

INSPECTION REPORT

STONEHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Letchworth Garden City

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117345

Headteacher: Mrs Jane Luff

Reporting inspector: John William Paull
22028

Dates of inspection: 13th to 14th November 2000

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

Inspection number: 224336

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Primary with nursery class

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: Three to 11-year-olds

Gender of pupils: Mixed

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Brian Williams

Date of previous inspection: 10th to 14th December 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Stonehill Primary caters for boys and girls of three to 11 years old. It is a community primary school in Letchworth Garden City in the local education authority of Hertfordshire. It has its own, recently opened, nursery class. At present, the roll is around 150, which is smaller than other primary schools. Of these, 18 are in the nursery and attend each morning. Nearly all its pupils are white. Only a small percentage is either black or of an Indian heritage, but even so, approaching one per cent are pupils with English as an additional language, which is a bit higher than in most schools. However, none of these is at an early stage of English acquisition. Currently around 24 per cent of pupils are known to qualify for free school meals, which is above the national average. Around 30 per cent of pupils are identified as having special educational needs, which is above average. Most of these pupils are identified as having a learning difficulty, although others with emotional or behavioural difficulties, or with impairments to their speech, have been identified. One has a statement of need maintained by the local authority. Evidence provided by the school suggests that overall attainment on entry has fallen in recent years. It represented a wide range at the time of the last inspection, but was generally average. This wide range is still evident, but a higher proportion is currently below average, and socio-economic circumstances in the area are also below average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Stonehill is an effective school. Its strengths clearly outweigh its few weaknesses. It adds to pupils' experiences, knowledge and understanding. By the time they leave, pupils' attainment is broadly in line with what is found nationally, and in English and science, it is well above the average of similar schools. This finding represents good achievement bearing in mind the below average attainment on entry to the school, and it directly results from good teaching. Behaviour at the school is generally very good, and pupils nearly always try hard for their teachers, who support and guide them strongly. Pupils work together well, co-operating and collaborating on tasks and activities whenever they are asked. Leadership and management are good, and the headteacher, deputy headteacher and governors share information and decisions with the staff openly and clearly. This strong leadership results in consistent application of policies and aims throughout the school. Although the school's income per pupil is fairly high in comparison with national figures, class sizes are kept relatively small, which means that sums of money available for other areas of spending are tight. However, in view of pupils' achievements, standards of behaviour, and the very good quality of teaching, value for money is good.

What the school does well

- In the 2000 National Curriculum tests of 11-year-olds, standards in comparison with similar schools are well above average in English and above average in science, and standards in history and art are generally high.
- The overall quality of teaching is very good.
- Systems and awards to promote and monitor pupils' behaviour are strengths, resulting in very good behaviour.
- Very good community links promote early opportunities for careers education, and good learning about citizenship.
- The recently opened nursery has started well, based on thorough planning and very good teaching.
- Good leadership and management results in a calm, caring and purposeful environment.

What could be improved

- By the time pupils leave the school, standards in mathematics are not as high as in English and science. This finding reflects the 2000 National Curriculum test results of 11-year-olds.
- Planning based on the new curriculum for the Foundation Stage (the national planning

document for children up to the age of five) has not yet been fully introduced in the reception class.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement since the school's inspection of December 1996 has been good. In general, the quality of aspects that were then identified as strong has been maintained, and several other areas have improved. For example, teaching was generally satisfactory, and sometimes better, whereas now, it is very good. In the last inspection, a little unsatisfactory teaching occurred, whereas none was found now. This good teaching results in secure acquisition of knowledge and skills in nearly all lessons, and in pupils' good achievement over time. At seven and 11 years old, standards in history and art are above expected levels, compared with in line with expectations in 1996. Very good teaching at the school ensures that by 11, progress has been good enough for overall attainment to match a much higher national average, despite a lower attainment on entry. Present findings are that information technology is in line with what is expected nationally. In the last inspection, standards were said to be above national expectations. However, it was reported that equipment was not available for using computers to control other devices or to model different solutions to problems, which makes it difficult to establish a fair comparison. The school's arrangements for the development of pupils' spirituality have improved. Assemblies, for example, now comply with statutory requirements for the inclusion of an act of worship, whereas in the last inspection, this was not the case. Key issues in the last inspection have been addressed well. For example, the school's improvement plan is now well constructed, containing sections about what will be tackled and when, as well as cost implications. More rigorous systems for assessing and monitoring progress have also been introduced.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11-year-olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
English	E	A	C	A	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
mathematics	E	D	D	C	
science	E	B	C	B	

