

INSPECTION REPORT

Meadowgate School

Wisbech

LEA area: Cambridgeshire

Unique reference number: 110949

Headteacher: Mrs R Blunt

Reporting inspector: Ian Naylor
20906

Dates of inspection: 20th - 23rd November 2000

Inspection number: 223694

Inspection carried out under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Community Special

School category: Special

Age range of pupils: 2-19

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Meadowgate Lane
Wisbech
Cambridgeshire

Postcode: PE13 2JH

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Dr. H. A. Hall-Smith

Date of previous inspection: June 1996

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	1
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	6
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	14
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	14
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	15

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Meadowgate is a mixed community special school, maintained by Cambridgeshire LEA, for 113 pupils with complex learning difficulties. The school currently has forty-five pupils with moderate learning difficulties; thirty with severe learning difficulties, twenty-five with profound and multiple learning difficulties; eight with autism; several pupils with sensory or physical difficulties. Many pupils come from low socio-economic backgrounds, and attainment on entry is very low. The school is experiencing a significant rise in the numbers of pupils with severe and complex learning difficulties and particularly challenging behaviour. There is pressure on places in the foundation stage and at secondary age. Numbers have risen significantly since the last inspection, and there are now 120 places. The school is situated on the outskirts of a large market town, but pupils are drawn in from a very wide area, including parts of Norfolk. The majority of pupils have transport provided to school.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very effective school that meets the diversity of individual needs of its pupils extremely well. The high quality of teaching leads to very good learning, and sustained good and often outstanding achievements by pupils. This is made possible by the excellent leadership and very good management that facilitates and encourages the very best qualities and aspirations of teachers and pupils alike. The school provides very good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Teaching is very good overall because it addresses the individual learning needs of all pupils.
- Achievement of pupils is very good; by the age of 19, students are well prepared for the next phase of education, training or employment.
- Leadership of the school is outstanding, and management is very good.
- Literacy hour is very good overall, with some excellent features, and offers a wide range of support to pupils' communication skills.
- The assessment of pupils' academic and personal development is a particular strength.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- There are no major areas of weakness.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the action plan prepared by the appropriate authority.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

All the issues raised at the previous inspection in 1996 have been very well addressed, and other minor weaknesses have also been eradicated. There has been considerable improvement in subject co-ordination and monitoring; the curriculum for French and information and communication technology; parking for pupils' transport. There has been a dramatic improvement in the quality of learning opportunities, assessment procedures and the setting of individual learning targets.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets by the time they leave the school.

Progress in:	by age 5	by age 11	by age 16	by age 19	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Key</i></p> <p><i>very good</i> <i>A</i></p> <p><i>good</i> <i>B</i></p> <p><i>satisfactory</i> <i>C</i></p> <p><i>unsatisfactory</i> <i>D</i></p> <p><i>poor</i> <i>E</i></p>
speaking and listening	B	A	A	A	
reading	B	B	B	B	
writing	B	B	B	B	
mathematics	B	B	B	B	
personal, social and health education	A	A	A	A	
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	A	A	A	A	

* IEPs are individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs.

The characteristics of the pupils for whom the school caters make it inappropriate to judge attainments against age-related national expectations or averages.

Achievement is good overall, and frequently very good and often excellent. By age 19, achievement and progress over time is very good in personal and social education. It is good in English, particularly in speaking and listening, and in mathematics. Analysis of pupils' work, individual education plans, teachers' planning, recording and assessments shows that pupils have very good achievement in their personal targets set at annual reviews and in IEPs. Achievement over time in science is also good at each key stage, although that seen in lessons was satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils love coming to school, enjoy lessons and work very hard. They are always eager to learn and take pride in their achievements. They appreciate each other's efforts, co-operate well and work as a team. More proficient students encourage and support their peers, who are confident to try things that they find hard. All students respond very well to the consistent stimulation provided in lessons. Older students are immensely proud of their Records of Achievement, which contain a whole array of certificates and awards.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Generally good, and often excellent. Pupils are very polite and courteous to visitors. They conduct themselves sensibly around the school, and follow simple class and school rules. There is very little bullying or aggressive behaviour towards others. Pupils give help willingly to those less able than themselves. Students' behaviour is exemplary whilst on visits to college or work experience.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Pupils have very caring relationships with one another, and those with staff are also of a very high quality. There are many opportunities, including an excellent personal and social education programme, to support pupils' learning of social and life skills. A student council helps to promote pupils' awareness of others and the responsibilities of making decisions. Staff and pupils treat each other with genuine respect and affection. They know each other as people and as members of a close community.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Levels of attendance are in line with similar schools, with unauthorised absence a little below average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5	aged 5-11	aged 11-16	aged over 16
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Very Good	Good	Very good

