

INSPECTION REPORT

ST NICHOLAS C of E (VC) FIRST SCHOOL

Codsall, Wolverhampton

LEA area: Staffordshire

Unique reference number: 124243

Headteacher: Mrs S M Kingston

Reporting inspector: Mr D Manuel
21090

Dates of inspection: 4th – 8th December 2000

Inspection number: 224067

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	First school
School category:	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils:	4 to 9 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Belvide Gardens Chillington Drive Codsall Wolverhampton
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr D V Walls
Date of previous inspection:	October 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mr D Manuel 21090	Registered inspector	Science Information and communication technology Religious education English as an additional language	The characteristics and effectiveness of the school The school's results and pupils' achievements Quality of teaching and learning Leadership and management
Mr P Oldfield 1112	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development Attendance Pupils' welfare, health and safety Partnership with parents and carers
Mr K Parry 24019	Team inspector	Special educational needs Mathematics Geography Physical education	Assessment
Mrs J Bavin 16038	Team inspector	Foundation stage Art and design History	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
Mr R Greenall 27777	Team inspector	Equal opportunities English Design and technology Music	Quality and range of curricular opportunities for learning

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St. Nicholas is a Church of England voluntary controlled first school situated in the village of Codsall in Staffordshire. The school serves the village and the surrounding area and provides full-time education for 317 pupils aged from 4 to 9 years. Pupils are organised into ten classes with two similar classes in each year group. The proportion of pupils from ethnic backgrounds is much lower than the national average and no pupils speak English as a second language. The social and economic circumstances of most pupils are above average. Fifteen pupils, four per cent, are eligible for free school meals. There are 13 pupils on the school's register of special educational needs. These figures are below average. Two pupils have statements of special educational need. There are no travellers' children. There are no recent exclusions and three pupils are withdrawn from collective worship. Attainment on entry, assessed by the school's early testing at the age of four, is above average for pupils of this age.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St. Nicholas is a very good school where staff, governors and parents work together very effectively. Since the previous inspection in 1996, the school has made very good improvement. Standards have risen in eight subjects at each key stage. By the age of seven at the end of Key Stage 1 and by the age of nine, when they leave the school, pupils attain well above average standards in English, mathematics, science and art and design. They attain above average standards in information and communication technology (ICT), geography, history, design and technology, religious education and music. In addition, by the age of nine, pupils' standards in physical education have risen from average levels to above average levels. The overall quality of teaching is very good and has a very strong influence on the rise in standards and the excellent attitudes that pupils have to learning. The leadership and management of the school are excellent. Taking into account the above average levels of attainment on entry, the high standards attained, the excellent leadership and management, the very good quality of education provided and the relatively low income figure, the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- When pupils leave the school at the age of nine, standards are well above average in English, mathematics, science and art and design, and above average in all other subjects.
- The quality of teaching throughout the school is very good and strongly influences the very good quality of learning.
- The leadership and management of the school, including the headteacher, key staff and the governing body, are excellent and contribute significantly to the very good improvements since the previous inspection.
- Relationships throughout the school are excellent.
- Parents and the community make excellent contributions to pupils' learning.
- The care provided by the school for its pupils is very good and ensures high levels of personal development and pupils' welfare.

What could be improved

- There are no significant areas requiring improvement.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was first inspected in October 1996. Since then, all key issues identified in the previous inspection have been dealt with successfully and overall the school has made very good improvement. A clear framework has been established for the Foundation Stage which ensures a good range of provision for both indoor and outdoor activities. Greater use is now made of the outdoor environment to improve provision for all pupils and support their personal development. Improved planning makes more effective use of time and has contributed to the rise in standards. An agreed policy has been developed to comply with the

Code of Practice for special educational needs and this effectively underpins the very good work undertaken by all staff.

In addition to the areas identified as key issues in the previous inspection, there have been significant improvements in a number of other areas. Trends over the past three years show that the school's test results consistently exceed the national average. The school meets its challenging targets in English and mathematics. Inspection evidence shows that standards have risen in most subjects at both key stages. The school now achieves well above average standards in English, mathematics, science and art and design, all previously judged as average or above average. Above average standards are achieved in ICT, religious education, geography, and design and technology, previously judged as average. In addition, at Key Stage 2, standards in physical education are above average compared to average at the time of the previous inspection.

The quality of teaching has improved from satisfactory to very good and has had a strong influence on standards. Provision for music and physical education, an identified weakness in the previous inspection, has much improved. Provision and support for pupils with special educational needs has also improved and, as a result, almost all of these pupils attain expected levels by the age of nine and some attain above expected levels. The governing body has improved its monitoring and evaluation of the quality of education provided to an excellent level. Clear targets for improvement have been set and have been successfully achieved. Financial management and planning are now excellent and spending decisions are evaluated carefully to measure their impact on the quality of education. Very good assessment procedures are now in place and are having a significant impact on monitoring and tracking pupils' progress. Effective action has been taken to improve levels of attendance.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 7-year-olds based on National Curriculum test results.

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
reading	A	A	A*	A	very high A*
writing	A	A	A*	A*	well above average A
mathematics	B	B	A	A	above average B
					average C
					below average D
					well below average E

By the end of Key Stage 1 when pupils are aged seven, test results in reading were very high when compared to the national average and well above average when compared to similar schools. Test results in writing were very high related to those nationally and when compared to similar schools. These results place St. Nicholas in the top five per cent of schools nationally. In mathematics, results were well above average nationally and when compared to similar schools. Teacher assessments indicate that results in science at Key Stage 1 were well above the national average. Trends over the past three years show that the school's results consistently exceed the national average. Inspection evidence confirms that standards in these subjects are well above expected levels. Standards in art and design are also well above expected levels. Standards in all other subjects are above expected levels except in physical education where standards match expected levels.

By the end of Year 4, when pupils leave the school at the age of nine, inspection evidence shows that almost all pupils make good progress in learning. They attain standards which are well above expected levels in English, mathematics, science and art and design and above average in all other subjects. These standards are due to the very good teaching evident throughout the school, particularly in English, mathematics and science. The school is very aware of the need to maintain these high standards and regular monitoring takes place to ensure this. Annual targets for improvement are challenging but achievable and are being met.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have excellent attitudes. They are very keen to come to school and become involved in a wide range of activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is very good. Pupils are very polite and respect each other's views and feelings.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships throughout the school are excellent. All children and adults are highly valued.
Attendance	Very good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years	aged 7-9 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Very 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.

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning observed during the inspection was very good. In lessons seen, 100 per cent were satisfactory or better. Eight per cent were excellent, 39 per cent were very good, 43 per cent good and 10 per cent satisfactory. This is an improvement from the previous inspection when the quality of teaching was satisfactory overall and judged to be satisfactory or better in 96 per cent of lessons, with four per cent unsatisfactory. The teaching of pupils who are under five, in the Foundation Stage, was good overall. In both Key Stages 1 and 2, teaching was very good overall. Particular strengths are very good subject knowledge, very detailed planning in relation to the agreed curriculum schemes and very clear introductions and explanations to ensure that pupils understand the tasks set them. This ensures that the needs of all pupils are successfully met. In addition, most teachers are very good at extending pupils' thinking and developing high levels of speaking and listening skills. The quality of pupils' learning is very good. All pupils systematically develop skills, knowledge and understanding in all subjects. Their learning is constantly stimulated by very good teaching strategies. This increases their confidence and self-esteem and enables them to build effectively on their knowledge and understanding and use their skills to complete tasks successfully.

All teachers show very good understanding of the principles of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and teach the necessary skills in English and mathematics very effectively. The teaching of ICT has improved, with better use of the new resources, a wide variety of learning opportunities and very good links being made with other curriculum subjects. The small proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well supported. As a result, very good progress is made towards set targets and most pupils achieve at least expected levels in all subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a very good range and quality of learning opportunities which are strong in breadth, balance and relevance, and carefully address the individual needs of all pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision for these pupils is very good and ensures that they receive the same high quality education as others.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for pupils' moral development is excellent. Overall the provision for personal, spiritual and social development is very good and for cultural development is satisfactory.

How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides high levels of care and support for pupils who feel very safe and confident in the very caring environment.
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The school has a very good partnership with parents. Almost all parents have very positive views of the school and their own contributions to children's learning are excellent.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership and management provided by the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other key staff are excellent. The headteacher provides very clear direction for the work of the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are very effective and have an excellent understanding of their strategic role. They fulfil all statutory responsibilities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has excellent strategies for monitoring and evaluating its performance. Clear priorities are agreed, challenging targets are set and successfully met.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes good use of all its resources.

Key strengths of the leadership and management of the school are the strong commitment by staff, governors and parents to consistently raise standards in all areas. There are good numbers of well qualified teaching and support staff who work together very well as a team. The quality of the accommodation is good and supports pupils' learning positively. The quantity and quality of resources are good and are used very effectively by all staff. The principles of best value for money are applied very effectively.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Over 90 per cent of parents strongly agree or agree with every aspect in their questionnaire except one. Only the six most pleasing aspects are listed, these having been agreed by 98 per cent or more of all parents who replied.

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school. • Behaviour in the school is good. • The teaching is good. • Parents feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or problems. • The school expects their children to work hard and achieve their best. • The school works closely with parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children should get the right amount of work to do at home.

The inspection team agrees with all the aspects which almost every parent identified as strengths of the school. Going further, the team identified pupils' behaviour and the quality of teaching as very good. Of the aspect that a very small percentage of parents would like to see improved, the team found during the inspection that the setting and marking of homework were done regularly and better than that normally seen for pupils of this age. This was particularly evident in English, mathematics, science and religious education.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Attainment on entry to the school is above average in most areas of learning. Children enter the school in the term following their fourth birthday and all children have at least one year in the reception classes in the Foundation Stage. From observations made during the inspection, it is expected that by the end of the year almost all children will achieve well above the expected levels contained in the Early Learning Goals. These Early Learning Goals are set for personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy, mathematical development, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development. Children make good progress in all areas of learning and are well prepared for statutory schooling and the National Curriculum.
2. In English, the 2000 National Curriculum test results for seven-year-olds in reading showed that the percentage of pupils reaching the expected Level 2 and above, and the higher Level 3, was very high compared to the national average and well above the results for similar schools. In writing, the percentage of pupils reaching the expected Level 2 and above and the higher Level 3 was very high compared to the national average and when compared to similar schools. These results place St. Nicholas in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Results over the past three years have consistently exceeded national averages. Girls and boys perform at broadly similar levels.
3. Inspection findings show that at Key Stage 1, all pupils make good progress and attain standards in English which are well above expected levels in speaking, listening, reading and writing. At Key Stage 2, by the age of nine when pupils leave the school, most pupils have continued to make good progress in their learning and attain standards well above expected levels in a wider range of literacy experiences. This is an improvement in standards from the previous inspection when standards were judged to be above national expectations.
4. In mathematics, the 2000 National Curriculum test results for seven-year-olds show that the percentage of pupils gaining the expected Level 2 and above and the higher Level 3, was well above the national average. Evidence gathered during the inspection shows that at Key Stage 1, most pupils make good progress and attain levels well above those expected nationally. This shows very good improvement since the previous inspection when standards were judged to be at expected levels. By the age of nine when they leave the school, pupils continue to make good progress and attain well above expected levels. This shows an improvement since the previous inspection when standards were judged to be above expected levels.
5. In science, results in the 2000 teacher assessments for seven-year-olds show that the percentage of pupils attaining the expected Level 2 and above and the higher Level 3, was well above the national average and when compared with similar schools. Inspection evidence shows that at Key Stage 1, pupils make good progress to attain standards which are well above expected levels; an improvement since the previous inspection when they were above expected levels. At Key Stage 2, all pupils make good progress in learning

and by the time they leave the school at the age of nine, standards are well above expected levels. This is largely as a result of improvements in the quality of teaching, with a greater focus upon experimental and investigative work in lessons.

