

Reporting inspector: Mrs Stephanie Lacey
3764

Dates of inspection: 14 - 16 January 2002

Inspection number: 196735

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 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Harris Court Aylesbury Buckinghamshire
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Sheila Callow
Date of previous inspection:	28 April 1997

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Louis Catholic Combined School is a small church aided primary school with 213 pupils on roll between 4 and 11. There are slightly more girls than boys, but in some classes there is quite an uneven balance between the two. About 10 per cent of the pupils either joined or left the school during the last academic year. Almost all of the pupils live in the parish of St Clare's. Almost 16 per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is broadly average. Sixty per cent of the families have their cultural roots in the British Isles. Forty per cent of the pupils are from families who have lived in England for several generations, but who came originally from France, Italy, Poland, the Caribbean, China and Pakistan. Eleven per cent of children are of mixed race. Fourteen pupils are bilingual and all are fluent English speakers. The county's baseline assessment indicates that the skills, knowledge and understanding of children entering the reception class are below average when compared with their peers in other Buckinghamshire schools. Nineteen per cent of pupils are on the school's register of special educational need, which is average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school where pupils achieve well and reach high standards. The teachings of Christ are the foundation for the school's work. Excellent leadership by the newly appointed headteacher, with good support from staff and governors, has helped the school to improve. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards are well above average in mathematics throughout the school and above average in English by the time pupils reach Year 6.
- Pupils are very positive about school, behave very well and relate very well to each other and the staff.
- A caring Christian ethos underpins the work of the school.
- The leadership of the new headteacher is excellent.
- Staff and governors work together well.
- There is a clear commitment to improvement.
- The administrative staff are very effective.

What could be improved

- Standards in information communication technology (ICT) have improved but are still not as high as they should be.
- The balance between time spent on English, mathematics, religious education and other subjects.
- The school's grounds, especially the area for children in the Foundation Stage.
- The internal design of the school, especially the layout of the administrative area.

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 progress since its last inspection in April 1997. There is now a very clear direction for the way forward, teaching has improved and standards have risen. Satisfactory overall improvement has been made in planning for different subjects, which was an area highlighted for development by the last inspection. Good improvement has been made in other noted areas, including the work of subject managers and planning for pupils of different ability. This good improvement has been achieved in the face of some difficulties, not least the unsettling effect of three headteachers in as many years. The appointment of a new headteacher just over a year ago has brought much needed stability and the school is in a good position to move forward further.

STANDARDS

Children in the foundation stage make satisfactory progress, with some reaching the early learning goals for the end of the reception year ahead of time. Pupils make good progress in Years 1 and 2 and last year's statutory test results were average in reading and writing and well above average in mathematics. Higher attainers did well in reading and mathematics, but not so well in writing. The inspection found that standards are similar this year.

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	A	B	B	B
mathematics	A	D	A	A
science	E	D	A	A

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

(Similar schools are those with a similar percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals. St Louis is in the 8% - 20% band)

This table shows that standards in Year 6 national tests fluctuate from year to year. This is because of the effects of small cohorts on statistical data and is typical of both Year 2 and Year 6 tests. However, since the last inspection overall standards in Year 6 national tests have improved faster than the national trend and last year were above average in English and well above average in mathematics and science. This particular group of pupils made very good progress from Year 2. In both years, higher attaining pupils did not do as well in writing as they did in other subjects. Standards are similar this year and the school is well set to meet its challenging targets. Over the last few years boys have not done as well as girls in both Year 2 and Year 6 national tests. The school is investigating reasons for this closely. The inspection found that there was nothing in the teaching in lessons seen to account for this disparity and that in many classes boys were in both higher and lower attaining groups. The school has worked hard to raise standards in ICT and pupils have made good progress since September. However, pupils do not have the skills, knowledge and understanding expected for their age. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because of the good support that they receive. Pupils who speak more than one language are all fluent English speakers, many speaking English as their first language at home. They achieve as well as their peers. The school has analysed the performance of pupils from all ethnic backgrounds and there is no difference between the spread of ability and achievement of different groups.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils are very positive about all aspects of school life. They enjoy coming to school and talk enthusiastically about the staff, their friends, their work and the new computers.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils behave very well in lessons and at playtimes. Very occasionally one or two pupils do not behave sensibly and last year one pupil was justifiably excluded for unacceptable behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils get on very well with their teachers and their peers. Older pupils respond very well to the extra responsibilities given to them. This includes organising playtime equipment and work on the new School Council.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Attendance rates have improved over the last few years. Most pupils arrive at school punctually.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 – 2	Years 3 – 6
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	Good	Good