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

Teaching is very good overall. Out of 32 lessons observed, 16 per cent were excellent, 53 per cent very good, 25 per cent good and 6 per cent satisfactory. Teaching is very good in English, mathematics, information and communications technology, personal and social education. It is satisfactory in science. There is very good planning, organisation and presentation of a range of very appropriate learning opportunities that are well matched to pupils' individual needs. Activities are challenging and interesting, capturing pupils' imagination. There is excellent teamwork between teachers and learning support assistants, who offer very significant support to pupils. Staff understand pupils' needs very well. They use very good assessment, recording and analysis of pupils' work to inform individual education plans so that they effectively promote learning. Learning is very good, and pupils know what they have to do to succeed.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	There is a very good range of learning opportunities and all requirements are met. Very good attention is paid to the needs of all pupils across a wide spectrum of learning difficulties. Policies and schemes of work are in place. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies have been successfully implemented for pupils of all ages, and adapted to meet individual needs. The management of the curriculum is now improved as a result of the strengthening of the role of subject co-ordinators. There is regular review and monitoring. Provision for information and communications technology has improved significantly.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision is very good for moral and social development, and good for cultural and spiritual development. Whole school assemblies celebrate achievement. There are visits to mosques, churches and Sikh temples. There is a spiritual dimension in many subjects, including science, art, dance, and drama. In religious education, pupils learn, for example, about Sikh customs, the Jewish New Year and the Christian Harvest. Staff are good role models and continually stress the ideas of right and wrong. The school has high expectations of pupils' behaviour. There are numerous very good opportunities for pupils to develop social skills, including many trips out of school. Theatre groups and storytellers visit school, and many pupils visit local art galleries. There is a French day and a day visit to France. Pupils celebrate different religious festivals.
Partnership with parents	Parents have a very good opinion of the school. They feel they are provided with very good information about their children's progress and achievement, and appreciate the regular meetings to discuss these. Some parents help with activities in school, such as horse riding and swimming. Parents enter into a home-school agreement.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Child protection procedures and guidelines are very good. Arrangements for health and safety are also very good. There are good links with other professionals in health and social services. Annual Reviews and Reports are carried out well. There are very good policies and procedures for the management of challenging behaviour. A particular strength is the monitoring and assessment of pupils' academic and personal development.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher is an outstanding leader, who very effectively motivates the staff team and enables them to deliver a high quality of teaching that significantly raises pupils' self-esteem and achievements. She is very ably supported by senior managers, who help to create a united team in their pursuit of excellence in provision. Management is very good, and there is a strong structure of subject co-ordination to support the curriculum.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The governing body is extremely supportive of the headteacher and staff, and meets all its statutory obligations. Many governors are very experienced and well trained for their role. Governors are kept well informed by the headteacher and by their many monitoring visits into classrooms. They have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, supporting staff and pupils extremely well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The headteacher, staff and governors constantly seek to improve. There is detailed analysis and monitoring of the curriculum, teaching and pupils' attainments. This is used very effectively to guide future teaching and curriculum, so that provision meets pupils' individual needs.
The strategic use of resources	There is good financial management and an efficient school office. Prudent spending has enabled funds to be realistically targeted at future projects that will enhance provision. Good attention is given to the principles of best value. A large underspend of the budget has been a prudent buffer in times of financial uncertainty, and is now suitably earmarked for specific plans to improve accommodation.