6. In information and communication technology (ICT) by the ages of seven and nine, most pupils make good progress in their learning and attain standards which are above expected levels. This shows improvement since the previous inspection and demonstrates improvement in the range of experiences offered to pupils, improved curriculum provision and teaching, better resources and good leadership in the subject by the co-ordinator. Standards in religious education are above expected levels identified in the locally agreed syllabus by the ages of seven and nine. Pupils are engaged and interested in their learning about different religions and are particularly good at expressing their own views and feelings and respect for the feelings of others.
7. In other subjects, by the age of seven pupils make very good progress and attain standards which are well above expected levels in art and design. They make good progress and attain above expected levels in geography, history, design and technology and music. These are improvements since the previous inspection. In physical education pupils make satisfactory progress and attain standards which match expected levels. This is similar to the judgement made during the previous inspection.
8. At Key Stage 2, by the age of nine when they leave the school, pupils make good progress and attain standards in art and design which are well above expected levels. Pupils make good progress and attain above expected levels in geography, history, design and technology, music and physical education. These show improvements since the previous inspection.
9. The school carries out regular monitoring of pupils' test results and attainment and sets realistic and challenging targets for all pupils throughout the school. Improved and very good assessment procedures have been regularly updated and enable pupils' progress to be tracked and monitored even more closely. Targets are suitably challenging and are shared with parents and pupils.
10. Pupils with special educational needs receive specific, good support through very good planning and effective use of classroom assistants. When measured against their prior attainment, they make very good progress towards their learning targets set in their individual education plans. Almost all attain levels which match those expected nationally for all pupils, and occasionally exceed them.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

11. Pupils have excellent attitudes to school. They are keen to attend lessons and become involved in the very wide range of activities that the school provides. Pupils interviewed during inspection week stated that they loved coming to school. Behaviour is very good. Pupils are involved in active learning and are always well supervised. The school has a behaviour policy with appropriate rewards which are greatly valued by pupils, and sanctions which are rarely invoked. There have been no exclusions since the previous inspection. Pupils respect others' views and feelings and play happily together. In lessons, many were seen to share equipment and support a neighbour. There was no oppressive behaviour, nor bullying, seen in the school.
12. Pupils are very polite and behave very responsibly. They hold doors open for others and place seats so that friends can sit easily during the well-organised meal period. At mid-morning break they share snacks, and when some pupils were distributing personal Christmas cards, recipients were heard to express a 'Thank you'. Pupils are very tolerant

- of each other and are encouraging to neighbours. This was very well illustrated during an assembly when they applauded recipients of awards. In lessons, pupils listen well and allow others to express views or answer questions without interrupting.
13. Pupils willingly undertake a wide range of jobs in the school with some volunteering to pick up litter. They also act as register and library monitors and move furniture after assemblies. Older pupils play in the younger pupils' play area at lunch-times to encourage and support them. All children and adults are highly valued at the school and the excellent relationships allow pupils to feel high levels of self-esteem. They talk happily to adults and express views without fear of any consequences. The school has developed this environment very effectively so that pupils are well regarded, confident and very well prepared for the middle school to which they will transfer. Adults in the school were seen to be part of a friendly, helpful and confident team and this atmosphere supports pupils' very positive responses to the school. Pupils are welcome partners on a school committee, working alongside parents and staff, on matters of conservation in the environment.
 14. Attendance levels are above the national average. There is a minimum of unauthorised absence. Registers are marked well by the teachers and the computer-based system supports the very good control of attendance statistics.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

15. The quality of teaching throughout the school is very good. In lessons seen, 100 per cent were satisfactory or better. Eight per cent were excellent, 39 per cent were very good, 43 per cent good and 10 per cent were satisfactory. This indicates improvement since the previous inspection when the quality of teaching was satisfactory overall and satisfactory or better in 96 per cent of lessons, with 4 per cent unsatisfactory. Particular strengths are very good subject knowledge, very detailed planning in relation to the agreed curriculum schemes and very clear introductions and explanations to ensure that pupils understand the tasks set them. In addition, teachers are very good at extending pupils' thinking and developing high levels of speaking and listening skills. As a result, the needs of all pupils are successfully met and the quality of pupils' learning is very good. All pupils systematically develop skills, knowledge and understanding in most subjects. Their learning is constantly stimulated by very good teaching strategies. This increases their confidence and self-esteem and enables them to build effectively on their knowledge and understanding and use their skills to complete tasks successfully.
16. The quality of teaching of children under five in the Foundation Stage is good and this results in most children exceeding the Early Learning Goals in all the areas of learning. Particular strengths include the excellent management of children. Teachers have very high expectations of what all children should achieve, which result in their developing very good attitudes and behaviour at an early age. Teachers provide very good role models for children, which promote a clear understanding of right and wrong. Teachers make very good use of the review sessions at the ends of lessons to identify very clearly what children have done well during the lesson and what they have achieved for the first time. Very careful planning effectively increases knowledge and understanding. However, in a small number of lessons, there are missed opportunities for children to develop skills as independent researchers. As a result, they do not take enough responsibility for planning their own activities through developing questions and gathering their own resources.
17. The quality of teaching of pupils aged from five to seven years at Key Stage 1, is very good overall and as a result pupils make very good progress in their learning to attain standards which are well above and above expected levels in almost every subject. At Key Stage 2 the quality of teaching for pupils aged from seven to nine, is very good overall and has had a strong influence on maintaining the high standards in a wider range of learning

- experiences in all subjects.
18. In the best lessons in both key stages, teachers use their own good subject knowledge skilfully to stimulate curiosity and enthusiasm and to extend pupils' own ideas. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach are very good, particularly in English, mathematics, science, ICT and art. The full impact of teaching can be seen over time in the high quality of teachers' planning, samples of completed work and in the consistency of high test results. Very good planning builds very effectively on regular assessment to set challenging and stimulating tasks. Teachers encourage the use of specific subject vocabulary and are very good at extending pupils' speaking and listening skills. In lessons, teachers clearly respect and value pupils' contributions, creating very positive learning experiences and establishing excellent relationships. Very good joint planning between those who teach pupils in the same year group further helps to ensure consistency and equality of learning opportunity.
 19. Teachers show a very good understanding of the principles of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and teach the relevant skills very effectively. In English at both key stages, the quality of pupils' work and progress across the school clearly reflects consistent, very good teaching over time in implementing the National Literacy Strategy. All teachers, for example, mark work rigorously in a way that gives clear direction to pupils' learning and defines individual targets sharply. Planning for the next steps in learning is consistently based upon accurate assessment information and good knowledge of both subject matter and pupils. Relationships everywhere are excellent. These bring a happy and co-operative spirit to learning, within which pupils enjoy competing against their own previous achievements. All teachers use questions skilfully to promote learning. Sometimes they use questions creatively to challenge different ways of thinking. Good links are made with other subjects, as demonstrated when pupils' speaking and listening skills are extended in many lessons, when writing science reports and expressing their own deep feelings in religious education.
 20. In mathematics, the quality of teaching is very good at both key stages. Lessons are lively and interesting with a good balance between mental and practical work, stimulating pupils to become enthusiastic learners with a strong desire to do well and this willingness makes a significant contribution to their learning. Teachers' commitment to continuing improvement is evident in their readiness to adapt their teaching styles to accommodate new ideas. This approach has played a major part in the successful implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy which has been particularly effective in ensuring that pupils' learning develops systematically. Effective use is made of review sessions at the ends of lessons to reinforce learning and evaluate levels of pupils' understanding.
 21. In science, the quality of teaching is very good in both key stages. Lessons are well planned around practical investigations. In practical sessions, resources are readily available and managed effectively. They are used very effectively to develop skills of enquiry, prediction and evaluation. In religious education teaching is good in both key stages. Teachers have very good knowledge of all faiths and answer pupils' questions confidently. Lessons are planned to include concepts beyond being able to retell significant parts of a story. Pupils are asked to consider the deeper meanings and how this reflects on the way they lead their own lives.
 22. Teachers' subject knowledge in other curriculum areas is sometimes very good, as in ICT and art and design. It is good in geography, history, design and technology, physical education and music. This expertise contributes significantly to the good and very good progress in learning made by pupils and the consistently high standards achieved. Good links are made between literacy and numeracy and most other subjects of the curriculum. Good links are also made between ICT and other subjects, including the use of computers for word processing and data handling, tape recorders, a digital camera and control work

with electric floor robots. Teachers make good use of time and resources to support pupils' learning.

23. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very good. Teachers employ a variety of highly successful strategies to support pupils in achieving their individual learning targets. Teachers work and plan closely with each other and with specialist colleagues when necessary, to produce high quality individual and group education plans, which are closely matched to pupils' specific needs. Support staff are briefed well and provide sensitive support that promotes good learning.
24. The use of day-to-day assessment to guide short-term planning is good. It enables teachers to plan very effectively for what pupils need to learn next. Pupils' work is marked regularly and in many subjects, particularly English, there are helpful comments, enabling pupils to improve the quality of their writing. During the inspection, good examples were observed of the setting and use of homework in a range of subjects to support pupils' learning. It was used particularly effectively to support reading and spelling in English. Pupils take books home regularly to share reading with their parents. Other subjects where homework was used effectively were mathematics, science, ICT and religious education.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS?

25. The school offers a very good range and quality of learning opportunities. Its curriculum is strong in breadth and balance and carefully addresses the individual needs of pupils, particularly in basic skills and personal development. The statutory curriculum is in place, together with the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. The school's priorities are reflected in the time and attention it gives to promoting ever-higher standards in English, mathematics and science. At the same time, the curriculum has range and richness. It includes high quality opportunities for pupils to develop creative and performance skills in areas such as art, music and physical education.
26. The school has worked very hard, and with clear vision and all-round success, to improve its curriculum since the previous inspection. Very good policies and schemes of work are in place to ensure that curriculum development aims primarily to raise quality and standards, and that every teacher contributes decisively to the process. Good improvements are seen in every subject and schemes of work in physical education and music, which were identified as weak in the previous inspection, are now strong. Established strengths have been continuously and systematically reinforced and enhanced by imaginative and well planned responses to national strategies and guidance. Rising standards throughout the school reflect these improvements. Every subject is continuously reviewed and developed. Subject co-ordinators monitor the quality of planning, teaching and pupils' work. As a result, good subject knowledge and practice are fully shared. The quality of planning for teaching is consistently high, being supported by good guidance, clear understanding of what should be taught at each stage of learning and accurate assessment. The staff work as a cohesive curriculum team, supporting each other and valuing the strong partnership with parents that makes the homework policy so effective in practice.
27. The strong quality of the school's response to change is illustrated by the adjustment of the timetable to allow five sessions each day for every class. This increases teaching time to well above the national average and thereby enables the school to take on board the national requirements of Curriculum 2000, with the fullness and balance that it seeks.
28. A similarly strong response to the national strategies for literacy and numeracy has been

very effective in raising standards. Particular strengths in both areas are the careful matching of suitably challenging tasks to different levels of attainment, and the very good planning for the use and development of these basic skills through other subjects. Highly effective management of both areas has raised the confidence and expertise of all staff. Very good strategies have improved resources and developed the accuracy and shared use of reliable assessments. As a result, pupils' targets are defined precisely by their needs and their best rates of learning. Each child is tracked and supported in each skill and parents are more closely involved and informed about their children's progress. Analyses of assessment information are used to identify and reinforce elements of literacy or numeracy that need improvement. For example, a newly sited library and improved numbers of books, mean that work on library and study skills is now planned into lessons.

