

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **AMHERST SCHOOL**

Sevenoaks

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118281

Headteacher: Mr P D Wiltshire

Reporting inspector: Mrs S J M Lacey  
3764

Dates of inspection: 4 - 6 February 2002

Inspection number: 198137

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Junior
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	7 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Witches Lane Riverhead Sevenoaks Kent
Postcode:	TN13 2AX
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs E S Harris
Date of previous inspection:	13 October 1997

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Amherst School is a large junior school in the Riverhead area of Sevenoaks with 373 pupils on roll between 7 and 11. There are slightly more girls than boys. Most pupils transfer to the school in Year 3 from Riverhead Infant School, with a small number coming from elsewhere. Overall, standards on entry to the school are well above average in English and mathematics. The pupil population is stable with about three per cent of the pupils either joining or leaving the school during the last academic year. Most pupils live within two miles of the school. Only 0.5 per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is low when compared to the national average. Ninety-eight per cent of the pupils have their cultural roots in the British Isles, with a small number of pupils having an Italian, Dutch, Chinese or African heritage. Three pupils are learning English as an additional language, with two of these at the early stages. Seventeen per cent of pupils are on the school's register of special educational need, which is average. Three pupils have statements of special educational need.

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

Amherst is a good school, with some very good features. It has a justifiably high reputation in the local area. Good teaching and the headteacher's very good leadership ensure that standards are high and pupils achieve well. The school provides good value for money.

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

- Standards are high in English and mathematics and above average in science.
- The school's ethos ensures that pupils are very positive about learning, behave very well and form very good relationships with each other and adults.
- The leadership of the headteacher is very good.
- Teaching is good and ensures that pupils achieve well.
- The school's provision for activities outside lessons is excellent.
- The school's partnership with parents is very good.

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

- Within the context of a good school there are some minor areas for development.
- The time spent on investigative work in science and mathematics, and design and technology.
  - The role of subject managers.
  - Some inconsistencies in teaching, including marking and challenge for more able pupils in some lessons.
  - The school grounds.

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

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

Amherst was a good school at the time of its last inspection in October 1997 and since that time has maintained and developed its provision for the pupils. Consequently standards have risen in line with the national trend and pupils continue to be interested in learning. Good improvement has been made in developing the quality of the teaching. Great strides have also been made in the area of information and communication technology (ICT). A new computer suite has been established, there is a systematic approach to teaching the subject and standards are rising rapidly. Sound progress has been made in addressing the areas highlighted for improvement by the last inspection, which were related to curriculum planning and the school's own strategic improvement plan. The school is in a good position to move forward 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	A	A	A	A
mathematics	A*	A	A*	A
science	B	B	B	C

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

*Similar schools are those within the same band for free school meal entitlement. Amherst is in the 0% to 8% category.*

Standards have been high at Amherst for many years, especially in English and mathematics. In last year's Year 6 national tests, standards were in the top five per cent of all schools in mathematics, well above average in English and above average in science. Pupils at Amherst did much better than their peers in similar schools in English and mathematics and as well as their peers in science. Standards have risen in line with the national trend over the last few years. Amherst staff are not complacent about the pupils' achievement and set appropriately challenging targets for them in national tests year on year. In line with the national picture, pupils do better in reading than in writing. The school has been concentrating on developing pupils' writing skills for two years in order to raise writing standards, especially for the more able pupils. This has had a positive impact on standards. Similarly, staff are also working hard to raise the performance of higher attainers in science. The inspection found that standards remain high in English and mathematics, with pupils writing for a range of purposes and achieving well. Standards in science remain above average. Pupils have a very good scientific knowledge base, but their investigative and experimental skills are not so well developed. Pupils have made very good progress in developing their ICT skills since the opening of the new computer suite and standards, although currently average, are rising rapidly. In this short inspection, there was insufficient time to assess standards in other subjects in any depth.

Standards are high on entry to the school in Year 3 and these are maintained well, with pupils making steady progress. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. As a consequence of the good support given in Years 3 and 4, many come off the special needs register by the time that they reach Years 5 and 6. Pupils learning English as an additional language make very good progress. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls or of pupils from different ethnic groups.