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 overall progress of their children. • Caring environment of the school. • Very good communications with parents and carers. • School responds very well to suggestions and has an open door policy. • There is always someone to help. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small minority of parents and carers have concerns about homework and out-of-school activities. • Some parents and carers are worried about the lack of support from health and social services, though they know that the school does everything it can to get this support.

Inspectors agree with the very positive views of parents and carers. They do not share their concerns about homework or out-of-school activities, as there is strong evidence that these areas are well addressed. The school has made extensive efforts to work with and to encourage support by the local health and social services.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Teaching is very good overall because it addresses the individual learning needs of all pupils.

1. Teaching is very good overall, with 94 per cent of all teaching good or better. Out of 32 lessons observed, 16 per cent were excellent, 53 per cent very good, 25 per cent good and 6 per cent satisfactory. This is a most commendable picture that reflects the very highest qualities in teaching. Teaching is very good in lessons seen in English, mathematics, ICT, physical education, personal and social education. Teaching is satisfactory in science. Teaching is good in all other subjects. The quality of learning reflects the quality of teaching, with good or better learning by pupils in over 90 per cent of lessons.

2. Teaching is very successful and effective for a number of reasons. Teachers have very good detailed knowledge and understanding, not only of their subject, but also of the individual needs of pupils. They consistently use a range of recording and assessment measures to establish what pupils know, understand and can do. They use this knowledge to plan and prepare the next step in pupils' learning, and map this out in pupils' individual education plans (IEPs). These are then used in turn to inform lesson planning. Classes contain pupils of very mixed ability, ranging from moderate learning difficulty (MLD) to profound and multiple learning difficulty (PMLD). Very many pupils have complex learning needs and often present challenging behaviour. Teachers, therefore, have to plan lessons to meet this wide spectrum of need. They do this extremely well, using meticulous preparation of what each pupil will learn, and organising learning opportunities and activities that are well matched to individual needs. Lessons challenge pupils' imagination and motivation to succeed, and use appropriate resources to sustain interest and concentration.

3. An excellent literacy lesson for pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 was typical of many lessons that had all or most of these qualities, and serves to illustrate some of the other features of the best teaching. Planning for the lesson on Shakespeare's "Macbeth" was detailed and explicit. It built clearly on previous learning, which was brought out by the teacher's skilful use of questioning, revealing what pupils knew and had remembered. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils enabled all pupils to be involved, including pupils with profound learning needs in wheelchairs. A video recording of the play was used well to stimulate interest and imagination. Activities were timed so as to set pupils just the right level of challenge, and the teacher's high expectations for pupils' involvement, performance and behaviour ensured that very good learning occurred. In a mathematics lesson at Key Stage 2, teaching of number bonds was made into an exciting learning experience because of the teacher's enthusiasm, excellent use of questioning, clear instructions, skilful management and control of challenging behaviour, and detailed knowledge of pupils' needs. The skills of the learning support assistant (LSA) were used effectively to help a pupil with visual impairment. He was helped to read numbers through the use of a whiteboard, so that he was fully included in the group activity. Pupils were challenged by the activities, understood the routines and followed instructions. They were interested and enjoyed the lesson, so that they reached a very good level of achievement in learning number bonds. Even those with the weakest concentration were successfully re-engaged in learning by the consistent approach from staff.

4. In an art lesson for Foundation and Key Stage 1, pupils explored natural materials such as leaves, pebbles and sand, and then printed pictures using these objects. The teacher had planned thoroughly, so that pupils had the time to explore the materials by feeling, moving and rubbing them. Excellent attention was paid to pupils' communication skills, with staff using signing to ensure that pupils could express their thoughts and experiences. Teaching methods were very good and accurately targeted at individual needs; for example, PMLD pupils were encouraged to use the senses of touch and smell, whilst higher attaining pupils were expected to work more independently on practical skills and to concentrate for extended periods. The classroom was very well organised, with appropriate space for different activities, and resources made easily available to staff and pupils.