The table compares the average National Curriculum test results of 11-year-olds at the school with those of pupils nationally, and with those in similar schools. Similar schools are defined as those with similar percentages known to be eligible for free school meals. For example, in the 2000 tests in science, the school's average score is in line with that of all schools nationally. This result is better than in 1998, not quite as good as in 1999, but nevertheless is above that of similar schools. The results in all three subjects are better now than in 1998, when they were all well below average. Results in mathematics have lagged behind those of English and science. More 11-year-olds achieve the higher than expected Level 5 in science than in either mathematics or English, which reflects national figures. However, the school's performance at Level 5 is broadly average in English and science, whereas it is below average in mathematics. Nevertheless, bearing in mind attainment on entry, these results together represent good achievement and are directly linked with very

good teaching, which helps pupils to acquire secure knowledge and skills. Year groups are comparatively small, and differences in their character from year to year have considerable statistical effects. For example, the 1998 group contained a particularly high proportion of pupils with special educational needs, including five with statements of need, which directly accounts for the low results that year. However, the school's overall trend, taking all three subjects together for the past four years, is broadly in line with the national trend. The results of seven-year-olds in the 2000 National Curriculum tests show that standards in reading and mathematics are broadly average in comparison with all schools, and above average compared with similar schools. In writing, they are above average compared with all schools, and well above in comparison with similar schools. These results are an improvement over those of recent years. Standards in most other subjects are generally in line with expectations, although in art and history, many pupils achieve above expected levels.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good – pupils are enthusiastic about what the school offers them. A group in Year 6 explained how they are looking forward to visits to the council chamber and to parliament. Pupils agreed that they like coming to school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good – pupils behave well in lessons. They listen to their teachers attentively. For example, pupils in Year 4 remained busily on their tasks in a numeracy lesson, working very hard for their teacher. Pupils are generally sensible and polite around the building.
Personal development and relationships	Good – pupils co-operate well with adults, demonstrating a friendly and open approach. They collaborate well with each other, when opportunities arise.
Attendance	Satisfactory – attendance figures are broadly in line with the national average. Nearly all pupils arrive on time in the morning and lessons begin promptly.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years	aged 7-11 years
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Good	Very good

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

The overall quality of teaching is very good. Over 60 percent of the inspected lessons were of this quality. All others were satisfactory or better. Examples of very good teaching were seen across the school, and in the nursery. Evidence in lessons, planning and a scrutiny of work shows that mathematics especially is very well taught, which is leading to particularly secure learning of numeracy skills. Teachers in all age groups manage pupils very well, ensuring that available time is spent on acquiring the knowledge and understanding that teachers planned. In fairness, it should be pointed out that although teaching in classes for five to seven-year-olds was judged good, rather than very good, this was based on fewer direct observations of lessons. Elements of very good teaching were still present, and planning was thorough. Throughout the school, work is usually planned for groups of different prior attainment, and the provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. However, work for higher attainers, although it enriches pupils' experiences, does not always require a

higher level of understanding. As a result, the progress that these pupils make is sometimes slower than it might otherwise be. However, higher attaining pupils in Year 5 work with Year 6 pupils in mathematics, which addresses their learning needs well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory – planning of the new National Curriculum for 2000 is well underway and statutory requirements are fully met. In the nursery, good planning of the areas of learning for children under five meets recommendations for the new Foundation Stage. However, planning in the reception, although thorough and meeting needs, is not yet based on the Foundation Stage. The curriculum for older pupils is enhanced by work on citizenship, and early experiences of commercial and industrial workplaces are good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory – individual education plans are usually precise and teachers understand pupils' needs well. However, occasional inefficiencies in uses of classroom assistants were evident, such as when they sat passively during introductions to lessons, or unnecessarily supported pupils who were already coping, and who could have been left to gain independence.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory – currently, only very few pupils with English as an additional language are attending the school, and none is at an early stage of English acquisition. However, teachers are aware of pupils' needs and ensure that they understand what to do to make progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall – provision for spiritual development is strong in religious education, and pupils are given opportunities to appreciate art, craft and literature. Moral values are strongly promoted in assemblies, and pupils are involved in drawing up the rules for good behaviour and sociability by which their classrooms will operate – an example of very good practice. Opportunities for cultural development are sound.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good – procedures for child protection are clearly understood and followed by staff. Information about pupils' individual progress and their personal development is gathered and checked, and the deputy head maintains a thorough overview. This information is used well to plan work and set targets.