29. The curriculum makes very good provision for all pupils, whatever their needs, through the accurate matching of learning activities and support. This applies equally to those pupils who have special educational needs and to those identified as higher attainers. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good and ensures that they receive the same high quality education as their peers. Higher attaining pupils are included in this individualised approach, which includes setting targets and planning additional tasks to ensure that they too reach their potential. A good policy for these pupils ensures that they are challenged in all subjects to progress at their best pace and to achieve higher levels of attainment. In many subjects, a flexible system for grouping pupils on the basis of prior attainment helps teachers to provide good opportunities for all pupils to progress well. The school checks all books and other resources for gender bias and ensures that all curricular and extra-curricular provisions are the same for boys and girls.
30. An excellent range of other activities and experiences enhances the basic curriculum. Most staff contribute to an extensive and varied weekly programme of after-school and lunch-time clubs. These provide opportunities for pupils to develop their intellectual, artistic and sporting interests and include clubs for mathematics, science, French, computers, library, art and country dancing. Additionally, there is outstanding provision for sports such as netball, basketball and football. There is also provision for music, with a recorder club for Years 3 and 4 and a very good Year 4 choir.
31. The curriculum is further enhanced by a very good range of visits and visitors and by opportunities which challenge pupils to achieve higher standards. For example, through the national scheme of 'Sport England', the school has gained national awards for its sporting provision and achievements. Very good sporting links also involve coaching sessions from various sports clubs, including Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club. In the summer term, the senior recorder group participated in the area's recorder festival and the choir entered the Staffordshire 'Singposium 2000'. Regular school productions provide further opportunities for pupils to develop their musical skills. For instance, the annual Christmas concert features the choir, a tuned percussion group and a large recorder ensemble. Such events contribute to the school's excellent links with the local community. The 'Artist in Residence' programme provides a very good example of a whole-community project in which parents and governors participate. All pupils have worked with a professional potter to make tiles for a large and impressive ceramic mural of Codsall village. There are also strong links with the local church, the parish council, the county council and local senior citizens. For example, the choir sings at care homes and in the church, and a recent Grandparents' Day brought 150 grandparents into school to enjoy a lunch with the pupils.
32. Links with partner institutions are very good. Well-developed arrangements with nursery units and middle schools ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, both when first entering the school and when leaving. Pupils enjoy concerts given by a Salsa band and a rock group from the high school. Sporting fixtures and district

support group meetings reinforce the good links with similar schools locally and the school offers good work experience to student teachers and nursery nurses. In addition, the school regularly hosts visits by other schools wishing to observe such developments as 'The Walking Bus' and paired science or mathematics with parents.

33. The provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is good and much improved since the previous inspection. Although PSHE does not have formally dedicated lesson time, it permeates the entire curriculum and contributes significantly to the very good quality of the curriculum and the strong ethos of the school. Assemblies, 'circle time' and educational visits also make important planned contributions. The themes include personal hygiene, fitness for health, substance use and misuse and sex and relationships education. A policy statement on the latter is very clear and well-considered in relation to pupils' ages and the character of the school. In addition, the school has gained nationally recognised status for its work in promoting an appreciation of the environment and how to care for it. This further illustrates the quality and extent of curricular development achieved since the previous inspection.
34. The previous report identified strengths in the school's provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, but raised a key issue linking the use of the outdoor environment to enhance these aspects further. The school has made considerable improvements to the school grounds, including the provision of a garden and a seating area that increases opportunities for pupils to sit and reflect and appreciate the natural world.
35. The provision for spiritual development is very good. The school has successfully retained a spiritual ethos that extends beyond religious education and whole-school assemblies. Staff provide very good opportunities for pupils to reflect upon the value of the non-material world. For example, in Year 1 pupils request non-material gifts in their lists to Father Christmas, such as 'no fighting'. Pupils in Year 2 value the natural world when they write poems about how 'special' the world is and entreat their readers not to 'pollute' it. Year 3 and Year 4 pupils appreciate creativity and the passing of time when they work with an artist-in-residence to represent historical features of their locality in clay.
36. The moral ethos, previously reported as high, has developed further and is now judged to be excellent and the very good opportunities provided for social development have been maintained. All adults in the school consistently provide very good role models for hard work and consideration for others. These role models are highly effective in underpinning the school's Christian ethos and promoting a very clear understanding of right and wrong. Additionally, there are excellent relationships between adults, and adults and pupils at all times. This inspires pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and actions. Staff frequently use teaching strategies that require pupils to co-operate and also to collaborate. They communicate their expectation that, without question, all pupils will work together harmoniously and support each other sensitively. Pupils rise to these expectations impeccably. There is an exceptionally wide range of clubs and activities available to pupils after school and very many pupils take advantage of these. The school also seeks to enrich all aspects of the curriculum with a well-planned programme of visits out of school and visitors into school. The integration of moral and social development into the curriculum and school life is outstanding.
37. Provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. Previous strengths in pupils' experiences of local culture and that of a British heritage have been sustained. The school places an appropriately high emphasis upon art, music and history that supports pupils' cultural development well. However, the school recognises that it has not developed work encompassing cultural traditions that reflect the diversity represented in contemporary Britain. At present, staff do not specifically plan to enhance pupils' appreciation of diverse cultures across the curriculum and also miss opportunities to exploit the materials and

resources they already use. The school is well placed to develop this area further.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

38. The school has a very high regard for pupils' welfare. The headteacher is the designated person for child protection and carries out her duties in a very efficient manner. All staff are very aware of these procedures. There has been appropriate testing of electrical and fire fighting equipment. Termly fire drills are held and a very conscientious health and safety committee of governors appraises each drill. A good number of staff have received formal first aid training. The deputy headteacher has the day-to-day responsibility for health and safety procedures and these duties are discharged very well.
39. Minor accidents are dealt with in a calm and professional manner. The very high care offered by the school was well illustrated by a member of staff sitting with a sick child throughout one lunch period, as parents were awaited. Because of this very high care and support, pupils feel very safe and confident in the caring environment. The school prayer 'To love one another' is very apt.
40. The school has very good procedures to monitor and approve attendance, including a very good system of allowing late pupils to register in an 'Attendance Book' at the main entrance. Parents are expected to inform the school of all instances of absence and are pleased to respond. In response to parents' requests, the school now has a member of staff in the playground at the start of the day, to make sure children enter classrooms safely. This first greeting is much appreciated and welcomed by children.
41. The behaviour policy is very good. As a result, pupils play happily together, they work hard in classrooms and follow teachers' guidance very well. In the playground pupils play well, share equipment in the Reception playground and talk happily with other pupils. Teachers and lunch-time supervisors are always on hand and give caring support. Although procedures are in place to monitor behaviour, they are rarely needed. All pupils show an excellent approach to good neighbourliness and high conduct.
42. The school has very good procedures to monitor pupils' personal development. Individual records of achievement allow pupils to reflect upon their own development and to make their own written comments. Circle time and the personal and social programme extend pupils' personal development. Class teachers keep individual records which provide a basis for teacher discussions and to note the personal progress of each pupil. The very high standard of care and support contributes very well to pupils' achievements at the school. The school has clearly achieved the target stated in its mission statement: ... 'For children to achieve their full potential within a caring Christian environment'.
43. The school's procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are very good. The headteacher and all staff share a very practical understanding of the purposes and uses of assessment which is quite rightly seen as a major factor in the continuing efforts to raise pupils' standards even further. This philosophy provides a clear direction for the development of assessment within the school. As a result, there have been good improvements to the school's arrangements since the previous inspection and assessment is now firmly embedded as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. This enables teachers to track pupils' progress very accurately and set continually challenging targets, resulting in the very good standards achieved.
44. When children first enter the school they are carefully assessed and the information is used to match pupils of similar attainment levels and to plan suitable teaching programmes. This information is also used very successfully as a first step in the early identification of pupils with special educational needs. In addition to the statutory tests and

assessments in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 1, non-statutory assessments in English and mathematics are used in Years 3 and 4 together with regular testing of reading throughout the school. In the past year, the school has devised, and is currently implementing, its own arrangements to assess pupils' work at the end of half-termly study units in religious education and each of the other subjects. In addition, a more diagnostic test is administered in Year 1 in order to assist with the identification of pupils' individual learning needs. Teachers find that this comprehensive range of procedures is manageable and produces information that is helpful to pupils' current and future teachers as they move from year to year.

45. Through these procedures, which are consistently and conscientiously implemented in all classes, the school gathers a considerable amount of information about its pupils that builds into a detailed picture of their strengths and weaknesses. The careful recording of this information enables the school to monitor the performance of individuals and whole year groups and to track their progress in great detail as they move through the school. As a result, teachers are able to set challenging individual targets in literacy, numeracy and personal development which provide a clear focus for pupils' work in school and at home. The headteacher and subject co-ordinators rigorously analyse the results of tests and assessments in order to identify and address any areas of weakness. For example, analysis of the results of recent mathematics tests identified Venn diagrams as a minor weakness in Year 4. This led to modifications to the curriculum in order to improve its quality. Pupils' work is also monitored regularly by the senior management team. Their helpful observations are fed back to teachers, whose very positive attitudes make a significant contribution to the school's commitment to further improvement.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

46. The school values the very strong partnership it enjoys with parents. This is illustrated in the scheme 'The Walking Bus' where some parents have adopted a very positive scheme of making collections of pupils at two specific points in the village and walking them to school. Parents' views are always listened to and taken into consideration. Parents interviewed during the week of inspection were always very confident in the work of the school and the positive contributions that it offered to their children. Many parents and other members of the local community visit the school on a daily basis and help in classes with reading and other duties to fully support pupils' learning.
47. The school provides a very good quality of information for parents. Regular newsletters are sent and the school brochure and governors' annual report to parents contain detailed information about the busy life and work at the school. All parents interviewed during the inspection week were fulsome in praise of the school's attempts to keep them very well informed about events, including curricular needs and pupils' progress.
48. Some parents help teachers on a regular basis, to walk to the high school where swimming is enjoyed. Another group are involved in the positive introduction of the 'Walking Bus' which relieves congestion at the school gate and is a positive assistance to other parents, who can then collect their children at the railway station or village hall, where parking is so much easier.
49. A very small number of parents indicate that the frequent homework set is not welcome. Inspection evidence indicates that a very large majority of parents and pupils approve of the homework. They regard it as a regular feature which extends lesson work and prepares pupils very well for transfer to the middle school. Good examples were seen of setting and using homework to extend pupils' learning during the inspection and the team considers that the school's approach to homework is better than that in similar schools and contributes significantly to the high standards achieved. Other initiatives include the

scheme for 'paired mathematics and science'. This involves parents being paired with their children to look at new skills being learnt and then helping their children at home to develop these further. At the beginning of each school year, all parents are invited to offer their time and talents at the disposal of the school.