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

A small sample of seventeen lessons was seen and the quality of teaching in three-quarters of these lessons was good or better. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Most of the lessons seen were in literacy, numeracy and ICT. From these lessons, teachers' plans and pupils' achievement it is evident that overall the quality of teaching at St Louis is good and ensures that pupils make good progress. Throughout the school very good relationships between staff and pupils underpin the teaching and learning.

In the nursery and reception classes teaching is satisfactory overall with some good features. Planning is based on national guidance for the Foundation Stage and there is good improvement in this aspect of teaching since the last inspection. There is not yet enough emphasis on enabling children to plan their own activities or to learn through structured play. This is impeded to some extent by the unsatisfactory provision for children's learning in the outside area. In Years 1 and 2 the teaching is good and pupils are achieving well. Lessons are well planned. The teaching assistant provides very good support and works effectively with the teachers. Teachers explain new ideas carefully, although sometimes they spend too long talking to the whole class. In Years 3 to 6 the quality of teaching is also good overall, with more of a range between the very good and satisfactory lessons. Some teachers have particular strengths and in these classes pupils move forward quickly. In the better lessons there are high expectations of what pupils can achieve and lessons move at a good pace. In some lessons these elements were missing. Literacy, numeracy and ICT are taught well overall. The extra input from the headteacher into numeracy especially has helped to lift standards. Standards in ICT are also rising as a consequence of the good specialist teaching in this area. Pupils with special educational needs are taught well and appropriate tasks are planned for them.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. Staff have worked hard to improve planning for different subjects. The heavy emphasis on literacy, numeracy and religious education means that some subjects are not covered as well as they should be.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils work on appropriate tasks and are supported well in lessons by teachers and assistants.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Provision is good for pupils speaking English as an additional language. They are bilingual and do not need any extra support. Nonetheless staff are careful to explain new words carefully.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. Satisfactory provision for pupils' cultural development overall, but not enough emphasis given to celebrating cultural traditions outside Great Britain.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well overall. Very good attention is paid to pupils' welfare. Improvement since the last inspection in assessing how well pupils are doing.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher has a very clear educational vision and gives an excellent lead to staff and governors. Most senior staff have taken on their responsibilities recently and already support colleagues well.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors undertake their responsibilities with enthusiasm. They use their particular talents well in the best interests of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school effectively evaluates how well it is doing and uses the information well to set an agenda for future improvement.
The strategic use of resources	Very good financial planning ensures that the school uses its resources well to focus on areas for development. The school applies the principles of best value well and provides good value for money.

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 well led and managed. • Behaviour is good. • They would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. • The school is helping their children to become more mature. • Their children like school. • The teaching is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range of activities outside lessons. • Homework arrangements. • Information about their children's progress.

104 of the 204 questionnaires sent to parents seeking their views were returned and 17 parents attended the meeting held for them before the inspection. The views above are based on the both the questionnaire and the meeting.

The inspection wholeheartedly agrees with parents' positive views. It found that there are some activities planned outside lessons, including musical events. Overall there are not as many regular out of school activities for pupils as there are in many schools. At the moment there are three school clubs outside of lessons, for example. However, there are many opportunities for pupils to take part in musical events and drama productions. The work in this area is a strength of the school. Homework is set regularly, but the ways that parents are informed about what is expected vary from class to class. This is confusing for parents. The information given to parents about their children's progress is satisfactory overall. Teachers are now involving parents more in discussing what their children need to do to make progress.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards are well above average in mathematics throughout the school and above average in English by the time pupils reach Year 6.