In questionnaires and responses at the meeting, parents' views of the school were generally good. Records show that nearly all attend consultation evenings at which teachers discuss pupils' progress. Information in written annual reports is of good quality.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good – the headteacher is clear about the direction of the school and together with her deputy sets targets for raising standards. The school's improvement plan is a clear document that sets out appropriate priorities and aims in an easily understandable form.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good – governors are supportive and knowledgeable, understanding their responsibilities well. For example, the need for a nursery was well researched, prioritised and seen into

	existence.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good – systems for collecting and evaluating information about standards are good. In-service training is used to match developmental needs.
The strategic use of resources	Good – finances are managed well and are used to resource priorities in the school's improvement plan. Staffing is deployed sensibly and classes are relatively small.

Senior staff and governors are beginning to apply the principles of best value. They understand the need to seek expert advice and separate quotations before making decisions about the expenditure of capital. Different catalogues are also checked to see that competitive prices are sought and paid. Office staff are efficient in their administration of day-to-day accounts.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school and behaviour is good. • Teaching is good, and there is an expectation that children will do their best, resulting in good progress. • The school works closely with them; the staff are approachable; and keep them well informed about their children's progress. • The school helps their children to become more mature and sensible. • The school is well led and managed. • Most believe that homework is about right. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few believe that amounts of homework are inconsistent, and that activities outside lessons are restricted.

Inspectors agree with parents' positive views of the school. However, bearing in mind the relatively small staff, inspectors judge that the amount of extra-curricular activities provided for pupils at lunchtime and after school is reasonable. During the week of inspection, several pupils took the opportunity to pursue interests indoors at lunchtime, and a good football training session occurred after school. Other activities include opportunities in mathematics, other sports and a choir. Evidence emerged that amounts of homework are sometimes inconsistent, but what was set in the inspection enhanced and supported the skills that were acquired in lessons, and that home/school books are usually used well.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

In the 2000 National Curriculum tests of 11-year-olds, standards in comparison with similar schools are well above average in English and above average in science, and standards in history and art are generally high.

1. At the time of the last inspection in 1996, pupils entered the school from a wide range of backgrounds. Nearly all of them were eager to learn and attainment on entry was broadly typical. The report pointed out, however, that social circumstances amongst successive intakes was beginning to change. For example, the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals was increasing, and the percentage with special educational needs was already a little above average. These changes have now worked through the school. The percentages of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and of pupils with special educational needs are both above average. Attainment on entry is now judged to be below what is normally found, and this is supported by the results of baseline assessments that the school carries out. The last inspection found that at the age of 11, standards in English and science were in line with national expectations. Currently, standards attained by pupils in Year 6 are broadly average in both subjects. The results of the 2000 National Curriculum tests support this judgement. In English and science, the average attainment of 11-year-olds at the school is broadly in line with the average of all schools in the country. In English, when only similar schools are included, these results are well above average, and in science, they are above average. Bearing in mind that attainment on entry to the school is lower now than it was when the last inspection occurred, this performance represents a better achievement. Furthermore, the averages that are used for these comparisons are much higher now than in 1996, since standards in the tests have improved nationally. Trends over the last four years show that the school's results have kept pace with this national improvement.
2. The results of National Curriculum tests of seven-year-olds reflect the changes in attainment on entry to the school more closely than those of 11-year-olds. The main reason is that good teaching has had less time to affect the standards attained by these younger pupils. That said, year groups at the school are relatively small, and differences in the results of just one or two pupils make a large statistical impact. Results of tests, therefore, tend to fluctuate. In 1998 and 1999, they were below average in reading and well below in writing. However, in 1997, they were well above average in both, and this year (the May 2000 tests), they were average in reading, and above average in writing. In comparison with similar schools, the 2000 results are above average in reading, and well above in writing. These latest results show that in the years ahead the school is well placed to maintain its levels of achievement by the time pupils leave the school. Seven-year-olds do not undertake National Curriculum tests in science. However, Statutory Teachers' Assessments show similar, although smaller, fluctuations from year to year. The latest results are below average judged in terms of the percentage attaining the expected Level 2 and above. Last year (1999), assessments were broadly in line with average. These comparisons are also based on a better national performance now than in 1996.
3. A scrutiny of work and what was seen in lessons shows that what is achieved now supports these judgements. In an English lesson in Year 3, for example, pupils showed good understanding of the differences between fiction and non-fiction. They read accurately from *Festivals* by Joy Ely, discussing the text convincingly. In Year 6, stories, poems and factual writing of good quality were seen, showing that pupils write effectively for different purposes. During the inspection, the writing of instructions was

discussed. The level of challenge provided by the teacher was good. It enabled pupils to understand the type of language and setting out that is required, based on the needs of the intended audience. For example, a group used information technology, checking instructions about folding a sheet of paper into eight sections. As a result of their teacher's good questioning, they demonstrated considerable concentration and respect for each other's views as they gathered around the computer and offered their ideas.