#### **PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES**

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils are very positive about all aspects of school life. They concentrate well in class and work hard.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils behave very well both in lessons and at playtimes. They are polite and courteous. There have been no exclusions from the school for inappropriate behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils form very good relationships with their peers and adults. They take on more responsibility as they become older and undertake their tasks, such as prefect duties, very sensibly.
Attendance	Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance rates are well above average.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

<b>Teaching of pupils in:</b>	<b>Years 3 – 6</b>
Quality of teaching	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 overall good quality of the teaching ensures that pupils achieve well. Teaching has improved since the last inspection and this improvement has been sustained in spite of significant staff changes. There are a number of reasons for this. These include improved planning in English and mathematics following the introduction of the literacy and numeracy strategies. Good support for staff new to the school has also been an important factor, as has the monitoring of teaching, leading to appropriate support for teachers. Strengths underpinning the teaching include good planning and preparation, especially in English and mathematics, very good relationships between teachers and pupils and good support for pupils with special educational needs.

Literacy and numeracy, which have been a focus of the school's work in recent years, are both now taught well. Teachers have been concentrating on helping pupils to develop their writing skills this year and plan carefully to ensure that pupils write for a range of purposes. Teachers ensure that most numeracy sessions move at a good pace, with the mental and oral session at the start setting a good foundation for effective learning.

Within the context of good quality teaching, areas for improvement include some aspects of marking and the challenge for higher attaining pupils in some sessions.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good overall. Strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy, with more limited time spent on some subjects. Excellent provision for a wide range of interesting activities outside lessons. School has achieved the Schools' Curriculum Award several times and has won the Sport England Activemark Gold Award.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good overall. School continues to provide very good levels of support for pupils, who do well, both when they have an adult working with them and when they work independently.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. The very few pupils learning English as an additional language are supported sensitively by staff and are making very good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall. Very good provision for pupils' moral and social development and good provision for their spiritual and overall cultural development. Provision for pupils to learn about cultural diversity has improved and is now satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well. The school is very thorough in its attention to all aspects of health and safety. Pupils' personal and academic progress are carefully monitored.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher has a clear vision for the educational direction of the school and manages the school very well. He is well supported by the three deputy headteachers. Many subject leaders are new to their posts and are beginning to learn about subject leadership within the school in order to raise standards further. Staff, governors and parents work together very well.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors, including the longstanding chairman, are very supportive of the school. Many use their talents and expertise well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school evaluates its performance well and takes appropriate action to improve provision in order to raise standards further.
The strategic use of resources	The school uses its resources, both financial and human, very well. It makes good use of the principles of best value, especially consultation and competitive tendering. The carry forward figure from the last financial year was slightly above the percentage recommended.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour is good.</li> <li>• Teaching is good.</li> <li>• The school expects children to work hard and do their best.</li> <li>• The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.</li> <li>• Their children are happy at school.</li> <li>• The school is well led and managed.</li> <li>• The school is helping children to become more mature and responsible.</li> <li>• Children make good progress.</li> <li>• They would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information about their children's progress.</li> <li>• The amount of homework.</li> </ul>

116 questionnaires were returned. Responses show overwhelming support for the school. Thirty parents attended the meeting held for them before the inspection.

The responses in the boxes above are drawn from the questionnaires sent out to parents and the meeting held for them before the inspection. The inspection wholeheartedly endorses parents' positive views. It looked carefully into the areas that a few parents were concerned about. It found that the information given to parents about their children's progress was better than in many schools. Three parent-teacher consultation evenings are organised each year and parents are able to make arrangements to see their child's teacher at other times if they have any queries. The written reports are clear and there are plans to improve them further this year. Homework arrangements are sound and there is no apparent disparity between the arrangements for parallel classes or between different year groups. The inspection found that parents make a significant contribution to the work of the school, both in their help in classes and clubs and financially. Last year, for example, over £7,500 was raised at the Christmas Bazaar.

## PART B: COMMENTARY

## WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

### Standards are high in English and mathematics and above average in science

#### *Introduction*

1 Pupils at Amherst achieve high standards in English and mathematics particularly and also do well in science. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, many of the pupils are high attainers and standards are high on entry to the school in Year 3. Secondly, the school places a heavy emphasis on work in English and mathematics particularly and teaching is good. Thirdly, parents have high expectations for their children and support them well at home and at school.