1 Pupils do well in mathematics throughout the school and reach high standards in English by the time they reach Year 6.

Mathematics

2 In national tests last year all pupils in Year 2 reached the expected Level 2. This meant that in relation to other schools they were in the top five per cent. Half of the pupils reached the higher Level 3, which was well above average. In Year 6 national tests, standards were also well above average.

3 The inspection found that standards are similar this year. There are several reasons for pupils' success in this area. These include:

- Clear leadership by the headteacher, who is also the mathematics subject leader;
- Successful implementation of the national numeracy strategy;
- Good teaching;
- Additional support for pupils in Years 3, 5 and 6.

4 Throughout the school pupils are achieving well at tasks appropriate for their age. In Year 2, for example, pupils were working on estimation of numbers. They showed good understanding of sequence of numbers to 100 and most were secure in the knowledge that 50 was half of 100 and 25 half of fifty. In Year 6, pupils were studying the relationship between multiplication and division when working to two decimal places.

English

5 In Year 2 national tests last year standards were average in reading. (Although the number of pupils reaching the expected Level 2 and the higher Level 3 was above average, a high proportion only reached Level 2c and this brought the overall standard down). In Year 2 writing tests standards were also average overall. More pupils than average reached the expected Level 2 in writing, but higher attainers did not do so well. Standards in English overall were above average in Year 6 national tests, with higher attainers again not doing so well in writing. The inspection found that standards are similar this year.

6 Pupils throughout the school speak confidently. They participate well in whole class question and answer sessions. In some classes there are opportunities for pupils to discuss aspects of their work together. However opportunities to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills are not systematically planned throughout the school.

7 Pupils enjoy reading and this sets a firm foundation for the acquisition of skills, understanding and knowledge. They make good progress in developing their understanding and enjoyment of a range of authors alongside skills related to a development of phonics. Most share books regularly with parents and carers at home and this helps them to make good progress. Generally teachers set homework in reading and other subjects effectively to help pupils to consolidate their progress and extend their skills, but there is some inconsistency in the arrangements from class to class. Pupils select their own books from a colour-coded range of schemes and other books. These are mostly fiction books and there is less opportunity for pupils to borrow non-fiction books from the library on a regular basis. Within the literacy hour teachers make good use of high quality texts as a basis for the work.

They plan appropriate activities for all pupils and support lower attainers well.

8 The school is working hard to raise standards in writing to match those in reading. Pupils experience a wide range of writing. In a Year 1 lesson, for example, pupils were identifying the beginning, middle and ends of stories in order to improve their own understanding of story. In Year 2, pupils were trying to improve their writing in the lesson seen. Year 5 pupils were writing a 'concrete' poem and pupils in Year 6 were writing the argument for one side in a debate. Individual targets are also used well to remind pupils of what they need to do to improve. Work is displayed carefully in classrooms and this helps pupils to realise that their efforts are appreciated. Good quality texts are used as a basis for the work. This helps pupils to model their own writing on work of high quality. In some classes there are one or two factors that limit progress. These are insufficient time for writing, not enough attention to redrafting and limited links with other subjects.

9 Pupils with special educational needs are well supported in both literacy and numeracy sessions and this has a positive impact on their achievements. Teachers plan appropriate tasks for them and in many sessions learning support assistants provide extra help.

10 Boys have not done as well as girls in national tests and this is discussed in a later section. The school has analysed carefully the performance of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds and there is no significant difference between the different groups.

Pupils are very positive about school, behave very well and relate very well to each other and the staff

11 All pupils enjoy coming to school. The youngest pupils in the nursery and reception classes are settling in well. They follow instructions carefully and become involved well in their chosen activities. Older pupils particularly are very positive about all that the school has to offer. In conversation with some Year 6 pupils, it was evident that they have great respect and affection for their teachers. They explained that teachers sorted out problems quickly and were very approachable. They enjoy the work set, especially mathematics, geography, science, history and physical education. They value the extra responsibilities that they are given. These include acting as captains and vice captains of houses and undertaking prefect duties. Sometimes they are asked to help pupils who find it difficult to behave well. The new School Council, set up in September, is made up of the elected house captains and vice captains. They are proud of what they have achieved so far. This includes providing new playtime equipment. In lessons seen pupils were all very attentive to their teachers and worked hard during the activity part of the lesson. These positive attitudes are typical of all groups of pupils, including higher and lower attainers, pupils from a range of ethnic backgrounds and boys and girls.