4. Recent work in science, shows that pupils in Year 2 know that light on earth originates in the sun. They understand that "pushes" and "pulls" are both forces and that different species survive over time by reproducing themselves. In a good lesson, a very high proportion of pupils understood the importance of good food and exercise for healthy growth, and related this knowledge to their own bodies. By the end of the lesson, sensitive teaching about drugs and medicines had occurred. Nearly all pupils understood that these substances were useful when used correctly, but that their misuse was dangerous. A work scrutiny provided evidence that pupils of all age groups undertake experimental and observational science at expected levels. By the time they leave, the large majority understands ideas of fair testing, and keeping experiments under controlled conditions.
5. Good co-ordination and very good teaching helps to ensure that good learning of basic skills occurs across the curriculum. In addition to these achievements in English and science, standards in history and art are high. At relevant ages through the school, what pupils know and understand is often above the levels required in the National Curriculum. Displays around the school demonstrate that pupils' art work is of high quality. The last inspection acknowledged that skills were taught well, but found little evidence of work based on different artistic styles or of famous artists. This element of the subject has clearly improved. For example, skilful work in the style of Tudor portraiture was found in Year 4, and very good uses of paint to create textured swirls of colour in the style of Van Gogh's *Starry Night* were seen in Year 6. Throughout the school, a high standard of care was evident in the displayed work of many pupils, and the emphasis on detailed observation has clearly been maintained. Three-dimensional work, such as collage in Years 3 and 5 was of good quality, and clay candle-holders were also well formed.
6. Work in history also is often of a higher standard than normally expected. A group of pupils in Year 6, who were interviewed by inspectors, demonstrated good recall of a broad range of historical facts. Their attitudes towards the subject were excellent, as they put forward ideas about World War II, and its effects on life in Britain. For example, they knew about rationing, the possibility of gas raids, and were full of anecdotes that were poignant examples of the points that they made. They understood that not all Germans agreed with Hitler, showing awareness that historical facts can be interpreted differently, according to the perspective of those recording them. Their recollections of past historical study were also good. They explained essential details about Ancient Egypt, the Tudors and King Henry VIII, and Victorian England. They put these eras into the correct sequence and spoke enthusiastically about the written work in their folders, which was neat, well presented and factually accurate. A very good history lesson in Year 2 contained very good uses of artefacts that the teacher produced from a bag. Questioning focused on what these could tell us about the past. The teacher's aim was to help pupils understand better how we know about the past. A time-line was also introduced and used well. By the end of the session, pupils' learning was thorough. They were able to record ideas about the objects and their uses as sources of evidence. Previous work showed that they knew interesting facts about famous characters in history, such as Helen Keller, Louis

Braille and Guy Fawkes. They also understood the significance of Remembrance Day and the sale of poppies.

The overall quality of teaching is very good.

7. In the last inspection, teaching was satisfactory. It included good teaching in the reception and classes for pupils aged five to seven. In classes for seven to 11-year-olds, it was also generally satisfactory and included some good teaching. However, about one lesson in seven was unsatisfactory for pupils in this older age group. Teaching has improved considerably since then. The overall quality of teaching is now very good. Based on the evidence of lessons seen, it is better for children up to five, and in classes for seven to 11-year-olds, than it is in those for five to seven. However, the difference is not large and is still of good quality overall for this age group, and included some very good teaching. Over 60 percent of the inspected lessons were very good. All other teaching was satisfactory or better. No unsatisfactory lessons were found. The school had no nursery class of its own at the time of the last inspection. In this inspection, examples of very good lessons were seen across the school, including the recently opened nursery. Evidence in lessons, planning and a scrutiny of work shows that English and mathematics are often very well taught, which is leading to secure learning of skills in literacy and numeracy. This quality is improving standards and producing good achievement as pupils move through the school. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, used to summarise and consolidate learning, pupils explained their tasks in relation to their own individual targets. As a result, they spoke in particularly good subject-specific language about instructions that are easy to follow. Explaining their work to others in this way ensured that they organised their own thinking successfully, which refined learning well.
8. In the last inspection, weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics to older pupils were identified. These consisted of a failure to ensure that pupils completed corrections, and an inconsistency in matching work to the needs of groups of pupils with different prior attainments. Both the governor with responsibility for numeracy and the subject co-ordinator linked this difficulty to planning and the misuse of a commercial scheme. The introduction of the National Numeracy Project has gone a long way to solving the problem. In this inspection, findings are that when commercial schemes are used, they provide relevant tasks, questions and sums to consolidate and exemplify what teachers have already planned and taught. Now, many very good mathematics lessons are taught. Different work for groups of different prior attainment is invariably provided, and in Year 6, booster classes offer opportunities to address the different needs of pupils further. However, minor weaknesses are still apparent within this aspect. Sometimes, work for pupils of higher attainment, although presented differently, was not at a higher level mathematically. For example, when asked to recognise numbers from clues in a given pattern, higher attainers were simply given fewer clues than other pupils. However, they were still working with numbers up to a hundred, and their specific knowledge of place value was therefore not extended. However, higher attaining pupils in Year 5 work with Year 6 pupils in mathematics, which addresses their learning needs well, and is thus a positive feature.
9. Teachers manage pupils very well, which contributes strongly to the quality of learning. Expectations of work and behaviour are high. Pupils respond accordingly with good attitudes to work, and behaviour is generally very good. As a result, available time in lessons is spent well on acquiring knowledge and understanding. Teachers' planning is usually very good, including information about what pupils are expected to know at the end of lessons, and containing adaptations for groups of different prior attainment. This feature also benefits the quality of learning as teachers