50. At the meeting with the registered inspector, a small number of parents indicated that the school had changed the style of the annual report of pupils' progress. The former style of reporting and the new style were examined by the inspection team. The new style is similar to that of other local schools, avoids repetition in the text and gives a very full account of pupils' attainment and progress and the steps needed for improvement.
51. Very active within the school is a parent, teacher and friends' association, which has a planned programme of social and fundraising events and has given generous contributions to major improvements, including the provision of landscaped gardens, playground improvements and the introduction of mobile classrooms.
52. The school has identified the need to maintain very strong links with the community and a senior teacher has the task of exploring ways for this to be developed even further. The whole-care and partnership between the school and parents begins before children join school, when a Reception class introductory evening works in concert with a pre-admission library service. The school is a very welcomed part of the local community, it has very strong church links and pupils play an active part in most village events. The school choir has more recently joined others in singing carols around the village Christmas tree. These very strong links enhance the provision of education and support to all pupils. They are very positive features and typify the high regard the community has for the school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

53. The leadership and management of the school provided by the headteacher, senior staff and governors are excellent. The headteacher provides a very clear educational direction for the work of the school, setting and achieving clear priorities and targets. Excellent monitoring procedures of teaching and learning have enabled her to share the best practice to the benefit of all.
54. Subject co-ordinators manage their areas of responsibility very effectively and make significant contributions to good curriculum planning. The co-ordinators for English, mathematics, science and ICT have made particularly good contributions to these improvements. The effectiveness of the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies is very good. The management of special educational needs is very good and the resources allocated for these pupils are used efficiently.
55. The governing body is very effective and has an excellent understanding of its strategic role. The school improvement plan, the maintenance plan and the school development plan are very good documents. Each has an important strategic place in identifying a range of short- medium- and long-term priorities and targets very clearly. These priorities are reviewed rigorously by the governors on an annual basis. Individual governors attend a range of appropriate training courses and play a very full and active part in the life of the school. The governing body has excellent strategies for evaluating the school's effectiveness such as monitoring the school's National Curriculum test results and setting new targets. The governors fulfil all their statutory responsibilities and help to foster excellent links in the community. Staff are very appreciative of the commitment they receive from governors and parents.

56. The monitoring of teaching and the curriculum are very good. The headteacher regularly monitors curriculum planning and scrutinises pupils' work to check levels of attainment and rates of progress. She also observes and evaluates teaching in all classes. Monitoring is closely linked with the school's own appraisal procedures, which meet statutory requirements and performance management procedures. Staff have considerable individual strengths in subject knowledge and these are successfully shared to contribute to whole-school development in the curriculum and teaching.
57. The school's aims and values are very appropriate and well communicated, reflecting the strong church ethos. The school fosters excellent relationships and these are greatly valued by parents. Provision for children under five is managed very effectively and positively influences their learning. There are very good procedures for admitting children and they settle quickly into class routines.
58. The school has a good number of qualified and experienced teachers to meet the needs of the pupils and the demands of the curriculum. They have well-defined responsibilities and work very co-operatively as an effective team. Subject leaders successfully develop their roles and have a clear idea of their responsibilities and their place in the management structure of the school. Teachers and pupils are well supported by a good number of well-trained and effective learning support assistants. They make valuable contributions to the work of the school and in particular to the very good progress made by pupils with special educational needs. The very efficient administrative staff, site manager and cleaners are valued team members and contribute significantly to the smooth running of the school.
59. Arrangements for training are good and the headteacher holds regular professional development interviews with all staff. These interviews have been successful in helping them to improve their performances as well as giving the headteacher a clearer view of the school's work. New members of staff, including newly qualified teachers, are given good support enabling them to settle quickly and successfully into their new roles.
60. The quality of the accommodation is good and effectively supports teaching and learning. Key issues arising from the previous inspection were to ensure that children under five had adequate experiences, both indoors and outdoors, and that greater use should be made of the outdoor environment to improve provision for Key Stages 1 and 2. In rectifying these issues, the school has shown good initiative to acquire the new unit for Early Years and the ICT suite. Other improvements include the re-sited library, the attractive garden areas and seating on the playground. The school continues to develop the whole site as a resource for learning with the support and practical assistance of parents and friends of the school. There is a good sized school playing field and hall. Swimming is offered for Year 3 and Year 4 pupils at the local high school community pool. The standard of daily maintenance is very high.
61. The quantity, quality and range of learning resources are good and effectively support all areas of the curriculum. They are readily accessible and used well throughout the school to enhance the quality of education provided. Resources for ICT are much improved, with an increased number of computers enabling all pupils to work individually or in pairs to improve their skills.
62. The overall efficiency of the school is very good. The school has built successfully on the good standards of financial planning reported at the time of the previous inspection. The headteacher and governors have developed highly structured and systematic procedures that very effectively support the school's educational priorities. This is a process that involves all members of staff in an annual review of the work of the school in order to identify and agree future priorities. A good example of the school responding to the analysis of its current position, while at the same time successfully addressing national

initiatives, is the significant improvement in standards. Very good use is made of new technology in all aspects of school life to improve efficiency levels and to support the curriculum. Resources are used effectively to support teaching and learning, particularly in ICT, mathematics and science.

63. The school successfully applies the principles of best value for money and is very good at consulting and involving all those concerned in decision-making about spending. Full consideration is given to alternative providers for services and resources in order to acquire cost effectiveness and as a result money is spent carefully. The school's day-to-day financial controls and procedures are excellent, enabling the headteacher and governors to closely monitor and evaluate spending decisions, such as the recent increase in numbers of learning support assistants to raise standards of attainment. The most recent financial audit, carried out only two weeks previously, identified 'many strengths' and 'no recommendations'. Teaching and support staff are deployed very effectively to promote pupils' learning and their improved expertise is used for the benefit of all.
64. Taking into account the above average levels of attainment on entry, the high standards attained, the very good teaching and learning which take place, the excellent leadership and management, the very good quality of education provided and the relatively low unit costs, the school provides very good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

65. There are no Key Issues for the school.

However, there are some minor issues the governors may wish to include in their action plan:

- (a) within the current schemes of work, identify a wider provision for pupils' cultural development in the curriculum such as the Islamic patterns, Caribbean music and African dance;
- (b) further develop opportunities for children in the Foundation Stage to take opportunities for their own learning.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

61

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

33

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
8	39	43	10	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

	Nursery	YR – Y4
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	N/A	317
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	N/A	15

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

	Nursery	YR – Y4
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	N/A	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	N/A	13

English as an additional language

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	22
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.6
National comparative data	5.5

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
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 1

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	28	37	65

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	28	28	28
	Girls	37	37	37
	Total	65	65	65
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (95)	100 (98)	100 (95)
	National	83 (82)	84 (83)	90 (87)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	28	28	28
	Girls	37	37	37
	Total	65	65	65
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (95)	100 (98)	100 (98)
	National	84 (82)	88 (86)	88 (87)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	4
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	3
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	249
Any other minority ethnic group	0

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y4

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	12.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	29
Average class size	32

Education support staff: YR – Y4

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	209

Number of pupils per FTE adult	15
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	517,649
Total expenditure	495,056
Expenditure per pupil	1,552
Balance brought forward from previous year	56,290
Balance carried forward to next year	78,883

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	317
Number of questionnaires returned	127

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	61	38	0	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	54	41	4	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	67	31	0	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	39	49	8	4	0
The teaching is good.	65	35	1	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	39	52	6	1	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	72	27	2	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	70	28	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	50	48	0	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	72	25	1	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	59	36	3	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	65	27	5	1	3

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

66. There have been considerable improvements in the provision for children in the Foundation Stage since the previous inspection. At that time, while most children achieved satisfactory standards, they did not receive a suitable curriculum for their age. A Key Issue for action in the previous report was for the school to establish a clear curriculum to ensure suitable experiences for children both indoors and outdoors. The school is now providing a good curriculum for children under five with increased opportunities for outdoor activities in teachers' planning. This, combined with good teaching, has a positive impact upon children's learning.
67. Children enter the school in the term following their fourth birthday. The school provided a pre-reception class from Easter until July 2000 and this restarts in January 2001, so this could not be observed during this inspection. Most children who join the school have already had experience of working in groups with other children outside the home. This experience contributes to the ease with which children settle into the school's routines. However, school staff also help pupils to make a smooth transition into school by providing warm relationships, regular routines and consistent expectations. At the time of this inspection approximately one third of the children are five years old, the majority are still four and a significant number will not reach their fifth birthday until the summer term.
68. When children start at St. Nicholas they arrive with skills in communication, language and literacy and mathematical development that exceed expectations for their age. This is confirmed by the initial assessment undertaken with children soon after their arrival in the school. Their good skills in expressing their ideas and in listening to other people, significantly enhance their learning across all areas of the curriculum. Teaching throughout the Foundation Stage is good overall and this results in most children attaining well above expected levels in knowledge and understanding of the world, mathematical and physical development by the time they start in Year 1. In personal, social and emotional development, physical development and communication, language and literacy, teaching is very good and this promotes high levels of attainment.
69. Children in the reception classes remain impressively interested throughout the day in activities which promote their **personal, social and emotional development**. They develop very good levels of understanding of different feelings, for example by empathising with characters in stories such as 'Mr. Happy' or a little boy with a shark in his bath. They take turns in both large and small groups with impressive maturity and are supportive of each other, enjoying each other's success, for example in mastering doing up shirt buttons for the first time. Teachers provide very good role models for children and so are very successful in promoting a clear understanding of right and wrong. Consequently children understand, for example, that unkind words or actions may cause distress. Teachers place a suitably high emphasis upon encouraging children's social independence. As a result of this, children take justifiable pride in their achievements and, for example, willingly record their new skills by writing a name card for the 'I can do' display. Children make good progress in developing those skills in social independence that enable them to change for physical education. Overall, teaching of this area of development is very good and promotes good levels of learning so that children start the National Curriculum with very good personal and social skills.
70. Very good teaching of **communication, language and literacy** ensures that children in

the reception classes have a very good understanding of books. Teachers make good use of the literacy framework and this, together with their high expectations of all children, means that children identify features of the title page and become confident using the vocabulary of 'illustrator', 'title' and publisher's 'logo'. They also recognise rhyme and identify the combination of letter sounds that produce the rhyme. For example, children identify the rhyming words, 'fin' and 'skin' in their reading of 'The Shark' and they understand that it is the 'in' sound that is responsible for the rhyme. When teachers make very good use of the review at the ends of lessons, they identify very clearly for children what they have done well during the session and what they have achieved for the first time, while reinforcing the key element of the lesson. This part of the lesson is also used to value the contributions of individual children and makes a significant contribution to their personal and social development.