5. Most lessons succeed so well because of the excellent teamwork between teachers and LSAs. As part of continuous planning and organisation, teachers delegate most effectively a range of tasks and responsibilities within the classroom. These are carried out superbly by very committed, experienced and well trained LSAs. They give a high quality of support to pupils both academically and for their personal needs. Teachers involve LSAs in planning, in recording pupils' achievements, and in liaising with other professionals and parents. All staff take part in training for literacy and numeracy strategies as well as for other areas, such as lifting and handling, restraint (positive handling) and signing. This training prepares them well to work collaboratively. Group work by pupils is a feature of the school's curriculum organisation, and relies on teamwork by staff to work effectively. Teachers plan group work to address pupils' needs and levels of ability. LSAs are entrusted with the teaching of these groups, and repay this confidence with dedication and hard work to ensure that learning aims are met. Significantly, LSAs frequently provide good continuity of curriculum information and experience of pupils' needs, which enables teachers new to the school to operate satisfactorily until their own knowledge of special educational needs grows.

6. A spectacular success of teaching is the total inclusion of pupils of all abilities into each class. Within each class, the full range of MLD to PMLD pupils is taught extremely well. Pupils are sometimes grouped according to ability for certain activities where this provides the best vehicle for learning, for example in literacy. The rest of the time, teachers match activities to pupils' needs and fully involve all pupils in each aspect of the lesson.

7. The least successful teaching, though still satisfactory, lacks some of the qualities outlined above. In particular, science lessons at Key Stages 3 and 4 do not have clearly identified learning outcomes or well defined knowledge of pupils' individual needs. This in turn leads to insecure control and management of pupils' behaviour.

Achievement of pupils is very good, and, by the age of 19, students are well prepared for the next phase of education, training or employment.

8. Achievement is good overall, and frequently very good and often excellent. By age 19, achievement and progress over time is very good in personal and social education. It is good in English, particularly in speaking and listening, and in mathematics. Analysis of pupils'

work, individual education plans (IEPs), and teachers' planning, recording and assessments shows that pupils have very good attainment in their personal targets set at annual reviews and in IEPs. Achievement over time in science is also good at each key stage, though that seen in lessons was satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4.

9. Pupils enter school with very low attainment, self-esteem and personal social skills. Because of highly effective teaching and an appropriate curriculum, most pupils make rapid progress within their abilities. Higher attaining MLD pupils are able to gain employment or places on further education college courses by the time they leave school between the ages of 16 and 19. Less able SLD and PMLD pupils are well prepared for the next phase of education or training, and many gain in self-confidence, self-esteem and independence skills. The oldest pupils gain OCR (Oxford and Cambridge Royal Society of Arts) National Skill Profiles in communication, information technology and numeracy.

10. The Leavers' Programme is particularly successful in promoting the highest achievement and performance of students in Key Stage 4 and Post 16. The extensive programme includes work experience and college links, in which the success that pupils achieve raises their self-esteem and self-confidence. Students were observed whilst on a weekly half-day link course with the local further education horticultural college. Several make their own way to the college whilst others walk in a group with staff from school. They make excellent progress in a variety of horticultural activities, including learning safe procedures in the work place; for instance, students know the safe use of secateurs when pruning. They learn about plant propagation, landscaping, and the effects of seasonal changes on the growth of plants. Students work well in an adult environment, and understand the need for careful work habits and basic skills.

11. Work experience placements also provide excellent opportunities for student to gain valuable work-related skills and to increase their self-confidence in working in an adult environment. The school has an extensive range of over thirty work-experience providers. These placements include retailers, manufacturers, garages, agricultural engineers, nursing homes and charities. Some are deliberately chosen because of their proximity to the student's home address. Placements are carefully matched to each student's interest and ability by the school co-ordinator, who makes regular monitoring visits to ensure that placements operate successfully. Inspectors visited two work experiences placements, one at a local heavy goods vehicle repair workshop. This student had just begun his placement, but was already looking confident in his new environment, wearing suitable clothing of overalls and boots. He knew the main points of safety and had established a good relationship with his supervisor. The second placement visited was a firm that assembles packaging for various retail outlets. Here two students were well established in their work routine. They knew how to assemble the boxes from their component parts and place them on the conveyor belt. The supervisor spoke highly of their hard work, concentration and ability to follow instructions to complete the job. Both students were clearly enjoying the placements, and had gained considerably in their skills and knowledge of the workplace and in their social relationships and confidence. Their attitude to work and their behaviour were exemplary.