invariably share it with their class, which helps pupils to see where their lessons are leading them. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. Classroom assistants are usually well used in supporting individuals and small groups, whose needs they know well. Targets on individual education plans are communicated well, and focused in this support. As a result, these pupils make progress at rates similar to that of other pupils, albeit at lower levels.

Systems and awards to promote and monitor pupils' behaviour are strengths, resulting in very good behaviour.

10. Parents at the pre-inspection meeting commented that the school's arrangements for promoting pupils' personal development are good. They were particularly impressed by opportunities for pupils to draw up rules for their classrooms. Inspectors agree with this. For example, spiritual and moral values are strongly promoted in assemblies, contributing to pupils' thoughts and feelings about the world and their part in it. This teaching includes understanding of right and wrong. In subjects such as history, teachers take opportunities to explain issues and motives behind people's actions. An example was seen in work about the events surrounding Guy Fawkes and the gunpowder plot. Planning in religious education displayed similar features about what could be learnt from religions. However, possibly the strongest feature of this aspect, and an example of very good practice, is that pupils are involved in drawing up rules of behaviour and sociability by which their classrooms will operate. At the beginning of each school year, teachers make a particular point of explaining why rules are necessary. Pupils from the youngest to the oldest are then given the opportunity to work out what they want their classrooms to be like. The process also provides good cross-curricular links with speaking, listening and literacy, as pupils discuss, listen to each and then write for a purpose. As a result social development is strong. Nearly all pupils express ideas such as wanting to learn from their teachers; to be safe; and to enjoy being there. With this in mind, each class agrees and draws up its rules as a code of conduct. Pupils write them out and decorate them, and a copy is displayed prominently in the classroom. Even classes for the youngest children are included. Those who are not yet able to write freely use illustrations. This system ensures not only that pupils understand rules, but that they have a stake in them and therefore want them to work. As a result, inspectors found that pupils displayed a strong commitment to these codes of conduct, knowing what they meant and trying to keep them. In this way the system is effective in contributing to the very good standards of behaviour that were found.
11. The school also has a good system of points that are given for good work, attitudes and behaviour. These have the added incentive of bronze, silver and gold awards as certain numbers of points trigger a threshold. Inspectors found that this was also working well. Most pupils knew their position with regard to these points and awards, and were motivated to earn them. At the same time, this system produces a record of pupils' behavioural achievement and personal development, and provides a procedure for monitoring it.
12. As a result of this strong provision, pupils' attitudes, personal development and relationships are good, and behaviour is very good. These standards make a similar strong contribution to the climate for learning and the work of the school generally. Attitudes and behaviour were never less than satisfactory. In around 70 percent of inspected lessons, behaviour was judged to be good or better. In most of these, it was very good, and in Year 6, it was excellent. This finding suggests that as pupils grow older and experience it more, the impact of the school's good provision strengthens. Whenever pupils were asked, they stated that they enjoyed school and were proud of it. At the meeting, a few parents questioned whether attitudes and

behaviour in Year 4 were as strong as in the rest of the school. In the inspected lessons, pupils in this class behaved as well as others. They listened to their teacher well; worked hard for her; and co-operated well in groups. This type of response contributes strongly to the quality of learning. It means that teachers throughout the school are able to spend higher proportions of their time on teaching the planned objectives of their lessons. In turn, pupils consolidate skills more effectively and acquire factual knowledge more securely. Behaviour around the school is good. Pupils are polite and helpful to visitors and greet them with a friendly word or smile. They respect work on display and are very willing to explain its significance or how it was done. The school gives every indication of offering a warm, purposeful and secure environment.