12 Behaviour in lessons and at playtimes is very good. Children in the nursery and reception classes are generally sensible, they clearly know the difference between right and wrong. They are beginning to become accustomed to school routines. Most understand that they have to listen carefully to their teachers, for example, when they are sitting in a large group. One or two full-time children are tired by the end of the school day and are less attentive in the last session. Throughout the school teachers do not have to waste time on behaviour management. Pupils respond well to the high expectations that the school has of their good behaviour. Occasionally a very small minority find it difficult to behave well. Last year, for example, one pupil was appropriately excluded for unacceptable behaviour. This term there have been one or two incidents involving racist remarks. The staff have dealt with these promptly and effectively and the pupils involved are satisfied with the outcome. There were no racist incidents during the time of the inspection and pupils from all ethnic backgrounds appear to get on very well together. There were no incidents of bullying seen. Pupils feel that

the staff sort out the odd difficulty very quickly.

13 Relationships between pupils are also very good. Within lessons pupils work well together when asked to do so. They respect each other's views and opinions and discuss these sensibly. In one Year 6 literacy session, for example, pupils worked together to give opposing views on the use of experimentation on animals. Many held strong views, but all were willing to listen to the other person's point of view. At playtimes, pupils play happily together and enjoy using the new playground equipment.

A caring Christian ethos underpins the work of the school

14 St Louis has a very clear mission statement that is evident in every aspect of the school's work. It states that 'We aim to work in partnership with parents, parish and the wider community to ensure that our belief in God and our Catholic faith permeates all aspects of our children's education.' This commitment to partnership is reinforced further in the school's motto: 'Ut sint unum - that they may be one'.

15 From the moment that one steps through the door of the school it is evident that the school community cares for and values individuals. A delightful display of portraits of all the pupils in the school greets the visitor and on turning towards the office one sees a display of staff and governor photographs. In practical terms individuals are cared for well. In the staffroom, for example, there are photos and notes about pupils who have chronic medical conditions, so that all are aware of their particular needs. Pupils feel that the concern and care for people is a particular strength of the school and five of the seven 'best things' that older pupils identified about the school were related to the contribution of individuals.

16 This care is clearly based on a belief in Christ's teachings. Faith and belief permeate the work of the school in a meaningful and positive way. Assemblies are the focal point of the day. They are reflective and calm occasions, when staff and pupils meet together to worship God. Pupils also have opportunities for prayer and reflection at the start and end of the day.

17 Care for each other is also shown in very practical ways. During the inspection, for example, two girls kept a friend company at lunchtime because she had injured her leg and pupils were assiduous in their offers to wash up cups for inspectors.

18 There are very good relationships between all those involved in the school, pupils, staff, governors and parents. Parents value the Catholic ethos of the school and some non-Catholic parents also choose to send their children to St Louis. Some governors, together with the priest, are the main bridge between the school and the parish of St Clare's. Several pupils are prepared each year for their first communion.

19 Alongside this care for the spiritual, social and emotional needs of the pupils is a real commitment to enabling all pupils to do their best academically. Staff have high expectations of pupils and are continually seeking ways to enable them to do even better. The whole ethos is one of inclusiveness, in that the school welcomes pupils and adults as they are and strives to do the best for them.

The leadership of the new headteacher is excellent

20 The headteacher is now in the second year of her headship. She has the full support of staff, governors and pupils and is leading the school forward very effectively.

21 There are several factors that contribute to her excellent leadership. Firstly, she has a

clear vision for the future. This is exemplified in the school improvement plan, which provides a clear agenda for the school's work in the current year and the future. The plan has been devised in consultation with the governors and staff and lays out the plans for improvement within the context of the school's current circumstances. Eight priorities have been identified for the current year, all appropriately related to the development of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. There are clear action plans for work in different areas and arrangements for close monitoring and evaluation of the success of work undertaken. In some instances the criteria to measure success are linked more to the completion of a task rather than to the impact of new developments on standards.

