

INSPECTION REPORT

DOWSON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Hyde

LEA area: Tameside

Unique reference number: 106198

Headteacher: Mr F Doidge

Reporting inspector: Mr P Snelling
3624

Dates of inspection: 2nd – 5th October 2000

Inspection number: 224963

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant and junior
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 to 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Marlborough Road Hyde Cheshire
Postcode:	SK14 5HU
Telephone number:	0161 366 0177
Fax number:	0161 366 0546
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr S Manson
Date of previous inspection:	November 1996

© Crown copyright 2000

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mr P Snelling OIN 3624	Registered inspector		The characteristics and effectiveness of the school The school's results and pupils' achievements Leadership and management Key issues for action
Mrs J Hughes OIN 11084	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development Partnership with parents
Mr D Twist OIN 1492	Team inspector	Information technology Art Equal opportunities	Teaching and learning
Mrs J Boden OIN 12301	Team inspector	Science History Music	
Mr K Johnson OIN18370	Team inspector	Mathematics Geography	Pupils' welfare, health and safety
Mr M Bowers OIN 17907	Team inspector	Special educational needs Design and technology Physical education Religious education	Quality and range of opportunities for learning
Mrs S Oyen OIN 7167	Team inspector	Foundation stage English as an additional language English	

The inspection contractor was:

Primary Associates Limited
West Lancs Technology Management Centre
Moss Lane View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TN

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Registrar
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	1
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	6
The school's results and achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?	8
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS?	10
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	12
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	13
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	14
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	15
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	17
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	21

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Dowson Primary School is much larger than most schools of this type. There are 433 boys and girls on roll aged between four and eleven. There are two buildings, one housing pupils in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, the other pupils in Key Stage 2. Pupils come from a variety of different types of houses and backgrounds though the area from which the school draws most of its pupils has average social and economic circumstances. There are a similar number of children entitled to free school meals as in most schools though there are fewer on the register of special educational needs. There are sixteen pupils who speak English as an additional language, with skills similar to those of other children of their age. When pupils start in reception their attainment is broadly average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school is effective but with room for improvement. Children get off to a fine start in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 where their achievement is good, whilst in Key Stage 2 their progress is largely satisfactory. By the age of eleven, most pupils reach the standards they should in mathematics and science but not in English. The headteacher provides committed and caring leadership that promotes very good relationships and a broad education for pupils but not enough attention has been given to improving achievement in Key Stage 2, especially in English. The school gives satisfactory value for money from a modest budget.

What the school does well

- The lively teaching and rich variety of experiences in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 promote pupils' good achievement.
- Standards are better than in most schools in design and technology, and in swimming.
- The school helps pupils develop a very strong sense of moral responsibility, which contributes to their good behaviour and personal development.
- The school involves parents effectively in many aspects of its life and work, and makes very good use of the community.
- Pupils behave very well and relationships between them, and with adults in the school, are very good.
- The school provides a rich programme of extra curricular activities, visits to places of interest and makes very good use of the environment.

What could be improved

- Standards of work in English at Key Stage 2, especially writing.
- Management checking the quality of teaching and pupils' learning, and taking action on their findings to raise achievement in Key Stage 2.
- Management and teachers' use of the information on what pupils can and cannot do, gained from their assessments.
- Provision for pupils with special needs in Key Stage 2.
- Attainment of older pupils in information technology.
- The opportunities pupils are given to develop their investigative skills in science and to use their number skills in other subjects.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made satisfactory progress since its last inspection. Although the school was not given any key issues for action, to their credit, the headteacher and governors wrote an action plan to improve in some of the areas judged in the main text to have weaknesses. This has led to a much better curriculum for the youngest pupils now in the Foundation Stage

and standards in design and technology better than in most primary schools. Achievement in information technology is better though there is more still to do. Involvement in a number of sports initiatives has raised pupils' games skills. Some significant improvements have been made to the buildings and school site. Internal remodelling of the open plan junior building has been carried out, which enables the national guidelines for literacy and numeracy to be more effectively implemented. The school has gained and maintained eco-status, which leads to pupils being very aware of environmental issues. The newly established 'Millennium Trail' around the school grounds provides a high quality resource for the study of nature and helps to support the children's good achievement in the life and living processes aspect of science. Although the school has picked up the signs of falling English standards at Key Stage 2, not enough attention has been given to treating this as a priority. The school has not kept up with the pace of change nationally in the subject. Teaching and learning have not been examined closely enough to see what needs to be improved.