71. Children use their mature knowledge of letter sounds to support both their early reading and writing skills. For example, most children begin to write and recognise familiar three-letter words such as 'can' and 'man'. Most children write their first names accurately and are making very good progress in writing their surnames. Staff are highly skilled at modifying tasks to meet individual pupil's needs and adjusting the demands on a daily basis to take account of new learning. This means that they provide a high degree of challenge tempered by achievable tasks and, correspondingly, children respond imaginatively, helped by good adult support. This is exemplified when children write letters to Father Christmas with very good letter formation with varying levels of support. When they write 'messages' independently on a pad next to the play telephones with recognisable letters, they also demonstrate a good understanding that writing is used for a variety of purposes. Adults provide consistently commendable linguistic role models. As a result, children make very good use of their increasing vocabulary to share information and explain their ideas and feelings, as well as to negotiate with each other. They enthusiastically and spontaneously engage in conversation with visiting adults. However, on a very small number of occasions, staff miss opportunities to ask questions that have more than one answer and so, while enhancing specific vocabulary, in these instances they constrain opportunities for children to develop their ideas verbally.
72. The school is using aspects of the National Numeracy Strategy with children in the Foundation Stage very successfully to promote their **mathematical development**. Staff select extremely good resources, such as '1, 2, 3, Off to the Sea', that are ideally suited to engaging children's interest while developing understanding and vocabulary concerning number and shape. This very good use of resources, accompanied by the consistently high expectations of all pupils, results in children developing a very good understanding of number. Most children use skills in 'counting on' that significantly exceed expectations for their age. They are very confident in counting meaningfully to ten and they also record simple calculations with an impressive level of accuracy and understanding.
73. Additionally, mature language skills help children to retain the vocabulary that supports mathematical concepts well. For example, while they are constructing models, children spontaneously identify wheels as circles and name the rectangles that they are using instead 'just for fun'. They recognise triangular prisms as a different shape and both use and name them as 'ramps'. Children understand that number, size and shape are important in everyday life. For example, they write clear numerals to provide price tags for a display of small toys. While staff successfully instil children with confidence in their mathematical skills, planning for mathematical development tends to rely on numeracy lessons and this is not fully balanced with opportunities for children to learn through their own methods and mistakes across a wide range of activities. However, teaching of this area of learning is good overall.
74. Staff use elements of **knowledge and understanding of the world** to provide the theme

for their planning. These include topics such as 'Ourselves' and 'Spring and new life' that provide a context for other work. This leads to strengths in the teaching of early scientific skills. During the inspection, children used magnifying lenses to scrutinise their hands before recording their observations. They both observe and record with a level of detail and accuracy that surpasses expectations for their age. For example, they represent the creases in their fingers with the correct number of lines and remark on a pattern of lines on their palms that resemble an 'M'. They learn that materials change when they are combined and heated when they bake biscuits. They also make very good use of their extensive vocabulary when they describe how materials feel with words such as 'mushy' and 'cool' when learning about using their senses. They know that plants and living creatures need nourishment. For example, they are very clear about plants needing water in order to grow, and the two class goldfish, 'Fish' and 'Chips' needing food regularly.

75. Children have a mature understanding of their own past and the passing of time. They use the personal 'time-line' of birthday cards displayed in both reception classes as a reference when explaining who has had a birthday. They understand that they were babies and then toddlers with developing skills before they started school. They have a good understanding of the world around them. They know that their parents work outside the home and that some adults have jobs helping others, such as fire-fighters. Teaching is good overall, with strengths in the team's very careful planning to increase scientific knowledge and understanding within this area of development. However, there are missed opportunities for children to develop skills as independent researchers and also to take responsibility for planning their own activities through developing their own questions and gathering their own resources.
76. Children in the Foundation Stage have very mature balance and co-ordination skills in their **physical development**. They are very confident using the school hall for early gymnastics and dance skills. During the inspection, in an excellent lesson, they created a travelling movement with impressive imagination and performed their movements with exceptional maturity, both in physical and social skills. The school has improved the resources to support physical and social development through outdoor activities since the previous inspection and now has large wheeled and climbing equipment. Additionally, staff provide suitable opportunities for outdoor activities in their planning.
77. Children are equally skilled when working with modelling materials or writing implements. For example, they perform precise and controlled operations when they use 'butterfly clips' to make a hinged Father Christmas. Most children have extremely good pencil control for their age and this is evident in the well-formed letters they produce when they are writing. Staff teach physical skills very effectively. Teachers successfully plan for the systematic development of physical skills in sessions in the school hall. They also have very high expectations and these are skilfully balanced with warm encouragement. All staff provide very clear guidance for children to further develop their fine control, for example when they are rolling icing to make snowmen or using scissors to cut circular Father Christmas bodies. Overall this area of learning is taught very well.
78. Children successfully develop their creative skills. **Creative development** is another area of learning that is strongly enhanced by their linguistic skills. For example, when children construct houses, they provide ladders to the roof and explain very clearly and confidently that this represents the workmen working on the school roof. Similarly, they share well-considered ideas arising from the stories they create when working with a train, farm or animals. In the only music session seen during the inspection, children enjoyed using instruments to accompany a rhythm and a march. In the lessons seen during the inspection, teaching was good because it successfully promoted good levels of learning in relation to specific objectives in one or more activities. However, the adults determine these objectives. These experiences, while valuable, are not completely balanced with

children having opportunities to initiate and develop their own ideas, plan their own activity and express themselves autonomously. Similarly, children have limited access to materials and experiences that reflect a range of cultures. Consequently, the teaching of this area of learning is satisfactory overall.

79. Children start at St. Nicholas with good skills in communication and mathematical understanding. As a result of mainly good teaching, a high proportion of very good teaching and a good curriculum, they leave the Foundation Stage with skills and understanding well above expected levels. Teachers and classroom support assistants are reflective practitioners, who continually evaluate their work and its impact upon the children. Thus, the school is very conscious of its existing strengths as well as the areas for development. Staff recognise, therefore, that they are still in the process of embedding all the principles of the new curriculum for the Foundation Stage consistently throughout all the areas of learning.

ENGLISH

80. By the end of Key Stage 1 when pupils are seven and by the time they leave the school at the age of nine, attainment in all aspects of the subject is well above expected levels. This indicates an improvement since the previous inspection when standards were above expected levels. Test results over the past three years show that the performances of seven-year-old pupils have been well above average or very high in both reading and writing when compared to national results and those of similar schools. In the 2000 National Curriculum tests, every pupil, including those with special educational needs, achieved the expected level both in reading and in writing. Well above average proportions reached the higher Level 3. These results place the school in the top five per cent of all schools nationally. Results in writing are very high in comparison with the results for similar schools and reading results are well above those of similar schools. The results achieved by the oldest pupils in the school's optional national tests for Year 4 are similarly high in reading and writing. All pupils make good progress, not least those who have special educational needs. Girls and boys do equally well. This differs from the national picture and means that the performances of boys, particularly in writing, are very high in comparison with the average for boys nationally. Inspection findings confirm test results. Standards attained by the oldest pupils in each key stage are well above expected levels in all basic language skills.
81. High achievement and rising standards reflect significant improvements in the quality of provision. The school's adaptation of the National Literacy Strategy has been made particularly effective by a number of interrelated developments. These have become consistent across the school because of the quality of teamwork and training and the exemplary professionalism of staff. Key developments centre on the diagnostic and creative uses of information derived from the school's comprehensive range of assessment procedures. This information is used to identify individual strengths and weaknesses at an early stage in school life, to create and re-arrange groups and to track and target individual progress. This ensures that each pupil advances through the phonics programme and the reading scheme at the best pace that each can maintain. Support is given where it will be most effective and learning activities are planned which are precisely matched to prior attainment. As a result, all teachers and pupils work together in a climate of high, but achievable, expectations. This is evident in the consistency of marking, teachers' constructive comments and the sharpness of the targets they set. It can also be seen in the positive way pupils take comments on board and work to achieve each target. Little escapes teachers' attention and pupils thrive on purpose and success. Another key development is the planning of literacy opportunities across the curriculum. This promotes greater range and assurance in language skills by using them rigorously in different contexts. In return, the enhanced skills support learning in all subjects.

82. Standards in both speaking and listening are well above expected levels. All pupils achieve well in these skills, because they have frequent and good opportunities to use and develop them and because all adults in the classroom model them consistently. In reading activities, pupils are encouraged to read aloud expressively. For example, lower attaining Year 2 pupils dramatised the story, 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt', with effective changes of pace and mood and a relish for changing sound patterns such as 'swishy, swashy, and 'splash, splosh'. Similarly, pupils in Year 4 gave a very good unrehearsed performance of a play script to establish a model for their own writing. The school has incorporated national guidance on spoken language into its literacy strategy and this has improved the consistency and quality of opportunity and of learning. As a result, pupils have good opportunities to work in pairs or larger groups, using talk to develop reading and writing skills and also to support their learning in other subjects. Pupils in Year 1 used collaborative talk successfully as they worked in pairs to write portraits of characters from the story they had read. In response to the story of 'The Girl who Cried Monster', pupils in Year 3 took turns to speak skilfully to express opinions and feelings and to make reasoned predictions about what might happen. Pupils listen with attention and strong interest. They enjoy sparking each other's thoughts to sustain lively discussion and their relevant and substantial contributions reflect good listening comprehension. These skills make a very strong contribution to the quality of pupils' learning throughout the school.
83. Reading standards are very high throughout the school and all pupils make consistently good progress. All teachers keep good diagnostic records of individual attainment and use the information to ensure that each pupil is placed on the correct book to match attainment level. Very good teaching of key skills maintains progress at every pupil's best pace. This is strongly reinforced by the excellent support provided by parents and by the quality of information shared through reading diaries. Outstanding work with 'Owl Babies' in Year 1 drew pupils into the heart of the story. Pupils began to identify with different characters in the story by reading parts dramatically. They noted different ways in which the author had used print expressively and raised their voices, for example, when the print became larger. The teacher's searching questions drew perceptive comments from pupils about the feelings of different characters. These feelings were not always explicit in the story and the ability displayed by many pupils to 'read between the lines' was far beyond what is expected of five-year-olds, as were most reading skills shown in this lesson. Pupils in the lower attaining set also gave a strong reading in unison of a shared text and showed good book knowledge by their clear explanations of author, illustrator, title and 'blurb'. This range of attainment from average to well above average in relation to age is found in each year group.
84. Pupils in Year 2 read books that are well matched to their different attainments. Their reading is confident, fluent and accurate. They have good strategies for tackling unfamiliar words. Their understanding enables them to make and explain reasonable predictions and they offer accurate explanations of the differences between fiction and non-fiction. Pupils in Year 3 benefit from regular and planned use of libraries. By the time they are in Year 4, pupils explain how to find specific information in a library. They point out and explain features that typify information books. Most pupils are voluntary readers who understand how to choose and use books. In discussion, several were eager to compare notes on their preferred episodes and characters in the latest Harry Potter novel.
85. High standards in writing at both key stages signify that all pupils make good progress. Each pupil is tracked in each specific skill. Individual strengths are promoted and weaknesses are identified and tackled. Every pupil has targets. Lower attainers in Year 1 work at the level expected for their age, while higher attainers are already forming letters and words correctly to retell simple stories and unfold events in clear sequence with good structure and detail. In Year 2, the higher attaining pupils use a joined style. They plan and

draft a variety of poems, stories, letters, instructions and other types of text. They use complex sentence forms to show reasoning. Word processing skills are successfully developed in the context of this work. Their personal writing on themes such as 'When my brother annoyed me', is lively and well structured. Lower attainers write quite lengthy stories, though with limited control of structure or sentence variation. Their invented spellings, such as 'cryssonning' and 'vicker', show a sound knowledge of typical patterns. Almost every pupil in Year 4 has reached the skills levels expected for their age, with over half the pupils above and well above these levels. Higher attainers compose long stories which blend action with dialogue to entertain the reader. They use a mature, fluent and joined handwriting style and control a range of different forms, such as interviews, writing scientific reports and school reviews. For example, they wrote very good play-scripts dramatising the story of Perseus and Medusa, using lively dialogue to bring out character and situation. All work is stringently marked and constructive comments chart progress by noting new gains and setting clear short-term targets for further ones.