#### *National tests*

2 Standards have been high in national tests for many years, although higher attainers do not do so well in writing and science as they do in reading and mathematics. Consequently the school is currently working to improve pupils' attainment in these two areas. This work has already had an impact on standards in writing. A particular challenge facing this school is the difficulty in raising high standards any further. However the staff are not complacent and are continually seeking ways to improve provision. Gifted and talented pupils, for example, receive a limited amount of extra support and the school is considering widening this provision when funding allows. In tests there is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls, or of pupils from different ethnic groups.

#### *English*

3 The inspection found that standards remain high in English and pupils achieve well throughout the school.

4 Pupils speak confidently in class discussions, with older pupils using appropriately complex sentences. They listen well to their teachers and other staff. At the moment there is no planning guidance for the development of pupils' skills in this area and activities such as debates and presentations are organised on an 'ad hoc' basis, rather than as part of a planned programme of study. Similarly, drama activities are planned within some lessons, but these are connected to a particular project, rather than the development of skills. Systematic planning in these areas is likely to raise standards further in speaking and listening.

5 There are several contributory factors to the high standards in reading. These include:

- Good quality teaching with an appropriate emphasis on pupils reading for enjoyment. There is a wide range of good quality books in both the library and classroom collections, which pupils are encouraged to read.

- The support pupils receive from their parents.

Pupils are expected to read at home and this has a positive impact on their progress. Many pupils belong to a local library. Many parents also spend time in school sharing books with pupils, which ensures that all have some individual attention each week.

- The good support for pupils with special educational needs.

These pupils have extra help, often with phonic skill development and this helps many to catch up with their peers.

6 Pupils' standards in writing are above average and there is evidence in their work of steady and sometimes good progress this year. Factors that have helped pupils to achieve well are:

- Opportunities to write for a range of different purposes.

Year 5 pupils, for example, talked about the writing that they had done. This included stories,

instructions, letters, book reviews, writing up science experiments, poetry, historical accounts and diaries.

- Good teaching about writing techniques.

This includes work on drafting and redrafting, as well as planning stories.

- Adopting a flexible approach and using interesting stimuli for imaginative writing.
- Good links with other subjects.

In Year 3, for example, pupils were particularly enthusiastic about their writing on the story of Boudicca. This had obviously fired their imaginations.

- Opportunities for extended writing.

Older pupils particularly have opportunities to write at length and this helps them to develop a fluent style. In some classes pupils spend more time on writing of this nature than in others.

- The use of good quality texts.

Teachers help pupils to develop their writing skills by exposing them to good quality writing. This is a very positive aspect of the planning for writing. However there is sometimes a large disparity between the texts used in parallel classes. Occasionally, too, the pupils see only extracts from longer books and do not always have the opportunity to read the whole text.

7 Spelling is taught systematically and successfully. There is also a school handwriting style, but this is not so effectively taught and some pupils' handwriting is not as well formed as it should be.

### *Mathematics*

8 Mathematics was not a particular focus of this short inspection, but it is evident that standards are high in all year groups and pupils achieve well. Factors that contribute to these high standards are:

- Good quality teaching.

The introduction of the numeracy strategy has had a positive impact on teachers' planning. Lessons generally move at a good pace and much is achieved.

- Good management of the mental and oral introduction to sessions.
- Tasks set which are appropriate for pupils of different attainment levels.

In a Year 3 session about triangles, for example, lower attaining pupils worked on constructing triangles, while more able pupils investigated lines of symmetry.

- Good attention to the development of numeracy skills.

In a Year 4 lesson, for example, pupils used the four rules of number well to solve problems involving money.

9 Within the context of a subject where pupils reach high standards there is room for more challenging work in some lessons for higher attaining pupils and more investigational mathematics.

### *Science*

10 Standards in science are above average throughout the school, with standards higher than they were at the time of the last inspection. Pupils' knowledge of the areas that they have studied is particularly good.

11 The reasons for pupils' good achievement include:

- Overall improvements in teaching since the last inspection.

The better lessons move at a good pace and activities are well chosen to match the aims for the session. In one Year 6 session, for example, pupils investigated foodstuffs in a shopping bag to evaluate their contents for fat, sugar and calorific content.

- Some improvement in the investigative and experimental work, although work in this aspect is not as strong as in other areas of science.

12 Within a positive overall picture, factors that currently limit the schools' capacity to raise

standards further are:

- Lack of formal monitoring in the past, which is to be addressed by the newly appointed subject manager.
- Use of assessment data and tracking of pupils' progress to identify the strengths and weaknesses in provision.
- Inconsistencies between classes in standards of presentation.