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	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
English	D	C	D	E	well above average A above average B
mathematics	E	B	C	C	average C below average D
science	D	A	C	C	well below average E

These 1999 test results are average in mathematics and science and show that by the time they left, most pupils had achieved what might be expected of them. Results in English were not as good as they should have been, particularly when you compare pupils' performance to that in schools similar to Dowson. Although the 2000 results cannot yet be compared with other schools, they are not as good as those for 1999 because the group had a larger than usual number of pupils with special needs. The school did not meet the target it had set itself for 2000 in English; the target it has set for 2001 is challenging.

Most of the pupils in the Foundation Stage (reception classes) comfortably achieve what is expected of them or more. They achieve well because they quickly gain confidence in their teachers and the other adults who work with them. Pupils in Key Stage 1 make good progress largely due to the consistently good or very good teaching they receive. By the end of Key Stage 1, nearly all pupils have achieved the standards they should.

Work seen during the inspection in mathematics and science confirms that standards for the current Year 6 are average. However standards are low in English in Key Stage 2, particularly in writing. There are several reasons why. Writing is not taught systematically and not enough is demanded of pupils. There is too little emphasis on teaching pupils the language they need to become good writers when they are older. Whilst the school has adopted the national guidelines for literacy, they have not adapted them well enough to get the greatest benefit from the 'literacy hour'.

In most other subjects, including religious education, pupils reach standards typical of those in most schools. However, standards are still below average in information technology by Year 6 because the improvements seen with younger children have not yet worked their way

through as better achievement for the oldest pupils. High standards are reached in design and technology with some exciting activities to challenge pupils.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Younger children in particular work very hard when practical activities capture their imagination. Older children are very keen on the out of school activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils are very well behaved in class, around the school and out on visits.
Personal development and relationships	A strength of the school. Pupils respect and support each other well. They try hard to meet personal targets and carry out responsibilities very well.
Attendance	Better than in most primary schools. Pupils arrive in good time

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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.

In 96 per cent of lessons seen teaching was satisfactory or better, in 22 per cent very good or better and in 4 per cent unsatisfactory. All the unsatisfactory teaching seen was in Key Stage 2.

Teaching is better in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2. The teachers of the younger children work closely together, so pupils know what is expected of them and they are consistently challenged. Learning is often exciting, full of interesting activities that encourage pupils to work hard and with enthusiasm. In Key Stage 2, the teaching is sound but more mundane. Teachers and pupils get on well but there are fewer occasions when pupils are stimulated by challenging activities and there is more use of dull worksheets or tasks. Teachers in Key Stage 2 do not always make enough use of information about the pupils' previous achievements to set their work. This can lead to pupils repeating work they have done before, so they are not stretched.

Teaching of mathematics, including numeracy, is satisfactory throughout the school. Teaching of English is better in Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2, where there are some particular weaknesses. In Key Stage 1, teachers have a lively approach to teaching reading and writing. They question and demonstrate well, prompting the pupils to think about what they are doing. In Key Stage 2, not enough attention is given to developing speaking skills and this has a knock on effect in undermining good writing. Despite conscientious planning, teachers do not always make it clear enough to pupils exactly what they should know by the end of a lesson and sometimes they try to teach too much in one go. Although older pupils work in ability sets for literacy and numeracy, more attention should be given to matching work to the different needs of children within these groups.