12. Another valuable learning opportunity for older students is the Leavers' Enterprise. This is a school-based activity aimed at providing work-related skills through mini-projects that introduce students to research, planning, budgeting and publicity. Students were observed successfully making

candles, painting picture frames and plant pots, and preparing lunch snacks, all to be sold to raise funds. They were also washing and valeting cars. They use the funds raised to help finance residential trips and to buy further equipment and materials for their enterprises. Students showed a very good understanding of these projects, were fully involved in their organisation, and understood some of the basic commercial principles involved. They were very committed and enthusiastic about their work, and clearly enjoyed what they were doing. Teachers give very good support and guidance in showing students the basic skills, but their main accomplishment is that they allow students to make their own decisions and learn from their mistakes. These mini-enterprise activities promote students' numeracy and personal and social skills very successfully, as well as giving them the confidence to work in a mature environment.

13. There is a very successful careers education programme that constantly adjusts to meet the needs of students and workplace providers. The school successfully harnesses funding to provide a range of resources to use in the careers programme. Careers guidance is available for all students from Year 9 onwards, and they are all challenged to take as full a part as possible. Suitable support is available from the local careers service in the form of a specialist careers officer who makes regular visits to the school to interview students, provide information and help them choose their next phase of education or training when they leave school. Students have access to the careers information database. Teachers and the careers service support their personal learning plans. Transitional reviews are held which involve teachers, the careers service and parents, with a range of professionals invited as appropriate. All students complete a National Record of Achievement (NRA) which gives a comprehensive profile of their experiences, achievements, successes and certificates gained whilst in the secondary department. These NRAs provide a record of all the various activities that are contained in the extensive Leavers' Programme. Others not mentioned specifically above include: St Johns' Ambulance First Aid Awards, pre-driver's training course, sports and leisure certificates, day and residential trips, including a trip to France. All these experiences make a significant contribution to the overall progress and achievement of students.

Leadership of the school is outstanding and management is very good.

14. The headteacher is an outstanding leader who very effectively motivates the staff team and enables them to deliver high quality teaching that significantly raises pupils' self-esteem and achievements. She has a very clear vision for the future direction of the school, and has been instrumental in changing the outlook of the school to address current trends in admissions, as well as promoting the best practice in meeting special educational needs. Management is very good. The headteacher very effectively manages the personnel, financial and material resources of the school, and is very well supported in management by senior managers. Together, they help to create a united staff team. There is now a strong structure of subject co-ordination to support the curriculum, and this has been a significant improvement since the previous inspection. The headteacher has the full support of the governing body. They have worked together diligently to successfully address all the key issues arising from the last inspection, as well as seeking to improve on many of the minor weaknesses that were identified. There is now very good and comprehensive school documentation for policies, procedures and schemes of work. There are also general guidelines that are understood and followed by staff, and this helps to make the school effective and efficient. There is a detailed school improvement plan that has clear criteria for success, identifies personnel responsible for action, and is carefully linked to the school budget. The headteacher is very good at

giving support to teachers and learning support assistants, and at analysing the school's strengths and weaknesses. In particular, there is very good use of data on school performance to make comparisons with other similar schools and to inform decisions about improvements to provision. The headteacher's training as an Ofsted Team Inspector has helped to introduce critical rigour into the monitoring and evaluation of what works in school and what does not.

15. The governing body carries out all its statutory duties, and has very effective procedures and terms of reference for its sub-committees. The chair of governors and the chair of the finance sub-committee are very experienced and have undertaken extensive training for governance. They work very closely with the headteacher, who provides them with regular reports and information to help them with policy decisions. The governors are very aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They monitor and evaluate the curriculum by making regular visits to the classroom, and are very clear about the distinction between governors' right to monitor curriculum and that of the headteacher to monitor the quality of teaching. The headteacher and governing body have a good pro-active relationship with the local education authority, and share a joint view of the school's future.