### **The school's ethos ensures that pupils are very positive about learning, behave very well and form very good relationships with pupils and adults**

#### *The school's ethos*

13 The school sets high expectations for pupils in relation to both their work and their behaviour. Within this positive environment there is rarely any need for staff to remind pupils about behaviour. However there are clear guidelines for behaviour and pupils understand their class rules. The school's emphasis on enabling pupils to fulfil their potential in all areas helps pupils in their turn to feel very positive about all that the school provides. There are numerous opportunities for pupils to develop their social skills, especially within the activities organised outside lessons. Pupils are expected to take on extra responsibilities, as they become older. Prefects, for example, act as a school council and discuss future developments with the headteacher. There is even more scope here for extending the opportunities for pupils to take on more responsibilities and for older pupils to spend more time working independently.

#### *Pupils' attitudes*

14 Pupils respond very well to the expectations of the staff. They are very positive about all aspects of school life and are particularly proud of the wide range of activities available outside lessons. Year 3 pupils particularly value the larger playground and the school lunches. In lessons, pupils settle down quickly and listen to their teachers very attentively. They work hard and try their best.

#### *Pupils' behaviour*

15 Most pupils are very well behaved in lessons and at lunch and break times. They are polite and courteous to staff, other pupils and visitors. Very occasionally a minority of pupils are a little silly. They quickly respond to the staff's reminders about appropriate behaviour. No incidents of bullying were observed during the inspection, although one or two pupils feel that this sometimes occurs. Staff are fully aware of the situation and are dealing with all parties very sensibly.

#### *Pupils' relationships and personal development*

16 Pupils form very good relationships with both staff and other pupils. In lessons pupils work very well together and at break times the playground is filled with happy children enjoying each other's company. Pupils like their teachers and these very good relationships effectively underpin learning. As pupils move through the school they take on more responsibility. In Year 6, pupils undertake a range of tasks very sensibly, including helping in assembly and prefect duties.

### **The leadership of the headteacher is very good**

17 The headteacher has successfully led the school for many years. He is very well respected by pupils, parents, staff and governors and this trust in his leadership enables him to move the school forward well.

#### *Clear educational direction*

18 The school aim, to enable all pupils to develop their individual talents to their full potential,

is clearly stated in the school's prospectus. It successfully underpins the work of the school. The prospectus also states that the school 'seeks to achieve this by providing a happy school environment which promotes high achievement, broad interests, self-discipline, and a respect and care for others'. It is clear that the headteacher and staff have successfully created a school where these features are evident.

#### *Imaginative approach*

19 The headteacher approaches new challenges in an imaginative way and often turns potential difficulties into advantages. There are two good, recent examples of this. Last year the school found it impossible to recruit a suitably qualified deputy headteacher. At the moment, at the invitation of the headteacher, three experienced senior staff are sharing the role. Each of the deputies has responsibility for a specific area and rotate responsibility for the school in the headteacher's absence. This is proving extremely effective and means that the senior management team is a strong one.

20 Last year, too, the school was dissatisfied with the quality of lunches provided by the catering service and, after due consultation, set up their own kitchen in September. The headteacher has insisted that top quality produce is used and as a result the take up of school lunches has escalated, with pupils having a nutritious meal in the middle of the day.

#### *Experience*

21 The headteacher has substantial experience of headship, both at Amherst and before that at another local school. He uses this experience very well in working with both adults and pupils.

#### *Putting pupils first*

22 It is evident when talking to the headteacher that he puts the needs of the pupils first. He spends a good deal of time working directly with pupils, especially in the four out-of-school activities that he organises. He knows the pupils by name and greets them in a positive way as he moves around the school.

#### *Working with adults*

23 The headteacher works very well with adults. He guides and supports his staff through both formal and informal systems. He has good systems in place to evaluate how the school is running and to instigate appropriate action. The senior management team meets every week, for example, and individual subject leaders also meet with this team twice a year. This enables the senior management team to monitor the work of the subject managers and give more support when it is needed. The head empowers staff to take responsibility and support each other. New staff are inducted well and feel part of the school team. One teacher said that 'he couldn't wish for a better school in which to start his teaching career'.