Very good community links promote early opportunities for careers education, and good learning about citizenship.

13. The school enjoys many good links with the community. These help to enhance the quality of education. For example, different types of students work in the school, contributing to ideas and supporting with groups. Their work increases the ratio of adults to pupils and results in more opportunities for one-to-one explanations, enhancing understanding. Links with museums and visiting speakers similarly enrich opportunities for pupils to acquire skills and experiences. The school's link with the Letchworth Community Education Trust (LCET) is a particularly strong feature. Funding is provided to support good citizenship, learning about democratic institutions and their importance locally and nationally. For example, it enables the school to arrange visits to the Letchworth Council Chamber. Pupils in Year 6 meet councillors and are shown elements of the council's work. This knowledge is extended well, when pupils visit Whitehall. They meet their Member of Parliament in the Palace of Westminster and learn something of national government. This work provides good cross-curricular opportunities in literacy, art and display. For example, a good display of pupils' ideas and findings was in a public area of the school during the inspection.
14. Another strong feature of the school's work is early opportunities for careers education. The curriculum for older pupils is enhanced by experiences of commercial and industrial workplaces. Arrangements are made for pupils to shadow a parent or other member of their family. They keep a record of what they see, and this provision offers insights into the adult world of work. It makes a good impact on pupils' attitudes to education. Many older pupils link what they do at school with a process of gaining good qualifications and a good job or profession. The school's equal opportunities policy is evident in ensuring that all pupils benefit from this provision. For example, if family members cannot offer suitable or safe placements for pupils of primary age, alternatives are sought with the help of the education trust. In the past few years, no pupil has been excluded from this valuable experience.

The recently opened nursery has started well, based on thorough planning and very good teaching.

15. Until September of this year, provision for children under five was restricted to the reception year, whereas most other schools in the town had nursery classes of their own. Even though most pupils entering the school had attended play-groups or other nurseries, this diversity of provision resulted in a range of different experiences in each year group. Ensuring that these differences were ameliorated, and that children had equal opportunities to progress, resulted in an inevitable loss of time at the beginning of their schooling. This shortcoming was clearly beyond the control of the headteacher, staff and governors. However, some parents in the locality perceived it as a weakness. As a result, several children who might have attended the school had

joined nurseries at others. Understandably, these children often remained at these other schools when they were subsequently offered places in their reception and Year 1 classes, as friendship patterns had been established. Governors, headteacher and staff therefore identified the provision of a nursery class as a priority for future development. It is a testimony to their leadership skills that a plan was drawn up, funding was successfully sought, and that a morning nursery is now open.

16. Evidence gathered in the inspection shows that the nursery has begun well. Initial planning is thorough and is based on the curriculum for the new Foundation Stage. It consists of long, medium and short term elements that show what will be provided and when, and how work is related to the nationally recommended areas of learning for the age group. Staffing is good, including a teacher, a qualified nursery nurse and a classroom assistant, and therefore provides a very good ratio of adults to pupils. Resources and accommodation are good, including a main room, a small office and a secure exterior play area. Relationships with parents have also begun well. A meeting was held before the term began and another took place about six weeks later. Background information and early ideas of children's progress were swapped effectively.
17. Elements of all areas of learning were taught very well during the inspection. Various well planned activities were available to pupils based on the teacher's good knowledge and understanding of the age group. Children moved around these activities naturally, making choices and learning effectively. Social, personal and emotional development was particularly well taught. All the adults involved ensured that children were safe and understood what was required. As a result, all the children were ready to learn and to be involved. The adults were well aware of the needs of different individuals, helping those with less initial confidence to overcome their reticence. Outside activities included sit and ride toys, hopscotch, a role-play shop and books. Supervision was good, and plenty of conversation and exchange of ideas took place between adults and children, encouraging their imaginations and offering good support. Basic skills of running, jumping and balancing were therefore acquired effectively. Very good teaching resulted in an emphasis on taking turns and sharing, further developing social and personal skills. During work with a book, a brisk pace was maintained. Opportunities to point out words that rhymed, and how a pattern could be spotted in the spelling were taken well, by referring explicitly to the sounds of words. Pupils demonstrated an ability to listen well, and both the teacher and other adults used praise effectively. Plenty of cross-curricular learning occurred during these sessions, with good questioning from all adults about colours, number and shapes. Opportunities to make marks with pencils, to create their own books and to use simple materials to print on paper provided good opportunities for pupils to develop skills of hand and eye co-ordination. Displays generally enhance the appearance of the accommodation and help to create a colourful environment.
18. The co-ordinator of the school's provision for the early years is generally knowledgeable, and has already identified priorities for the future development of the nursery and its liaison with the main school. These include improvements in arrangements for joint planning with the reception, to enable children to move smoothly from class to class, and the formation of joint procedures for monitoring and assessment of the work of children under five in both classes.