16. Governors have already put into place many of the new requirements for performance management. Performance targets for the headteacher and teachers have already been written and are to be reviewed in the new year. The headteacher has a very good grasp of the training needs of staff. These are supported through a strong programme of staff development, including making available to staff both in-house and formal local authority and out-of- county training. There are good induction procedures for new staff, with a system of mentors in place.

17. An example of the headteacher's dedication and commitment is that she has worked very successfully in partnership with the local Primary Health Trust. As a result of this, she has ensured support to pupils and parents for a course for parents on managing the challenging behaviour of children.

18. Financial management is good. The underspend of the school budget, which has functioned as a prudent buffer in times of financial uncertainty, is now earmarked for specific plans to improve accommodation. The school improvement plan is closely linked to the budget, and targets resources for improvement. The headteacher has a clear rationale for expenditure. Forward planning is in outline, but it does include plans for the underspend. The school applies the principles of best value well, and has recently successfully evaluated its own financial procedures. Arrangements for competitive tendering and market testing are in place. Financial comparisons are made with other schools so far as the data allow. The school is beginning to compare pupils' performance with similar schools, as the information becomes available.

The Literacy Hour is very good overall, with some excellent features, and offers a wide range of support to pupils' communication skills.

19. The school had worked for a whole-school approach to English following the last inspection, to ensure better continuity across the key stages. The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) was introduced into the school in 1998, with suitable adaptations for its use with pupils with learning difficulties. Key staff initially undertook the literacy hour training, and all staff subsequently had

training through locally based in-service courses (INSET). At about the same time, the school also introduced the Equals Curriculum (a nationally recognised pre-National Curriculum programme) and was careful to dovetail this into the policy and scheme of work that had been produced in the school for NLS.

20. The strategies for teaching literacy skills are very effective. Teaching in English has improved because it is more active and focused than previously. The elements of teaching are more clearly defined, leading to an improvement in planning and differentiation. Teachers are more confident about the subject because they have been trained to use the NLS. Methods of teaching have been more clearly thought out, and there is clearer understanding of all the elements of literacy. Everyone across the school uses the same format, and this helps teachers to evaluate their results in terms of pupils' achievements and to focus together on adjustments that may be required.

21. There has been an increase in the emphasis on and the quality of teaching of speaking and listening skills. Because communication is at the centre of all the work the school does, it has gone to great pains to ensure there is also an extension of speaking and listening skills. Unfortunately the school has been without a speech therapist for an extended length of time, and this has detracted considerably from having a combined professional approach. The school has tried to compensate, with good success, through its own planned extension to speaking and listening skills. This is based on pupils' needs and using a combination of the Equals Curriculum, Makaton signing, objects of reference and symbols. Speaking and listening are also extended through using nursery rhymes and songs with younger pupils, and skilful question and answer sessions with older pupils.

22. The strengths of the NLS in the school are numerous. There is greater coherence of staff, including LSAs, who have more detailed knowledge of tasks involved and very clear goals. Pupils are given more variety through a wider range of texts. There are more opportunities to use external sources, for example, theatre groups, storytellers, (including sensory story teller) and advisory staff. Learning is more successful because of the clear literacy targets written in IEPs, and teachers have a structure to reach those targets. Pupils recognise the format of the lessons and respond well to the set routines. There is better continuity of skills, and pupils can make continual progress across the school. The school is successful at producing its own evaluation of how the NLS is performing through collecting relevant data about pupils' achievement, and this shows that they make good improvement.