24 The headteacher also spends time informally checking how staff, governors and parents are managing their various roles in school. He always has a friendly word for others and spends time talking informally to colleagues about their work.

### **Teaching is good and ensures that pupils achieve well**

25 The overall good quality of the teaching ensures that pupils achieve well. In the lessons seen, which were predominantly English, mathematics and science lessons, 90 per cent of the teaching was good or very good. This marks an improvement since the last inspection, which is due to:

- The introduction of the literacy and numeracy frameworks and consequently improved planning;
- Good support for staff new to the school;

- The monitoring of teaching in English and mathematics particularly, leading to appropriate support for teachers.

### *Strengths in the teaching*

26 There are notable strengths in the teaching which thread through most lessons. These include:

- Good planning and preparation, especially in English and mathematics.

This means that work is appropriate for pupils of differing abilities and that lessons move at a good pace. This was evident in a Year 6 numeracy lesson on organising and interpreting data. Pupils achieved a good deal and by the end of the lesson were formulating their own questions very well. In most year groups teachers plan together and this ensures that pupils in parallel classes follow a very similar curriculum.

- Very good relationships between teachers and pupils.

Pupils respect their teachers and there is rarely need for teachers to spend time in dealing with disruptions to lessons. Teachers use different and imaginative strategies for managing classroom routines. In one class, for example, pupils are helped to understand the different level of pupil conversation appropriate during the activity part of the session by the use of a traffic light chart linked to the colour of the teacher's waistcoat.

- Good support for pupils with special educational needs.

Appropriate tasks are planned for these pupils and within class they are given good support by teachers and learning support assistants. Some pupils on the register of special educational need are withdrawn each week for particular help with their area of identified need. These sessions are very well planned and pupils enjoy them immensely. They achieve particularly well at these times. Care is taken to ensure that pupils do not always miss the same lesson.

27 In the better lessons some of these features are also apparent:

- High expectations and challenge for more able pupils.

In some good and very good lessons, for example, teachers made particularly effective use of questioning to move pupils' understanding forward.

- Good use of good quality texts in the literacy hour.

During the inspection, for example, pupils' work in Year 3 was based on one of Aesop's fables. This brought relevance and meaning to their work on adjectives and nouns and helped pupils to consolidate their understanding and extend their writing skills.

- Good links with other subjects.

In Year 3, for example, good links have been made this term between the pupils' work about 'Invaders and Settlers' and their work in literacy.

### **The school's provision for activities outside lessons is excellent**

28 The number and range of interesting activities provided for pupils outside lessons is outstanding and a testimony to the school's commitment to educate the whole child. All pupils are able to attend at least one club, if they so wish and many attend more. Parents are rightly very happy with this aspect of the school's work.

### *Range and number of activities*

29 There is an impressive range of more than forty out-of-school activities. They are run every day of the week, before and after school and during the lunch hour. Some activities take place within the school or grounds, but good use is also made of local facilities to broaden the opportunities for pupils. There is a particularly good range of sporting activities, with many organised at two levels so that as many pupils as possible can participate. Pupils also have many opportunities to develop their musical skills through clubs and individual music tuition. All pupils have the opportunity to participate in the school's two annual productions.

#### *Residential visit*

30 In Year 6 pupils have the opportunity to participate in a residential trip. This is closely linked to work on environmental studies. This year for example, the pupils are visiting the Forest of Dean. Work from last year, including some fine examples of landscape painting on display in public areas, shows the very good contribution that this trip makes to pupils' achievements across the whole curriculum.

#### *Contribution of staff and parents*

31 There is an expectation that all teaching staff will be involved in organising an out-of-school activity and many undertake more than one. This is made quite clear to prospective staff at their initial interview. Parents, too, make a very valuable contribution and use their particular talents well, in Japanese conversation or flower arranging, for example.

#### *Curriculum award*

32 The school achieved the Schools' Curriculum Award in 2000 for its use of the community in the curriculum and for its work in supporting the wider community in areas such as fund raising. The Sport England Achievement Gold Award was also presented to the school in 2002.

### **The school's partnership with parents is very good**

33 The school has a very good partnership with parents and this close liaison between home and school sets a very firm foundation for pupils' good achievements.