22 The headteacher is a strong leader and, while working closely and sensitively with staff and governors, holds firmly to what she believes to be the best way forward for the school. She feels wisely, for example, that it is important to appoint the highest quality staff possible in order to provide the best support for the pupils. This means that, in some instances, the budget has to be readjusted in order to make this possible. The impact of these appointments has been very positive. Since September a new deputy headteacher, appointed from within the school, has effectively co-ordinated work for pupils with special educational needs, for example. A new teacher has been appointed to lead the work with children in the foundation stage and to manage ICT in the school. She has already had a very good impact on these areas and standards in ICT especially are rising quickly. A nursery nurse has also joined the Year 1 and 2 team and is giving very good support to the pupils in these classes.

23 The headteacher supports staff very well. In her monitoring of teaching and learning she has identified staff who need help in particular areas and spends a substantial part of each week supporting these staff in class. This is having a positive impact on both the teachers' skills and pupils' learning. She is aware of each teacher's personal and professional needs and takes care to ensure that these are met. During the inspection, for example, she was in and out of classrooms at the start and end of the day offering support and encouragement. She also challenges her staff and encourages them to take on further professional development. The Year 6 teacher, for example, is co-ordinating some research work with the London Institute of Education.

24 The headteacher has excellent inter-personal skills and uses these well to encourage and inspire staff, governors and pupils. She leads by example and her enthusiasm and hard work are an inspiration to all.

Staff and governors work together well

25 Both the staff and governor teams work well, complementing and supporting each other. This has a positive impact on the quality of education provided for the pupils.

26 Within the staff team there is a good balance of experience and expertise. Some of the staff, such as the caretaker and senior lunchtime supervisor have been at the school for many years. They know the school, the families and parish well and provide a sense of stability. Some of the teaching staff have particular subject strengths and use these well to improve the provision for the pupils. The deputy head, for example, has musical talents and uses these in running the choir and leading the singing in assembly. A particular strength is the way in which staff support and help each other. Learning support assistants, for example, complement the teachers well, particularly in literacy and numeracy sessions. At these times they often work with lower attaining pupils, offering sensitive and targeted help. Subject managers' roles are now developing and this has helped staff work more closely together in the monitoring of pupils' work and the auditing of resources. One of the disadvantages of a one-form entry school is that staff do not have the opportunity to work

closely with other staff teaching the same year group. This is particularly useful for more inexperienced staff. The school is aware of this and plans are in hand for teachers to visit classes in other schools to develop their expertise.

27 The governing body also have a good range of experience and expertise and this helps them to support the school very effectively. They undertake much of their work through small committees. Some governors, such as the literacy and numeracy governors are linked to subject managers and this helps them to have a clear picture of how well the school is doing in specific areas. Governors at St Louis are supportive, but also challenging. They work together well and are proactive in obtaining the best possible deal for the school. When appointing the new headteacher, for example, governors wrote to Catholic schools in the area to draw possible candidates' attention to the vacancy. The dynamics of the governing body have changed since the headteacher's appointment, partly because of her new leadership style and also because of the appointment of a number of new governors. They now have more of a strategic overview and are clearly aware of the strengths of the school and the areas for development.

There is a clear commitment to improvement

28 There is a clear commitment to improvement shared by staff and governors. This is expressed in the school improvement plan and evident in the daily work of the school.

29 One good example of this is the school's involvement, along with seven other Buckinghamshire schools, in an action research project in association with the London Institute of Education. Staff at St Louis have been concerned for some time about the apparent underachievement of boys throughout the school, because in national tests boys have not done as well as girls. They are about half way through the project, which involves interviewing staff, pupils, parents and governors about their views of successful learners. This looks particularly into the relation between pupil effort and pupil performance. Conclusions will be drawn once the project is completed, but the attention given to discussions about the relative effort and performance of boys and girls has already helped teachers to evaluate their own practice.