23. There is clear evidence from the eight lessons observed to illustrate these strengths. There is a consistent approach by teachers in their planning that makes lessons very effective. The NLS is suitably modified to meet a wide range of needs. Assessment and recording of progress are thorough and used to plan future steps. Lessons proceed at a stimulating pace, with a variety of well-planned activities that provide high but appropriate challenges to pupils. For example, a very good lesson at Key Stage 3, using a big book story on "Aesop's Fables" with a group of MLD and SLD pupils, was very well planned and organised. There was very good delegation to LSAs. The teacher understood the principles of the NLS and also had very good knowledge of pupils' needs. There was very good use of group reading, followed by questioning to check pupils' understanding. There was an appropriate written task set at three different levels of ability. By the end of the lesson, pupils knew that a story has a beginning, middle and an end. They knew the moral of the story, and could write simple sentences or captions for their pictures to illustrate what happened in

the story. At the same time, a group of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties were given a different story to follow, using sensory activities from a commercial programme. The teaching was similarly well prepared and presentation was very good, with excellent support from LSAs. Pupils explored a series of tactile materials and objects that accompanied the teacher's telling of a story about a princess. Pupils responded very well, took turns, listened carefully, and showed awareness of what was happening by their facial expressions and head movements. Learning and progress in the lesson were very good for all pupils.

24. An excellent lesson at Key Stage 2 had many exciting features, and successfully combined big book, group work, games and plenary sessions to present pupils with a range of learning opportunities well matched to their individual needs. Particularly successful was the use of 'story sacks' that teachers had prepared themselves with the help of volunteers, with resources of objects, words, and symbol cards. These augment a story regularly used as a big book for a whole class or group. Information and communications technology programs were also used effectively to support reading and spelling activities. Staff gave pupils effective reminders throughout the lesson of their individual targets. Useful sessions of self-evaluation by pupils at the end of the lesson meant that they understood what they had to do to achieve their targets and what progress they had made in the lesson.

25. Excellent involvement and collaboration by teachers with LSAs and a 'team' teaching approach with other teachers means literacy hour lessons have a variety of different approaches, so that the needs of PMLD, autistic pupils, MLD, SLD and pupils with visual impairment are all catered for. The timetabling of the literacy hour for the whole school at the same time of day means that similar ability groups from across key stages can work together to meet their individual objectives. Teachers place an emphasis on daily reading sessions that further enhance pupils' learning and progress.

The assessment of pupils' academic and personal development is a particular strength.

26. The school has developed a strong programme for the assessment of pupils' academic and personal development, and applies this uniformly across the school. Assessment is very effective in identifying pupils' needs so as to inform curriculum action and planning for lessons. There is a variety of assessment and testing procedures in use. These are carefully matched to the type of learning difficulty experienced by different groups of pupils in the school. Where appropriate, pupils undertake National Curriculum standard assessment tests and tasks. Few pupils score sufficiently highly to take the tests, but official teacher assessments are completed at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. The results are used to make comparisons with other similar special schools, and these comparisons are generally favourable. At Key Stage 4 and Post 16, students are entered for the OCR National Skills Profiles. The school is also undertaking a pilot scheme to look at the merits of using the QCA (Qualifications and Assessment Authority) 'P' Scales, which are an alternative method for planning and assessing pre-National Curriculum levels of performance.

27. The school has successfully adopted the Equals Curriculum across the school, for use with PMLD and SLD pupils, as it offers pre-National Curriculum programmes of study and has a built-in assessment programme. The school is part of the national Equals pilot scheme. This commercial scheme is used very effectively, and also provides a source for baseline assessment when pupils first

arrive at the school. It is the LEA's preferred scheme for special schools. This curriculum is dovetailed with the Foundation Curriculum for pupils aged under five, and with the National Curriculum in the rest of the school. All staff are trained in the use of the Equals programme, which has been closely linked to the rest of the curriculum for each subject area to ensure that pupils make continuous progress as they move to the next key stage. Another commercial scheme is used for the continuous assessment and recording of the achievements of pupils with MLD in the senior part of the school. The school has devised its own summative assessment booklet in which evidence of pupils' progress is recorded in detail and evaluated.