#### *Parents' views of the school*

34 About a third of parents returned the questionnaire seeking their views about the school, which was sent out before the inspection. The responses are much more positive than are typically seen. All the parents who responded feel that behaviour and teaching is good, that the school expects their child to work hard and do their best and that the school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons. Nine of the twelve statements on the questionnaire received well over ninety per cent of affirmative responses. Opinions expressed at the meeting held for parents before the inspections were equally positive. The areas where some concern was expressed were related to homework, the information given to parents about their child's progress and the closeness of the school's links with parents.

#### *Information provided for parents*

35 The inspection looked carefully into parents' concerns. It found that the information given to parents about homework is clear and there is no apparent disparity between parallel classes, or from year to year. Information given to parents about their child's progress is better than that provided in many schools. There are three formal consultation evenings and parents are also able to contact their child's teacher at other times if they have any concerns. Written reports are clear and some improvements are planned for this year. Other information for parents such as newsletters, the prospectus and annual governors' report are all clear and informative.

#### *Parents' contribution*

36 Even though a few parents feel that the school does not work very closely with parents, many make significant contributions to the work of the school. This has a very positive impact on the overall provision for the pupils. Many parents spend time helping in school on a regular basis, for example. This includes talking to pupils about books and helping with clubs and activities outside of school. Parents also raise substantial amounts of money for the school. Over seven and a half thousand pounds was raised at the Christmas Bazaar, for example.

## **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

### **The time spent on investigative work and design and technology**

37 Overall the school provides a good, broad curriculum for the pupils, with some excellent opportunities for pupils outside lessons. Satisfactory overall improvement has been made since the last inspection and planning, which was an area identified as a weakness, has improved. Good improvement has been made in planning for English and mathematics, with the use of the literacy and numeracy frameworks, and very good improvement has been made in work in ICT.

#### *Curriculum time and balance*

38 The time that pupils spend in lessons is just in line with the recommended time for pupils in junior schools. However the school spends more time than many schools on English and mathematics, especially in the autumn term of Year 6 when pupils are preparing for the 11+ examination. This is a factor in the high achievement of pupils, but does mean that the amount of time available for other subjects is more limited.

#### *Investigational work*

39 In science and mathematics there has been improvement in the planning for investigative and experimental work, but in both subjects this aspect remains an area for development. In science, for example, formal methods of recording investigations are not a regular feature of the work.

#### *Design and technology*

40 Planning for design and technology has improved since the last inspection and national guidelines have been adopted. Even so, less time is spent on design and technology than any other subject and the time allocated is insufficient to cover the work in any depth. There are insufficient good quality resources available for pupils.

### **The role of subject managers**

41 The last inspection found that the role of subject managers was under developed, especially in relation to the monitoring of standards and provision. There has been satisfactory improvement since that time, but there are still some aspects requiring more work.

42 The subject managers interviewed were enthusiastic about their role. In most cases managers are well qualified and studied their subject in their initial training. There are clear systems in place to support all managers in their work. These include clear guidance on their responsibilities in a subject manager's file and twice-yearly discussions with the senior management team.

43 Areas that need further development include:

- At the moment there is insufficient time set aside for monitoring the foundation subjects. This has been identified by the school. At the moment there is insufficient monitoring of pupils' work to assess standards and of teachers' planning to evaluate coverage and parity between parallel classes.
- Improving the subject development plans to prioritise points for action and provide a sharper focus on the impact of new initiatives. At the moment the success criteria listed refer more to the task completed than to the impact of the work on standards.

44 This year many of the subject managers are new to the school and so have been

concentrating on their own classes, rather than their wider subject brief. This has been entirely appropriate and these staff are now in good position to manage their subject responsibility more effectively.

### **Some inconsistencies in teaching, including the quality of marking and challenge for more able pupils**

45 Within the context of good quality teaching, which ensures that pupils do well, there are some common areas for development.

#### *Marking*

46 Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously. In most instances mistakes are identified and encouraging remarks are noted. In order to improve the quality of marking further teachers need to:

- Give clear pointers for improvement.

In some classes teachers do discuss targets with pupils in English and mathematics. These are displayed on the wall in Year 6, for example. However, little reference is made to these in pupils' books.

- Mark work in relation to the objectives for the session.

Teachers discuss the lesson objectives with pupils, but this is not always considered in a written comment.