86. The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good overall, ranging from excellent to satisfactory. However, the quality of pupils' work and progress over time, across the school, clearly reflects consistently very good teaching. All teachers, for example, mark work rigorously in a way that gives clear direction to learning and defines individual targets sharply. Planning for learning is consistently based upon accurate assessment information and knowledge of both subject matter and pupils. Relationships everywhere are excellent. This brings a happy and co-operative spirit to learning activities, within which pupils enjoy competing against their own previous achievements. All teachers use questions skilfully to promote learning. When relevant, they use questions creatively to challenge different ways of thinking. Questions then develop a discussion which has a life of its own because the pupils are encouraged to explore their own ideas through talk. In the 'Owl Babies' lesson, for example, open questions engaged the entire Year 1 class in listening, reading, thinking and talking in a way that was coherent because it was focused on the meaning of the story. All teachers have a very good understanding of the National Literacy Strategy and this enables them to make learning interesting, demanding, coherent, continuous and balanced. They plan unified and brisk lessons in which resources and activities are well matched to pupils' differing attainments. They set clear lesson objectives and group targets, organise support effectively and make very good use of homework.
87. In a very small number of lessons which were satisfactory overall, learning support assistants lacked an active role in the first half of the literacy hour and were not used to enable the lower attainers to contribute more strongly to discussion. When supervising group activities and in review sessions, teachers sometimes used intervention to draw attention to routine points of spelling or punctuation, rather than to maintain a critical focus on the key learning purpose of the activity. It is for these reasons that on these occasions, learning sometimes loses impetus and focus and the challenge weakens.
88. The co-ordinator has an excellent knowledge and understanding of her subject, and also of her role, which she performs supremely well. Her impact on standards in English and on the quality of classroom practice and other provision, is impressive. She monitors teaching and pupils' work rigorously and initiates and supports developments which extend provision and maintain or raise standards. She analyses assessment evidence thoroughly to identify features that need to be improved and has clear plans for further enhancements.

MATHEMATICS

89. By the end of Key Stage 1 when pupils are seven and by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 4, pupils attain standards that are well above those expected for their ages in all aspects of mathematics. This includes number, space, shape and measures and handling data. The inspection findings match the school's results in the 2000 National

Curriculum tests, which show also that the results are well above average when compared with similar schools. There are no significant variations in the attainments of boys and girls. Test results have improved since 1998 and 1999 when there was a slight decline in overall standards. This occurred as a result of the higher proportion of pupils in those years with special educational needs. In the 2000 tests, as a result of the very good support provided by teachers and classroom assistants, all pupils with special educational needs attained expected levels.

90. Inspection evidence shows that in Key Stage 1 pupils make good and often very good progress in their learning. By the time they are seven all pupils demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the place value of each digit in numbers to 100, confidently adding and subtracting numbers up to and beyond 20. They use standard and non-standard units for measuring, recognise the particular features of common 2D and 3D shapes and compile tables and block graphs. About a quarter of these pupils attain higher levels, normally associated with pupils up to two years older. In Key Stage 2, teachers build successfully on pupils' earlier experiences. As a result, their good progress is strongly sustained so that when they leave the school aged nine, about half of them are attaining the levels expected of eleven-year-olds. All pupils extend their understanding of numbers to 1000, solve money problems and begin to deal with multiplication and division. They estimate and measure accurately in standard metric units and investigate lines of symmetry. They develop their data-handling skills well, using the computer to generate a variety of graphs and charts.
91. Teachers are fully aware of the need to provide opportunities for pupils to practise their skills systematically in order to improve further. In mathematics lessons therefore, and in other subjects across the curriculum, good examples were seen of pupils using and applying their knowledge and understanding well to investigate and solve real-life problems. For example, pupils throughout the school use accurate calculations to locate particular happenings and periods in history. Similarly, pupils in Year 4 use the Celsius scale to measure and compare the temperature in a variety of different locations in a science lesson. These carefully structured situations make a significant contribution to pupils' mathematical development.
92. Evidence indicates that very good learning takes place throughout the school over time. In lessons observed, all pupils made at least good progress. They are enthusiastic learners with a strong desire to do well and this makes a significant contribution to their learning. Teachers' commitment to continuing improvement is evident in their readiness to adapt their teaching styles to accommodate new ideas. This has played a major part in the successful implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy which has been particularly effective in ensuring that pupils' learning develops systematically. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject and this is evident in their confident use of mathematical vocabulary. While there are no significant weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics, in a very small number of lessons teachers missed opportunities to encourage pupils' own use of vocabulary.
93. The quality of teaching observed was good. It was good or better in all of the lessons seen and was very good or excellent in almost half of the lessons. Other evidence, including teachers' plans and records and the high standards of pupils' attainment over time, supports the judgement that the quality of teaching is very good in both key stages. The best lessons were characterised by teachers' very high expectations leading to challenging and interesting tasks. As a result pupils were highly motivated, keen to participate and even the youngest pupils sustained high levels of concentration. In these lessons teachers listened carefully to pupils and clearly valued their contributions, using their occasional errors constructively in order to help them improve. In an outstanding lesson in Year 1, the teacher's approach promoted excellent relationships and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the

shared experience. She made very effective use of careful questioning throughout the session. This was particularly successful in the review at the end of the lesson, not only to reinforce pupils' knowledge and understanding, but also to assess what they had learned and to extend their learning through the use of a homework task. Teachers' day-to-day assessment of pupils is a strength and they know their pupils well, responding effectively to their particular needs. In the best examples, teachers make good use of the evaluation opportunities on the reverse of their numeracy planning sheets to identify issues which arise from their marking. In Year 3 for instance the teacher identified a pupil who was not yet confident when writing three-digit numbers, and promptly set an appropriate homework activity.

94. The use of computers to support pupils' mathematical learning is developing strongly. Pupils were observed working in pairs on classroom-based computers to reinforce their knowledge of fractions, while in Year 1 excellent use was made of the computer suite by the whole class to produce bar charts based on their weather observations. In Year 4, again in the computer suite, pupils developed their knowledge of reflection and symmetry while producing Islamic carpet designs.
95. Mathematics is very well managed by the deputy headteacher and her example as a teacher and commitment to high standards have helped to create an excellent ethos for learning. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection. Teaching is closely monitored and, as a result, it has improved and contributes strongly to the rising standards. Very good procedures for assessing and recording pupils' attainment have been introduced in order to track pupils' progress as they move up through the school and to set targets for their future development. The information gathered in this way is now used effectively to modify the planned curriculum for particular groups and individuals. The school recognises the challenge of sustaining high standards and is aware of the need to continue to refine its assessment systems and to target even more closely its higher attaining pupils.

SCIENCE

96. By the end of Key Stage 1 when pupils are seven, good progress is made and attainment is well above expected levels. By the age of nine when pupils leave the school, good progress has been maintained and standards are well above expected levels in the full range of the subject. This is largely due to improvements in the quality of teaching with a greater focus upon experimental and investigative work in lessons. Results in the 2000 teacher assessments for seven-year-olds were well above the national average and when compared with results of similar schools. All pupils are enthusiastic and articulate about their work as a result of well planned lessons and very good teaching. This demonstrates good improvement since the previous inspection.
97. Year 1 pupils respond enthusiastically to suggestions, answer questions and use the equipment sensibly when testing a wide variety of materials for their reflective qualities. They work in pairs to collect evidence and develop scientific ideas. They evaluate their evidence thoughtfully and when observed, carried out some tests in complete darkness with torches to ensure that no other light affected the result. Higher attaining pupils confidently discuss the factors that contribute to making their test fair. Most pupils also have a good knowledge of the human body and the importance of the five senses. They also learn that a healthy diet is made up of protein, carbohydrates, minerals and vitamins. Year 2 pupils make good links with mathematics when gathering evidence about favourite snacks and present their findings in graph form. They also carry out tests on seeds to discover the importance of both light and water, evaluating their evidence carefully. All pupils understand the need to make predictions and use appropriate scientific language, drawings and diagrams to record their observations. By the age of seven pupils attain well

above expected levels.

98. At Key Stage 2, pupils continue to make good gains in their knowledge and understanding as teachers plan carefully to ensure that their learning builds successfully on their earlier experiences. Pupils in Year 3 develop and extend their understanding of a fair test by investigating the properties of different materials as in their test to find the best materials for 'mopping up' water. Precise measurements were taken in millilitres and results were recorded accurately in the form of a table. Good discussions took place to make predictions and to apply their knowledge to everyday situations. In their work on thermal insulators, Year 4 pupils understand cause and effect when distinguishing between materials which insulate and those which conduct. They discuss their work together, apply their knowledge to everyday situations and even collect evidence from home to support their investigations. These excellent links with home are reinforced through the 'paired science' initiative when parents attend an after-school club and join in their children's learning. The emphasis placed by teachers on a practical, investigative approach makes a strong contribution to the very good progress made by all pupils, particularly those with special educational needs. This enables many of them to attain expected levels by the time they leave the school.
99. The quality of teaching is very good in both key stages, ensuring that pupils make good and often very good progress in their learning. Lessons are well planned and pupils respond enthusiastically. Excellent relationships are promoted throughout lessons. In practical sessions resources are readily available and managed effectively. In these lessons, when taking part in scientific enquiry pupils become fully absorbed in their work. They clearly enjoy their science lessons and always show interest and enthusiasm. Pupils' learning is enhanced by suitable teaching strategies involving the skills of prediction, investigation and recording.
100. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject and this is evident in their careful questioning and in the confident way they handle discussions in order to extend pupils' understanding. Teachers clearly respect and value pupils' contributions, creating a very positive learning environment in which pupils make informed decisions about their investigations. Lessons are well structured with clearly defined objectives for learning with good provision for individual research and opportunities for pupils to develop independent learning. The subject is led well by the co-ordinator, who has monitored teaching and standards of pupils' work regularly. Improvements have been made in the provision for the subject and there was clear evidence of ICT being used to support pupils' learning. The detailed scheme of work effectively supports teachers' planning and ensures good coverage of the programmes of study, following recent national guidance in Curriculum 2000. Very good procedures are in place for assessment and are becoming firmly embedded as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. The level of resources has been improved since the previous inspection. Resources are good in quality and range and are used very well to support learning.

ART AND DESIGN

101. By the end of Key Stage 1 and when pupils leave the school at the age of nine, standards in art and design are well above expected levels. All pupils make very good progress in their learning of the subject in a wide range of media and experiences. This represents a significant improvement since the previous inspection. Teaching staff place a suitably high emphasis upon artwork and its value in supporting learning across the curriculum. The school's recent work with an artist in residence, when pupils used clay to represent local old buildings, exemplifies this high profile. This approach alongside very good teaching is highly successful in motivating and inspiring pupils.

102. Pupils in Year 1 have a very clear understanding of the different properties of pastels and wax crayons. They make very good use of their experience of experimenting in sketchbooks and discuss what they have discovered with their teachers. During the inspection they were engaged in work on self-portraits that was planned to continue over a few weeks. They understand that different techniques affect the texture of a portrait and that Van Gogh 'looks different' in terms of his mood rather than his features, when they compare two portraits. Higher attaining pupils recognise the material as oils in one photograph of these portraits. By the age of seven, pupils confidently work on large hanging models of insects to support their learning about mini-beasts. They are also highly confident in exploring design and discussing visual ideas while using the computer to produce work in the style of Mondrian. In Years 1 and 2, pupils develop an exceptional awareness of colour and how to mix and blend colours to achieve a very precise effect. This informs the accuracy of their representational work and the aesthetic merit of their design work.
103. At Key Stage 2 pupils further develop very good skills in using different materials. For example, they use three tones of chalk to add light and shade to 'double portraits'. This successfully adds depth to their work and contributes to them developing a good understanding of perspective. They make very good use of earlier work on colour and form to produce exceptional representations of ancient cave paintings. In Year 3 they have the experience of using large pieces of paper and they respond with impressive confidence, whether they are representing large buildings or large animals. While all pupils in the school produced work in clay with the artist in residence, it was the pupils in Year 3 who were the focus of the project.
104. Teachers are highly successful in encouraging older pupils to continue to make very good use of sketchbooks to practice techniques and design. They encourage very thoughtful use of these books by providing sensitive and constructive marking in them. During the inspection, pupils in Year 4 were in the process of a piece of work developed over several weeks, representing an imaginary journey, using texture and symbols. They are entirely comfortable with planning, experimenting, reviewing and modifying. Their ideas, such as the journey of blood through a brain, are imaginative and demonstrate the school's highly successful integration of art with other subjects. Their planned symbols, design, texture and colour are thoughtfully selected and so very suitable for their chosen 'journeys'.
105. During the inspection, teaching in a third of lessons seen was very good and it was good in the remainder. However, evidence from portfolios of work, from pupils' sketchbooks and discussions with pupils and staff, indicate that overall, teaching is very good. The school has a very structured approach to developing and assessing pupils' skills and very high expectations of all pupils. Staff allow time for pupils to develop a piece of work, often over a number of weeks and this contributes to the high standards achieved. The co-ordinator provides good leadership in the subject and monitors teaching and standards of pupils' work regularly. As a result, high quality planning is evident, good resources are made available and good support is provided for those staff who do not have particular expertise in the subject. However, the school's ethos of high expectation for all pupils is clearly a very significant factor in the standards achieved. Teachers encourage pupils to plan, think and feel in relation to this subject and pupils respond extremely well as a result.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

106. Only one lesson was time-tabled in the week of the inspection and judgements are based largely on the evidence of completed work, teachers' planning and discussion with pupils. By the end of Key Stage 1 when they are seven, and when they leave the school by the age of nine, all pupils make good progress and attain standards which are above those

expected for their ages. This represents a clear improvement since 1996, when the previous inspection judged standards to be satisfactory and progress steady.