28. There is a comprehensive system for administering assessment and recording that is well understood by all staff. Held in the school office are files containing statements of special needs, annual reviews, reports, summative files, evidence of work and assessments and a copy of the year book. Pupils' ongoing files, IEPs, National Skill Profiles and other programmes, Equals assessment, diary and record of achievement are held in the classroom. Although this seems a huge amount of administration to undertake, the system works well and staff are very well informed about the abilities of pupils and the planning that needs to flow next for curriculum and teaching. Annual reviews and reports contain very good information for parents about what their child knows, understands and can do. Moderation of pupils' work is achieved by keeping samples of work from three pupils at each key stage. This is then used to make comparisons with pupils in other similar schools and also with pupils at the same age in primary schools.

29. Summative files are very detailed working documents compiled by staff on each pupil. They give indicators of where each pupil is within their curriculum and what needs to be done next. There are individual aims, IEP targets, behavioural records, and feeding, dressing and toilet training programmes. There is also a health care plan, detailing all medical and dietary requirements and physiotherapy programme. These records are very effective in supporting the assessment and evaluation process.

30. There are several significant and successful features in the assessment and recording system. One is the photographic record of achievement that is compiled by staff, particularly in the infant class, and given to parents. Comprehensive records of pupils' achievements throughout the year are made using photographs of pupils' responses to stimuli and their experiences. Careful annotation is made of date and context so that comparisons and evaluations are possible when reviewing progress over time. Another is the target setting for behaviour, using pupil self-evaluation, which is used very effectively at Key Stage 2. This is an extension of the sort of self-evaluation by pupils that is quite common in the school, and used by teachers at the end of lessons to reflect on what pupils feel they have learnt. Target setting involves each pupil in discussions with staff and listening to the views of other pupils about a particular aspect of their behaviour. The target behaviour is then set for the week and agreed to by the pupil concerned. These may include for example: 'I must not get out of the wheelchair without supervision' or 'I will answer in a loud voice in class circle time' or 'I will not run in school'. Pupils know their own target and those of others, and are very keen to succeed and so earn themselves 'smiley faces' or be nominated as student of the week. This target-setting generates very good discussion and understanding about pupils' own learning and progress. It is very influential in modifying unacceptable behaviour.

31. Another successful feature is the way in which LSAs are given a shared responsibility with teachers for making records of pupils' performance. These involve daily diaries of what pupils know and can do, and weekly summaries of what they have achieved. They also complete home-school diaries that keep parents informed of their child's day in school, and also the type of activity that parents might do with their child in the home to further support progress.

32. IEPs are compiled very thoroughly and are the product of the recording and assessment that has taken place. They encapsulate the individual aims for each pupil set out in the summative record. IEPs are reviewed regularly each term by staff, and the views of parents are incorporated. Older students, where appropriate, make their own contribution to setting IEPs. In conjunction with this process, there is a half-term evaluation of key areas of progress in literacy and numeracy. Regular parents' meetings enable parents to have reports on progress and to make joint decisions with staff about the future targets for their child.

33. A potential minor weakness of the school's assessment and recording is the way in which some records are replicated across several systems in use at one and the same time. This results in a considerable amount of recording and paperwork. The school is aware of this, and constantly seeks to adjust and improve the system to make it effective.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

There are no major weaknesses to report.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

There are no major areas of weakness and therefore no issues to address.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	32
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	65

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
16	53	25	6	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	113
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	44

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year]	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	5
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	8.4	School data	1.3

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	113
Any other minority ethnic group	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	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

**Qualified teachers and classes:
Y R – Y 13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	13
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	8.6
Average class size	16

FTE means full-time equivalent.

**Education support staff:
Y R – Y 13**

Total number of education support staff	29
Total aggregate hours worked per week	809

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	778386.00
Total expenditure	756497.00
Expenditure per pupil	7070.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	173485.00
Balance carried forward to next year	195374.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	113
Number of questionnaires returned	81

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	61	18	1	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	40	31	0	3	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	35	4	0	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21	29	7	0	12
The teaching is good.	54	23	1	1	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	57	20	2	2	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	68	9	3	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	44	27	3	0	6
The school works closely with parents.	56	21	2	1	1
The school is well led and managed.	60	17	2	0	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	46	29	2	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	39	23	3	3	12