Good leadership and management result in a calm, caring and purposeful environment.

19. At the time of the last inspection, the school's management produced a calm and orderly school. The headteacher had delegated responsibilities appropriately and knowledge and expertise was shared well amongst the staff. However, the overall effectiveness of management was restricted because procedures for analysing results were not in place. Findings in this inspection show that sensible aims and policies are well communicated to staff and pupils alike, and the school remains well ordered. Its open working areas are characterised by calm and purposeful routines, which result in a caring environment that supports pupils' learning very well. To these features has been added a system for checking National Curriculum test results and assessments. This analysis of pupils' work is the main responsibility of the deputy headteacher. It is very thorough and the information that it produces is passed on to class teachers. This information is used to set both overall targets for successive year groups as they move through the school, and also for individual pupils, who are aware of what they need to do to make progress. Standards of behaviour that are expected are also communicated to pupils well. As a result, pupils are content, and they acknowledge, when asked, that they feel safe and secure at school. In turn, they work well and classrooms are caring, purposeful places, in which lessons are planned to ensure progress that is monitored effectively. All this is passed on well to parents in annual written reports and consultation evenings that are generally well attended.
20. Governors understand their statutory responsibilities and are involved well in the school's work. The ex-Chair and new Chair of Governors share the headteacher's vision for the future success of the school, and developmental aims include further improvements in mathematics and information technology, and attracting more pupils into the school. These targets are appropriate and realistic, and action taken to bring them about is effective.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

By the time pupils leave the school, standards in mathematics are not as high as in English and science. This finding reflects the 2000 National Curriculum test results of 11-year-olds.

21. At the time of the last inspection, standards of attainment in mathematics lessons matched the school's results in the 1996 National Curriculum tests of 11-year-olds. These results were reported as broadly in line with the national average. However, attainment in the 2000 tests of 11-year-olds at the school is below the combined averages of all schools in the country. Although this result is not as good in terms of the particular comparisons made, different bases apply. In 1996, percentage of pupils reaching the expected Level 4 or above was in use, whereas now, a system that takes into account the different percentages of pupils who reach different levels (known as average points scored) is used. Furthermore, the national average of pupils attaining Level 4 or above (72 per cent) is anyway considerably higher now than it was in 1996 (54 per cent), and in fact considerably more pupils at the school are currently reaching this level than was the case previously. Nevertheless, arguments of this kind also apply to English and science, yet the school's results in these other subjects are in line with the higher national averages of 2000. Compared with the averages of similar schools, attainment in mathematics is broadly in line, in science it is above average, and in English it is well above.
22. Discussions with the co-ordinator and the governor with responsibility for numeracy indicate that past planning and the school's mathematics scheme contained

weaknesses. For example, teaching in some classes was too dependent on the explanations and methods of a commercial scheme. This shortcoming had already been identified at the time when the National Numeracy Project was announced by the government. It is a testimony to the school's good leadership that this was seen as an opportunity to develop the teaching of mathematics. The school therefore joined in the project's pilot year, which resulted in good levels of training. Many benefits have followed from that decision. Teachers are now more confident in the subject, as was shown in the very good teaching that was found in this inspection. Numeracy hours are planned well and teaching based on commercial material is no longer the emphasis of mathematics in any classes. Standards are rising through the school, as the effects of improved provision are felt. For example, in whole class sessions at the start of lessons, pupils demonstrate good mental recall of simple number facts for their age, and by 11, they often use these to help with written calculations. Furthermore, the 2000 National Curriculum tests of seven-year-olds indicated that every pupil attained at least the expected Level 2. The school is therefore very well placed to improve achievement in mathematics as these pupils move up into the older age groups.

23. The commercial scheme that the school used has been identified as sometimes too wordy in its presentation of work. Some pupils lost sight of the specific mathematical language that was embedded in the text. As a result, it is likely that a few older pupils are still experiencing difficulty in linking word-problems with the correct mathematical operations and methods for finding successful solutions. For example, in a scrutiny of past work, money problems that required a series of subtractions, followed by addition of the separate answers to get a correct result, were all added throughout. The addition itself was carried out correctly, but because of the faulty selection of operation, the answer was wrong. As this skill is important, and particularly so in the context of written test questions, the lack of it has a negative impact on pupils' results.
24. Good co-ordination of mathematics has led to the identification of these weaknesses, and measures are in place to rectify them. In most classes, for example, pupils are encouraged to make oral explanations about the methods that they use. Explanations of what works are made explicit. These features suggest that the school is well placed to improve its overall results.