107. Pupils in Year 1 are introduced to the key processes of the subject. Their recorded work reflects a basic grasp of the importance of selecting, measuring and preparing ingredients carefully before mixing them and also testing and comparing the product to consider its quality. Pupils in Year 2 have made a range of wheeled vehicles in thoughtful response to an initial design brief. The vehicles reflect good skills in measuring, cutting and jointing wood to form a chassis and in a variety of techniques for attaching axles and wheels to the chassis. All vehicles are well finished to achieve a good appearance and, after review and amendment, they correspond closely to the initial design. In discussion, pupils articulate clear understanding of the properties of different materials and the use of relevant tools. They understand the importance of design for structure, function and appearance. They focus on the need for wheels to rotate and explain the relative merits of some different methods that they used, or could have used, for attaching axles to chassis.
108. Pupils in Year 4 made electric torches in a project which both used and reinforced their learning about electricity in their current work in science. Their work reflects their developing technical awareness and skill and also an increasing emphasis on the testing and evaluation of products. A very good lesson in Year 3 showed a strong development of this emphasis. Working in collaborative groups pupils had designed, constructed and decorated 'moving monsters'. They had devised mechanisms to create vertical or lateral movement powered by pneumatic or hydraulic force. Each group had sought an original effect and found an ingenious solution to the technical problem involved. In the final lesson in the project, each group presented, tested and evaluated their moving monster. Pupils responded readily and thoughtfully to the teacher's challenging questions and showed a good ability to carry out a rigorous evaluation process, identifying design weaknesses and explaining how they could be remedied. However, a good opportunity for pupils to review their own learning was not taken.
109. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. The quality of teaching and learning in the one lesson observed was very good. Good knowledge of both the subject and the character of the class led to high expectations, good planning and organisation and excellent rapport. A very good understanding of the need to evaluate their work was developed in the pupils by a rigorous focus on the key aims of the project and by searching questions which used pupils' confidence in each other and their earlier learning. All pupils were fully and enthusiastically involved in every stage of the lesson. The outstanding quality of relationships was shown in their consistently positive, but not uncritical, appreciation of each group's efforts. Everyone worked with pace, concentration and purpose because all understood exactly what was expected and why. The good quality of work and learning across the school reflects the good quality of teaching and attitudes.
110. Consistently effective management of the subject has brought good improvements in the quality of provision. A positive response to national guidance material and revised curriculum requirements has resulted in an improved scheme of work. This has retained established strengths whilst ensuring a balanced coverage of the different strands of the subject. The chief strengths are the enthusiasm, expertise and good teamwork of the classroom staff. Formal planning is good and provides opportunities to link design and technology projects with work in science, mathematics, literacy, art and health education. However, not enough use is made of ICT to support learning in the subject. Pupil portfolios are kept and a broad assessment system is used to track pupils' progress.

GEOGRAPHY

111. At the time of the previous inspection, standards in geography were judged to be

satisfactory in both key stages. As a result of improved teaching, all pupils make good progress and standards throughout the school are now above those expected for pupils of similar ages.

112. At Key Stage 1 younger pupils have a good understanding of their immediate school environment and the local area of Codsall. They identify the distinctive features of the village and make good use of photographs to identify local buildings such as the church, the 'pub' and the post office. They also gain an awareness of more distant localities through the effective links being established with a primary school in Scotland. In Year 2 they locate places on maps and plans and use the four main points of the compass to follow a route. Through careful teaching they acquire a good geographical vocabulary, for example using terms such as cliffs, sea, lake and wood to identify features of the landscape.
113. The good standards in Key Stage 1 are maintained in Key Stage 2, where pupils make good use of their literacy skills to carry out research to answer a variety of geographical questions. They report on the particular physical and human characteristics of different countries by sending a postcard home to their parents. They consider similarities and differences between localities and investigate changes in the environment. Teachers continue to establish effective links with other subjects in order to make pupils' learning more purposeful. In their study of settlements for instance, pupils discover the influence of the Romans, Saxons and Vikings on English place names while developing their numeracy skills by constructing block graphs to show land use.
114. The quality of teaching and learning is good and teachers' good subject knowledge is a strength. This enables them to plan interesting and challenging activities that are clearly designed to promote the essential skills of geography such as mapwork and enquiry using globes, maps and other sources of information. Teachers carefully match the level of work for different attainment groups. A particularly effective example was seen in Year 1 of an extension task for a higher attaining individual to develop his inferential study skills. All pupils respond positively by joining in the discussions enthusiastically and working diligently and co-operatively to complete their tasks. Although younger pupils make good use of the local area, the syllabus agreed with the local middle school limits opportunities for pupils to develop a broader range of skills as they move through the school by carrying out fieldwork investigations outside the classroom.
115. The subject is effectively managed by the co-ordinator who has clear ideas about the future of geography within the school. These include continuing to explore the use of computers to support learning through a wider range of software and the evaluation of teachers' planning in order to update the school's scheme of work, taking nationally agreed guidance into account. The school is well resourced for the effective delivery of the curriculum, including a good range of atlases at a variety of different levels. Teachers use these resources effectively to support learning, as for example in Year 3 where teachers have produced very good quality brochures to extend pupils' study skills. A recent initiative has been the introduction of a very good whole-school system for the regular assessment of pupils' attainment and progress against national expectations. This is currently being implemented consistently by all teachers, although there has not yet been sufficient time for it to have the desired effect of raising standards further.

HISTORY

116. By the end of Key Stage 1 when pupils are seven and when pupils leave the school aged nine, all pupils make good progress and attain standards in this subject which are above expected levels. This represents a rise in standards for pupils between the ages of five and seven since the previous inspection, when standards were at expected levels and

indicates that standards have been maintained at above expected levels for pupils between the ages of seven and nine. Standards are above expected levels because teachers plan meticulously and have high expectations of all pupils. Consequently, younger pupils develop a good understanding of the differences between past times and contemporary life. They explain that their grandparents' toys were quite different from their own. They know that they were made from different materials, were simpler in design and so both looked and felt different.

117. Years 1 and 2 pupils develop an exceptionally mature understanding of the sequence of historical events. For example, they volunteer the information that George Stephenson pre-dated Neil Armstrong, without hesitation. They debate fully whether or not Jesus' birth pre-dated God's creation of the world and recognise the complexity of their discussion. In an excellent lesson during the inspection, pupils in Year 1 accurately placed three previously unseen teddy bears in order of age. This demonstrates an exceptional level of observation and understanding for their age. This exercise also provides pupils with very relevant experience of learning about the past by using artefacts.
118. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 retain a good range of historical facts about the periods that they have studied. The subject and the manner in which it is taught, captures their imagination and this enables them to recall various detailed information. For example, they enjoy relating details of social behaviour in Ancient Greek theatres as well as in Victorian school life. They confidently distinguish between past mythology and verifiable historical fact, moving easily from discussing the 'powerful' Medusa to the 'strong' Queen Victoria.
119. Throughout the school, pupils use knowledge of other subjects to contribute to their historical discussions. They clearly benefit from the effective links that staff make between subjects when they plan the curriculum. Year 2 pupils understand that we often learn about the past from stories handed down through generations and Year 4 pupils appreciate the value of archaeology in contributing to historical knowledge. However, throughout the school, pupils are less confident when discussing the means of discovering historical information than they are when sharing knowledge of past events.
120. The subject is well led with considerable enthusiasm. The co-ordinator has a clear understanding of the value in maintaining a balance between history and other subjects such as literacy, numeracy and art. There are regular opportunities for her to monitor teaching, planning and pupils' work to ensure that her well-founded objectives for the subject are implemented consistently throughout the school. This has successfully promoted the recent developments in the subject, such as the implementation of Curriculum 2000 and the introduction of new assessment procedures.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

121. By the ages of seven and nine, almost all pupils make good progress and attain above the standards expected nationally in the full range of the subject. This shows improvement from the previous inspection when standards of pupils aged seven and nine were at expected levels. Improvement is due to improved curriculum provision, increased teacher expertise, the teaching of specific skills and the use of much better resources in the new ICT suite, completed a year ago.
122. Following the guidance of the scheme of work, teachers plan a wide range of experiences for pupils throughout the school. All pupils are taught specific skills relevant to their stages of learning and are given good opportunities to consolidate these in links with other subjects. As a result they work with enthusiasm, develop good attitudes at a young age, develop ideas and make things happen. Year 1 pupils make good links with mathematics when using 'My World' to create a bar chart to present information about collected weather

data. They constructed their own titles, scales and horizontal and vertical axes. They shared ideas very well in small groups and then answered the teacher's questions accurately to show full understanding of their evidence. Year 2 pupils learn how to design pictures using art programs and learn how to create text on the screen. They carry out a series of controls and instructions to achieve the required results. They create imaginative designs and improve them using brush and colour controls. When challenged further, they paid particular attention to emphasise warm and cold colours according to their own preferred choices. Pupils at this age also access text and change its font and style, as for example when highlighting key words in bold or italic print. They learn a good range of new skills, including the use of keyboard skills and word-processing programs. By the age of seven, standards are above those normally expected.