#### *Challenge for more able pupils*

47 A high proportion of pupils at Amherst reach standards that are well above average. Generally they are challenged well in English and mathematics, although there is scope for even higher expectations of the more able pupils. A few years ago the school provided extra opportunities for this small group of pupils and is considering reintroducing this provision. Higher attaining pupils are not always so well catered for in other subjects. This is particularly the case in subjects like music, where some pupils are ahead of their peers because of their instrumental expertise. In ICT as well, some pupils' experiences of computer work at home means that they sometimes find class lessons less challenging.

#### *Joint planning*

48 In most year groups teachers plan together and this ensures equal opportunities for pupils in parallel classes. It also means that less experienced teachers can be supported by more experienced colleagues. In some areas, even when teachers plan together, there are still some inconsistencies in terms of the curriculum offered to the pupils. There is not, for example, an agreed framework of literary texts to share with pupils in each year group.

### **The school grounds**

49 The focus for the school's efforts in building and maintenance in recent years has been the new extension to the front of the school. This has been very beneficial to the work of the school. The new computer suite, particularly, has contributed to pupils' good progress in ICT. The building work has taken up a good deal of time and money and as a result less attention has been given to the development of the grounds. Consequently some areas are in need of repair and maintenance and some areas are ripe for further development. There is great potential for providing a stimulating and interesting learning environment in the grounds and there are several areas already established.

#### *Hard play surfaces*

50 There are a number of inter-linked tarmac areas, which are used at play times and for games such as netball. These are large enough for the number of pupils, but in some places the uneven surface and the base of previous constructions are a little hazardous. Line

markings have been painted on recently, but are already very well worn. Some of the benches provided for seating are in poor repair.

*Grassed surfaces*

51 The grassed area, used largely for team games in the winter, has a football pitch and a good quality trim trail around the perimeter. It is well maintained.

*Wild life area*

52 The wild life area is appropriately fenced. It has been well planted and there is evidence of some maintenance. However, during the inspection it was being used to store the netball posts, which had been taken down because of the high winds. These had been placed over the shooting bulbs.

*Garden areas*

53 There are garden areas outside some classrooms and although these have been planted they have not been well maintained.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

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

- (1) Improve provision for investigative work in mathematics and science and design and technology by spending more time on these areas.  
*(Reference paragraphs: 9 and 37 - 40)*
- (2) Further develop the role of subject managers by
  - Providing more time for managers to monitor provision and standards;
  - Sharpening the focus of the subject development plans and ensuring they clearly identify raising pupils' achievements as successful outcomes.*(Reference paragraphs: 12 and 41 - 44)*
- (3) Improve the consistency of teaching from class to class by:
  - Improving the overall quality of teachers' marking;
  - Consistently challenging higher attaining pupils;
  - Planning systematically between classes*(Reference paragraphs: 6, 9 and 45 - 48)*
- (4) Improve the school grounds to make them a more stimulating learning environment.  
*(Reference paragraphs: 49 - 53)*

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	20
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	19

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	5	13	2	0	0	0
Percentage	0%	25%	65%	10%	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 five percentage points.

### Information about the school's pupils

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y 3 – Y 6
Number of pupils on the school's roll	373
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	2
<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y 3 – Y 6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	65
<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3
<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	8
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	6

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.6
National comparative data	5.6

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0
National comparative data	0.5

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)**

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	55	39	94

<b>National Curriculum Test/Task Results</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	52	51	53
	Girls	38	37	38
	Total	90	88	91
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	96 (97)	94 (89)	97 (99)
	National	75 (75)	71 (72)	87 (85)

<b>Teachers' Assessments</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	48	49	51
	Girls	36	35	37
	Total	84	84	88
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	89 (95)	89 (91)	94 (99)
	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	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	374
Any other minority ethnic group	2

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

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

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y3 – Y6**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	14.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	26
Average class size	31

#### **Education support staff: Y3 – Y6**

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	107

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

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

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

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	2000 - 2001
	£
Total income	665,932
Total expenditure	648,948
Expenditure per pupil	1740
Balance brought forward from previous year	36,366
Balance carried forward to next year	53,350

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

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	6.6
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	372
Number of questionnaires returned	124

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	62	37	1	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	47	48	2	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	57	43	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	30	55	14	0	2
The teaching is good.	55	45	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	30	50	15	5	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	65	29	3	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	69	31	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	33	55	8	2	2
The school is well led and managed.	71	28	0	0	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	60	39	0	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	85	15	0	0	0

Percentages are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number and may therefore not total exactly 100