30 The inspection found that the situation was not a straightforward one and this could well have been the case for many years. In many classes there are uneven numbers of boys and girls, which could have an impact on class dynamics and the way in which the teacher manages the class. This would also impact on year on year statistical information, if, for example, a small group of boys had a high percentage of pupils with special educational needs. In several classes there was an interesting spread of ability, often with boys predominating in both the higher and lower attaining groups. The inspection found nothing in planning or the teachers' delivery to account for the difference between the attainment of boys and girls.

31 Another example of the commitment to improvement is the way in which teachers and support staff are striving to improve their practice. This is effectively tied in with the school's performance management strategy and is very well supported by the headteacher. During the inspection, for example, teachers were keen to discuss how they could improve their lessons further - even when they were already very good. Some teachers, who are not as experienced as their colleagues, receive extra support from the headteacher and advisory staff to help them to develop their skills. This is proving effective overall. At the time of the inspection one longstanding member of staff was absent on long term sick leave and so no judgements could be made on the quality or impact of her teaching.

32 A third example of action taken to move the school forward quickly are the regular 'key

dials' meetings where the governors meet to discuss how well the school is doing. ('Key dials' are taken from an aircraft's instrument panel where the pilot looks at the dials to check how the plane is flying.) Governors consider the school's performance in national tests, for example, when the school's 'PANDA' report is issued in the autumn term and discuss any steps that need to be taken to raise standards further.

The administrative staff are very effective

33 There are two office staff, a clerical assistant and an office and finance manager. They complement each other well and their efficiency and friendly manner make a significant contribution to the smooth running of the school.

34 The office and finance manager is responsible for the management of day-to-day finances. This is more onerous than in many schools because the school manages its own bank account, rather than passing invoices to the local authority for payment. She undertakes this very well and a recent audit report indicated only minor areas for improvement, which have all been addressed. She also helps the headteacher to prepare the annual budget, with her expertise in this area helping to make the process efficient. There is a 13 per cent carry forward from the last financial year. This is some way above the recommended five per cent. It is a consequence of extra funding given to the school to cushion the effect of the loss of Year 7 a couple of years ago (as a result of the Buckinghamshire school reorganisation). Since the appointment of the new headteacher, this extra funding has been wisely allocated and the overall carry forward is reducing to acceptable levels.

35 Generally the office and finance manager takes a good deal of administrative pressure from the headteacher and this enables her to concentrate on developing teaching and learning. The office staff also make very good use of ICT to maintain records and manage the finance.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Standards in information communication technology, which have improved but are still not as high as they should be

36 The school is taking appropriate steps to raise standards in ICT, but these are not as high as they should be. Pupils are now making good progress, but older ones especially have some way to go to catch up.

37 The main reasons for lower standards in this area are related to insufficient computers in the past, inadequate planning and teachers' subject knowledge. These problems have now all been addressed. There is now a computer suite, where half a class can work comfortably, as well as computers for individual use in classrooms. Planning has improved and the school has adopted some national guidelines to act as a basis for their planning. This will ensure that pupils' skills, understanding and knowledge develop in a systematic way. Training for all staff is to start in March. This will build staff confidence and enable all teachers to refine and develop their own skills.

38 Currently pupils are achieving well in lessons. This is because a specialist teacher is working with half a class at a time in the new computer suite. She plans appropriate work for pupils and presents it in an interesting way, which grasps the pupils' imaginations. In Year 2, for example, a group of pupils worked with 'Roamers' (programmable moving robots) to input instructions and observe what happened. By the end of the lesson most understood the mechanics of giving instructions to the machine. However it was clear that they had not used

a 'Roamer' before and were at the initial stages of an understanding of the concept of 'control'. In a Year 6 session, pupils were taught how to access the Internet for information about the Winter Olympics. They managed this well, many helped by their experiences of using computers at home. In conversation it was evident that pupils know how to save and retrieve files and send to print. They also have some word-processing skills. They have less experience of using simulation programmes or creating series of instructions.

39 Some pupils also use computers attached to classrooms to work through a mathematics programme and manage this well. It does mean that sometimes pupils miss work in other subjects and staff are aware of the need to monitor this carefully. Overall, classroom computers are not used systematically to support work in other subjects.