Planning based on the new Curriculum for the Foundation Stage (the national planning document for children up to the age of five) has not been introduced in the reception class.

25. At the time of the last inspection, children entered the school as they approached their fifth birthday, and joined a reception class. It was not possible to accept younger children, as the school had no nursery of its own. This situation changed with the opening of a new nursery in September 2000. The school was able to base its planning on the recently published curriculum for the new Foundation Stage of education. However, the school's provision for children of reception age was already in existence. Owing to the low numbers of children currently of reception age, and low numbers in Year 1, these two groups are at present organised in a mixed-age class. Planning for the younger children in this class, although appropriate, and different from that for pupils in Year 1, is not based on the new recommendations. As none of the children in the present reception attended the new nursery, they are not disadvantaged in any way by this mismatch. Furthermore, teaching in the inspection was judged to be at least sound. Nevertheless, children currently in the nursery will all have experienced teaching based on the new planning when they move to reception. It is therefore important that future planning for the reception takes this matter into

account. The headteacher, governors and co-ordinator for the early years are aware of this and plans are in place to address it.

26. Differences in the hours of working between the nursery and reception, and the spread across stages in the Year 1/reception class have so far provided obstacles for joint planning across the Foundation Stage. However, again senior managers are aware of the difficulties. Some of these are likely to subside in the near future with the formation of separate classes for Year 1 and reception.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The headteacher, staff and governors should :

- Raise standards in mathematics to match those reached in English and science, by:
 - i. Ensuring that work set for higher attainers is always at a higher level of difficulty that challenges their understanding and knowledge (see paragraph 8).
 - ii. Providing plenty of practice and opportunity, in all classes through the school, to help pupils to understand which mathematical operation(s) are correct for solving problems expressed in words (see paragraph 23).
 - iii. Continue to apply rigorously the new methods and planning that was introduced at the time of the numeracy strategy (see paragraph 22).
- Complete and implement planning for the Foundation Stage as soon as possible, ensuring that planning for children of reception age is brought into line with that of the nursery, by :
 - i. Providing more opportunities for teachers of children of reception and nursery ages to plan together (see paragraphs 25 and 26).
 - ii. Ensuring that what is planned for children of reception age is closely based on the new curriculum for the Foundation Stage (see paragraphs 25 and 26).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

14

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

20

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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0	64	15	21	0	0	0
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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 – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	9	149
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals		38

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	1	51

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	16
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.9
National comparative data	5.2

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	2000	12	8	20

National Curriculum Test/Task Results	Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	10	12
	Girls	8	8
	Total	18	20

Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	90 (67)	85 (67)	100 (85)
	National	83 (82)	84 (83)	90 (87)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	10	12	10
	Girls	8	8	6
	Total	18	20	16
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	90 (70)	100 (89)	85 (93)
	National	84 (82)	88 (86)	88 (87)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	11	13	24

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	8	6	10
	Girls	13	12	13
	Total	21	18	23
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	87 (88)	75 (58)	96 (92)
	National	75 (70)	72 (69)	85 (78)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	2	5	6
	Girls	11	11	12
	Total	13	16	18
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	55 (65)	63 (62)	75 (62)
	National	70 (68)	72 (69)	79 (75)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	3
Indian	4
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	130
Any other minority ethnic group	1

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21.3
Average class size	24.8

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	83

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	0.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18

Total number of education support staff	2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	28

Number of pupils per FTE adult	6
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	289,308
Total expenditure	289,941
Expenditure per pupil	1,946
Balance brought forward from previous year	1.041
Balance carried forward to next year	408

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	130
Number of questionnaires returned	36

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	70	25	2	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	48	48	2	2	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	45	49	2	2	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	52	9	5	6
The teaching is good.	69	26	2	3	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	65	28	5	2	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	75	17	3	5	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	75	23	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	56	33	6	3	2
The school is well led and managed.	54	32	9	3	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	60	34	0	3	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	25	43	20	4	8

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

Inspectors agree with parents' positive views of the school. However, bearing in mind the relatively small staff, inspectors judge that what is provided for pupils at lunchtime and after school is reasonable. During the week of inspection, several pupils took the opportunity to pursue interests indoors at lunchtime, and a good football training session occurred after school. Other activities include opportunities in mathematics, other sports and a choir. Evidence emerged that amounts of homework are sometimes inconsistent, but what was set in the inspection enhanced and supported the skills that were acquired in lessons, and that home/school books are usually used well.