123. Year 3 pupils build systematically on their knowledge and skills, using the mouse control and keyboard accurately to acquire a wider range of basic technological skills. They extend their learning of control skills and links with other subjects by using a music program to create a composition using notes of different length. Work was saved by pupils themselves, ready for the next lesson when different instruments such as piano, harp, guitar and trumpet would be selected to vary the timbre of the composition. Much thought and discussion takes place in these sessions as pupils work together effectively to solve problems. Year 4 pupils made very good links with mathematics, art and design and religious education when they designed Islamic carpet patterns, emphasising reflection and symmetry. Pupils worked co-operatively in pairs, sharing ideas and modifying designs. At the end of the lesson they printed out patterns of very good quality. They also access the Internet to gather information about particular countries in their geography studies and make links with history, literacy and numeracy when creating text and using systems to check spellings. They also devise questionnaires and gather information to produce block graphs showing the most popular snack biscuits.
124. Opportunities are also provided for pupils to enhance their work with illustrations created through their use of a digital camera. They are aware of the importance of information technology in their lives. They share ideas well and support each other very positively. Tape recorders are used at selected times to improve pupils' speaking and listening skills and enhancing their enjoyment of books. Almost all pupils are confident in their use of computers and work independently and creatively in their use of ICT skills. They have real enthusiasm for the subject and develop new skills within the good learning opportunities in the scheme of work. These improvements also extend to pupils with special educational needs, who make good progress as a result of effective support at identified levels of need. As a result, most attain expected levels with a few attaining above expected levels.
125. The quality of teaching is good at both key stages and has had a significant impact on raising standards. The good leadership by the co-ordinator has contributed to this through close and regular monitoring of teaching and pupils' work. Teachers and support staff have confidence and good knowledge of computing. Planning refers to previous assessment and clearly identifies what new skills and knowledge should be taught. Teachers also plan positive links with other curriculum subjects, such as those seen in English, mathematics, science, art and music. Pupils are progressively taught specific technology skills, such as re-drafting, re-sizing, importing and inserting text, in the new computer suite. Resources are of good quantity and quality and, with the new accommodation, contribute significantly to pupils' learning. Skills are effectively reinforced in other lessons and subjects through good opportunities to work in mixed ability and gender groups. These also successfully promote pupils' social development and contribute to the excellent relationships seen. Due account is taken of aspects of health and safety. The school has developed its curriculum successfully to meet the requirements of the national guidance in Curriculum 2000. A computer club has recently been established and there are planned links, through e-mail, with a school in Ireland.

MUSIC

126. By the ages of seven and nine, pupils make good progress and attain standards above those expected for their ages. This represents an improvement in Key Stage 1 since the previous inspection, when standards were judged to be satisfactory. Progress was then reported as 'steady'. Progress is now good throughout the school. Many pupils benefit from individual tuition in singing or instrumental skills. Standards are also significantly boosted by strong extra-curricular activity. Two recorder groups and a large senior choir meet weekly to practise. This year the recorder ensemble has played at the area festival and in Lichfield cathedral and the choir has performed at Staffordshire's Singposium 2000'. The participation rate is high in these clubs and events. As a result, the performance skills of older pupils are well developed and a source of pride to the school community and the pupils themselves.
127. After listening to 'Aquarium' and 'Fossils' from 'Carnival of the Animals', pupils in Year 1 were able to distinguish long and short sounds and comment on the effects they produce. Most used untuned percussion instruments to make long and short sounds and used these sounds to accompany their singing of a simple song in 'four time'. Pupils in a higher attaining Year 2 set maintained a rapid pace of learning activity throughout a challenging lesson. They quickly developed a good performance of Frère Jacques' by combining instrumental sounds of different duration and clapping and singing in time. They took a sudden switch to 'three time' easily in their stride and went on to practise and perform 'Away in a Manger', coping well with increasingly complex combinations of vocal and instrumental sounds as they explored the 'shape' of the melody.
128. Pupils in Key Stage 2 classes sing tunefully and expressively and keep good pitch and time. They showed good voice control and used dynamics well to suit the words of 'When a Child is Born'. Their good conceptual understanding enabled them to recognise and rectify weak points in phrasing identified by the teacher. Pupils in a Year 3 class showed a ready grasp of how computer games use pitch to signal successful or unsuccessful moves. They progressed quickly in using a simple notation to compose a sequence of pitch changes which traced the course of a computer game.
129. The quality of teaching at both key stages is good. The principal music lessons are taught by two specialists whose expertise is reflected in the high quality of planning and preparation, the clarity of questioning, the skilful use of demonstrations and the structured development of understandings and skills. In two very good lessons, pupils in Year 2 maintained a strongly productive work rate and high interest level as they were all actively engaged in a well managed and fast-moving sequence of practical activities. All pupils acquired new understandings and skills rapidly because they were securely grounded in previous learning, developed through creative music making and built in clearly linked steps of mounting difficulty. In such lessons, the level of expectation, confidence, effort and interest is high.
130. The subject is well-managed by an enthusiastic specialist whose hard work and clear vision are achieving good improvements. She has produced a good scheme of work in the light of national guidance and new curriculum requirements. Teaching is being carefully monitored and adapted as the scheme is gradually phased in. The main priority is to provide support and resources to enable non-specialist teachers to develop the 'ongoing skills' element through programmes of short lessons in classrooms. Further developments tackle areas of relative weakness identified by the school. These include improvements in opportunities for compositional work in school and for the use of ICT to support work in music. There is evidence of good progress in both areas. For example, an ICT lesson with a Year 3 class made good use of a software program to enable pupils

to extend their understanding of texture, duration, pitch and conventional notation as they composed patterns and 'layers' of sound. These developments enhance the school's traditional strengths in music and contribute to rising standards, although further progress in the use of ICT requires more software. The subject maintains a high profile in the life of the school and makes a substantial contribution to assemblies and pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development. However, pupils are given limited musical experience of music from non-western cultures and for enhancing resources for music in the Foundation Stage. Assessment, related to the new curriculum guidance, takes place during each summer term.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

131. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils attain standards that are in line with those expected for their ages. By the age of nine when they leave the school, pupils make good progress, and in some lessons, very good progress, to attain standards that are above expected levels. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into lessons and attain standards that are generally in line with their peers. Almost all pupils leave the school at the age of nine confident and safe in the water and able to swim at least 25 metres, a national requirement for eleven-year-olds. Many pupils gain more challenging awards.
132. Throughout the school, pupils experience a very rich and well-balanced range of activities including dance, games and gymnastics. In Key Stage 2, athletics and swimming are also introduced. During the inspection, pupils were observed taking part in dance, games, gymnastics and swimming. In addition, the school provided an interesting video of pupils involved in dance and a wide variety of games activities, which provided clear evidence of the progress pupils make in these areas.
133. In Key Stage 1, pupils participate in lessons with great enthusiasm and as a result of careful teaching they demonstrate a clear awareness of the need to work safely. In Year 1, they move rhythmically as they hop, bounce, glide and strut in response to the music. Year 2 pupils show good levels of control and co-ordination in gymnastics to complete 90 and 180 degree standing jumps and push hard off the floor to gain height in their jumps.
134. In Key Stage 2 most pupils make good gains in the acquisition of skills. In games they demonstrate an increasing awareness of tactics, for example in their close marking of opponents and in their developing understanding of attack and defence in small-scale versions of netball, rugby and basketball. In dance they interpret the music well to perform leopard and snake movements with sudden irregular freezes. They make good progress in their learning as a result of the structured and systematic development of skills. For example, in Year 3, pupils are introduced over a series of lessons to a variety of different balances, including shoulder balances. They are encouraged to observe carefully and to make judgements about the particular qualities of each one. As a result, they devise fluent sequences with a range of well-executed balances and changes of level and direction. Standards are higher in floor-work than on the apparatus.
135. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. It is however, stronger in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 1. All lessons are planned thoroughly and are well structured with warm-up and recovery sessions to promote good attitudes to health, fitness and exercise. Teachers are good role models. They change into suitable clothing and involve themselves fully in the lessons. In the most successful lesson, the teacher's very high expectations of pupils' behaviour and achievements effectively promoted high standards in a games session. The teacher monitored and assessed pupils' performances throughout the lesson and provided helpful and encouraging feedback. Pupils responded by listening attentively and following instructions carefully, showing a willingness and enthusiasm to practise their movements in order to improve. In a gymnastics lesson pupils demonstrated very good

speaking skills. They were encouraged to explain their sequences and to comment on their own and others' work. This had a positive effect on their learning. However, teachers do not always take full advantage of opportunities to promote pupils' cultural development. In one lesson, for example, the teacher made good use of African poetry and music as a stimulus for dance without using it to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of non-western cultures.

136. The subject is well managed by a knowledgeable and very well qualified co-ordinator. He is a nationally accredited coach and trainer. Teaching is monitored and in response to the detailed scheme of work, there is a clear emphasis on the systematic development of skills as pupils move up through the school and this is raising standards. The facilities and resources for physical education are good overall, although the school has quite rightly identified some of the gymnastics equipment as being inappropriate for young pupils. An excellent range of extra-curricular activities enhances the skills of the large numbers of pupils from all classes who participate. These opportunities also contribute effectively to pupils' personal and social development. The school has gained national awards through the 'Sport England' scheme and the Football Association's 'Active Mark' initiative. In addition, there are very strong community links which provide coaching in basketball, rugby and also football from Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club. The standards reported at the time of the previous inspection have been improved as a result of better teaching and consistent planning and the potential for raising pupils' attainment further is very good.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

137. Almost all pupils by the ages of seven and nine, make good progress throughout the school and attain standards which are above the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. This is an improvement since the previous inspection when standards met expected levels. Pupils make good gains in understanding the religious significance of stories from different faiths including Christianity, Hinduism and Judaism.
138. Year 1 pupils show a good understanding of Christmas as a Christian festival. They responded with great enthusiasm when discussing the traditional giving of presents and gifts. This theme was very effectively extended by the teacher to develop their understanding of 'invisible gifts' such as 'caring', 'sharing' and 'kindness'. There was a moment of great wonder and excitement when a big sack appeared, clearly containing parcels. When named pupils opened their parcels they found key words representing 'invisible gifts'. They discussed them with considerable sensitivity and imagination, expressing not only qualities associated with what they remembered about baby Jesus, but how people should behave towards each other. Year 2 pupils extended their knowledge of Christianity to describe how people show that Jesus is special through celebration, worship and by sending Christmas messages to each other. They made good links with literacy by composing poems and acrostics using the letters J,e,s,u,s, to begin the five lines or parts. In doing this they demonstrated a good understanding of the practices and beliefs behind religious symbolism. Earlier learning was linked well to other religions such as the Jewish fruit harvest festival of Succoth. By the age of seven, pupils attain above expected levels.
139. At Key Stage 2, pupils are engaged and interested when extending their learning about different religions. Suitable opportunities are provided for pupils to handle good quality religious artefacts. This supports learning well as pupils look at the objects as they talk about their significance to different faiths. In Years 3 and 4, pupils learn about 'Advent', 'Christingle' and 'Divali' and the importance of light to a range of religious customs. They learn about other religious customs and festivals such as Shabbat', the holy day in Judaism and the importance of particular prayer customs for Muslims. As a result of the good teaching provided for them, these pupils make good progress in their spiritual and

cultural development. On occasions, lessons are planned so that pupils interpret the content of stories through drama. This was demonstrated by Year 4 pupils with insight and maturity when role-playing the parts of Mary and the angel Gabriel, reflecting a range of emotions such as being nervous, scared and feeling special. By the age of nine when pupils leave the school, their knowledge and understanding is above expected levels.

140. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of all faiths and answer pupils' questions confidently. This leads to pupils thinking about what they have heard and in turn asking even more questions to understand why people believe what they do. Lessons are well planned to include concepts beyond learning about religion and involve pupils in learning from religion. Pupils are asked to consider the deeper meanings of words and feelings and to consider how this reflects on the way they lead their own lives. Reflection is used very effectively to reinforce the meaning of prayer. Due consideration of how prayer and reflection is used in various religions is given and supports pupils' understanding and developing values of other faiths.
141. The co-ordinator has good subject knowledge and provides good support to teaching and learning in the subject by monitoring teaching and pupils' work closely. There is a good scheme of work which follows the locally agreed syllabus closely. Assessment procedures enable teachers to track pupils' progress in learning and understanding in the key elements. The good use of artefacts has given a meaningful contribution to learning about all religions and faiths, as pupils handle these directly and talk about how they are used. Religious education makes a significant contribution to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through consideration and acceptance of different faiths and the opportunities provided to consider, through quality moments of reflection, the impact of their actions on others.