The balance between time spent on English, mathematics, religious education and other subjects

40 The school has improved its curriculum planning since the last inspection, when it was highlighted as an area for development. Planning frameworks are in place for all subjects, although the school is constantly refining these. The literacy and numeracy strategies form the basis for work in English and mathematics and national guidelines underpin work in most other areas. The school allocates slightly more than the recommended time to teaching the areas of learning in the nursery and reception classes and the National Curriculum and religious education in Years 1 and 2. It is broadly in line with the recommendations for time in lessons in Years 3 to 6.

41 There is a good emphasis given to teaching literacy and numeracy skills throughout the school and ten per cent of the taught time is spent on religious education. A session each week is given over to 'Golden Time', where pupils who have worked hard select their own activity. This means that time spent on other subjects has been squeezed and pupils are not covering some units of work in some subjects in sufficient depth. This is particularly the case in history and geography. Unusually, classes only have one physical education session a week. In some classes the timetable could be better organised to create an 'extra' session. This is especially the case in the morning, when sometimes the literacy hour extends beyond sixty minutes. The school is aware of this and is considering ways of adjusting the timetable to improve the balance of time spent on English, mathematics, religious education and other subjects.

42 Planning for a broad curriculum is now in place for different subjects. However opportunities to make links between subjects are not always taken. Planning does not indicate, for example, a structured approach to using historical texts as a basis for work in the literacy hour or how ICT can be used in other subjects. Another strand in curriculum planning that has not been developed sufficiently is the provision for pupils' multi-cultural education. At the moment this occurs on an 'ad hoc' basis. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about a Caribbean day, for example. There are no planned opportunities for pupils to learn about non-western cultural traditions in literacy, art or music, for example, even though over 20 per cent of the pupils have cultural roots outside Western Europe.

The school's grounds, especially the area for children in the foundation stage

43 The school is surrounded by housing on three sides and a field belonging to the Sisters of St Louis on the other. It is approached down a narrow drive, with room for two cars to pass with care and no pathway for pedestrians. In the past the building and grounds have been subject to vandalism. About three years ago, for example, £90,000 of damage was caused when the oil tank was emptied. The school has now installed surveillance cameras and engaged the support of neighbours in reporting intruders and the problem is lessening. One

of the consequences of the vandalism is that the school has been reluctant to invest in outdoor equipment and facilities in case of damage. As a result there are sufficient hard surfaces for pupils and a small area of grass, but these are fairly barren.

44 The area for children in the foundation stage can be reached from the reception and nursery classrooms and is therefore in a good position. It is a large area of tarmac. However, there is a steep ramp to the building side of the playground, which makes the use of wheeled vehicles potentially dangerous. The playground is also open to the car park on one side, with an open gateway to the older pupils' play area on the other. Children are always very well supervised, but this arrangement is not satisfactory. The play area itself is large enough, but has only one surface with no grassed area or place where children could tend plants and seeds. It has no permanent climbing equipment, sand pit or wooden shelter. Staff make the best of the area by taking out equipment for the children, but it is not conducive to providing rich learning opportunities.

45 The older pupils have access to several hard-surfaced areas, with small courtyards as well as two larger playgrounds. Some of the surfaces are uneven and in need of repair. There is a small area of grass within the school fence and the school also pays a rent for the larger field owned by the Sisters of St Louis. The outside area is not developed sufficiently as a resource for environmental work.

46 The school driveway is potentially dangerous. There have been two separate accidents involving vehicles in recent months and although nobody was hurt, staff, governors and parents are concerned about the potential threat to pupils' safety. At the moment pedestrians and vehicles share the same pathway. The car parking space is also very limited and parked cars block easy access to the building.

The internal design of the school, especially the layout of the administrative area

47 There is sufficient space inside the school building to enable staff to teach the National Curriculum and religious education. The school is very well cared for by an experienced caretaker. Staff and teachers use displays well to make the building an attractive place to learn.

48 The school has expanded over the years and extensions and adaptations have been made within the funding available at the time. Consequently the school has a unique design, which adds to its charm, but places some limitations on the use of the building.

49 There are three areas where the design of the building places some constraints on its use. One is that the internal access to the main school from the reception area and offices is through the new computer suite and library. In dry weather staff and pupils walk around the outside of the building if they need to move between the two areas. In inclement weather sessions in the ICT suite are constantly interrupted. The school is investigating ways of creating a covered access to overcome this difficulty.

50 The second area where the use of space makes working conditions difficult is in the office and school reception area. Here the two administrative staff work in a small corridor-like office. There is a hatch to the reception area, but it is difficult for staff to greet visitors without moving from their workstations. Similarly visitors approaching the hatch have a view of a computer screen, rather than a friendly face. Staff cope very well in these circumstances, but some remodelling of this area would enable the administrative officer to concentrate without interruption on her work and the reception secretary to greet visitors more effectively.

51 The third area where space could be better used is the shared teaching space outside classrooms. Some classrooms, although large enough for the number of pupils, are quite small. Teachers make some use of the areas outside classrooms. In a music lesson, for example, a small group worked together to plan the accompaniment for a song. However generally these spaces are underused. In some parts of the building there is scope for extending the classrooms to encompass part of the shared area.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

52 In order to build on the many strengths of the school, the headteacher, staff and governors need to:

- (1) Raise standards in information communication technology by:
 - Continuing to implement the current action plan;
 - Using ICT more to support work in other subjects and ensuring classroom computers are used regularly and effectively.

(Reference paragraphs: 36 - 39)

- (2) Readjust the timetable in order to give sufficient time to all subjects by:
 - Reviewing current arrangements;
 - Increasing the time spent on art and design, design and technology, geography, history, music and physical education so that the curriculum is better balanced.

(Reference paragraphs: 40 - 42)

- (3) Improve the school grounds to make them a more stimulating and safe learning environment, especially for children in the foundation stage by:
 - Fencing the outdoor area for children in the foundation stage as a matter of some urgency;
 - Providing a variety of surfaces and equipment in the area for children in the foundation stage;
 - Providing a pedestrian pathway along the school drive and improving the parking arrangements;
 - Reviewing the provision and use of the hard standing and grass surfaces.

(Reference paragraphs: 41 - 46)

- (4) Improve the use of the building by:
 - Reviewing the current efficiency of the school's layout;
 - Providing easy access to the main school from the entrance area;
 - Improving the layout of the reception and administrative area;
 - Making best use of shared areas between classrooms.

(Reference paragraphs: 47 - 51)

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	13

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	3	10	4	0	0	0
Percentage	0%	18%	59%	24%	0%	0%	0%

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	3	196
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	0	32

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	0	39

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	14

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2001	12	18

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	10	10	12
	Girls	17	17	18
	Total	27	27	30
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	90 (92)	90 (92)	100 (100)
	National	84 (83)	86 (84)	91 (90)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	10	10	11
	Girls	17	17	17
	Total	27	27	28
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	90 (92)	90 (96)	93 (88)
	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	10	8

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	7	7	7
	Girls	8	8	8
	Total	15	15	15
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	83 (80)	83 (63)	83 (80)
	National	75 (75)	71 (72)	87 (85)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	7	7	9
	Girls	7	7	8
	Total	14	14	17
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	78 (77)	78 (77)	94 (77)
	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	11
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	23
Indian	0
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	138
Any other minority ethnic group	1

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	8.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	22
Average class size	28

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	95

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	0.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	6
Total number of education support staff	0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	0
Number of pupils per FTE adult	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	2.6
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

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	8	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Financial information

Financial year	2000 - 2001
	£
Total income	391603
Total expenditure	358361
Expenditure per pupil	1848
Balance brought forward from previous year	18087
Balance carried forward to next year	51329

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	204
Number of questionnaires returned	104

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	58	36	5	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	43	45	9	2	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	38	56	4	1	1
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	33	44	17	5	1
The teaching is good.	44	47	2	2	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	34	48	14	2	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	68	26	4	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	62	37	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	45	42	12	0	1
The school is well led and managed.	51	44	1	1	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	41	53	2	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	13	29	32	14	12