Teaching of pupils with special needs is also more effective in Key Stage 1 than Key Stage 2. Where pupils have individual plans, infant teachers use them well to teach pupils new skills or practise existing ones. In some classes in Key Stage 2, work does not link closely enough

to the targets set out in the plans. Because the level of challenge is not right, pupils do not make the same good progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	All statutory requirements are met. The curriculum for the Foundation Stages and Key Stage 1 is of a better quality than Key Stage 2, where it is satisfactory. The school uses visits to places of interest particularly well.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision for pupils in Key Stage 1 is good but there are unsatisfactory aspects in Key Stage 2 where work is not always well matched to pupils needs.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The few pupils with English as an additional language do not require additional support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The provision for pupils' personal development is very good. Pupils are fully involved in setting their own targets with teachers and parents, and reviewing their achievement. Moral, social and cultural development are especially good because teachers give a lot of attention to them and the curriculum offers many opportunities for this.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils are well cared for. Procedures for ensuring pupils welfare, health and safety, including child protection, are very good.

The curriculum is better quality in Key Stage 1 because teachers plan more interesting and challenging activities for the pupils, especially in English and mathematics. In science in Key Stage 2 pupils do not have enough opportunities to plan, carry out and record their own investigations. Although teachers collect a lot of information about pupils' academic progress they do not make enough use of it in planning work.

The school works very closely and effectively with parents. It provides high quality information through reports on pupils' progress and on the curriculum and every day matters. A large number of parents offer valuable help in school.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Satisfactory overall. The school is well managed on a day-to-day basis. The headteacher and key staff are successful in promoting a broad education and good relationships for the pupils, which reflect the school aims. They are not so effective in implementing the improvements needed to raise standards to the highest possible levels, particularly in English.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are committed to the best interests of the school. They have a good awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses but need to ask more searching questions about how much it is improving.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school knows the broad areas it needs to improve but does not look deeply enough to know exactly what is working well in lessons, what isn't and why. Plans for change are therefore not sharp enough.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are used efficiently and to the benefit of all pupils. The school checks to see if it is getting best value; for example by asking parents about its provision through regular questionnaires.

The governors fulfil all their statutory responsibilities. The school has sufficient staff and there are enough resources to teach all subjects. The infant building is spacious and provides a rich environment to support pupils learning. The junior building has benefited from recent inside alterations and is adequate. The grounds are large and attractive and provide a valuable learning resource.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school is well led and managed. • The ease with which they can approach the headteacher or staff. • The teaching is good. • The school expects children to work hard and do their best. • Their children are happy to come to school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few parents think there should be more opportunities offered beyond the daily lessons. • A few parents think there is either too much or too little homework.

A substantial number of parents returned the questionnaires and very few had concerns. Parents overwhelmingly hold the school and its headteacher in high regard. Inspectors agree that the school has many strengths but there is room for improvement in some aspects of teaching and management. The opportunities offered for out of school activities, mainly in sports and the arts, are better than in many primary schools. Amounts of homework are line with national guidance.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Children who are five years old or younger, in the Foundation Stage, attain above average standards in communication, language and literacy; mathematical development; personal and social and emotional development; physical development. They reach average standards in knowledge and understanding of the world, and creative development. Most pupils enter reception with broadly average attainment, though in 1998 and 1999 more pupils scored below average than above in their tests when they first began school. Their achievement is good because there are valuable interactions between the children and adults, and the teaching places a high emphasis on practical activities that allow the children to apply their skills.
2. As they move through Key Stage 1, pupils continue to achieve well and consolidate their strong start. By the end of the key stage their work shows that standards are in line with what is expected nationally in reading and writing. This is borne out by recent test and assessment results, though in writing in 1999, the result fell below the national average. This was due to there being only a small number of pupils who reached the higher level (3) though nearly all reached the expected level. Whilst an early start is made to teaching writing and progress is generally good, the higher achievers are not introduced soon enough to the particular skills that need to be mastered to reach level 3. Pupils' performance in writing is weaker than that in reading and this carries through into Key Stage 2 where standards of writing at 11 are unsatisfactory. In this key stage, teaching of writing is not systematic enough and not enough is expected of pupils. There is too little emphasis on teaching pupils the language they need to become good writers. Spelling and handwriting are not taught well and too much praise is given for work of low quality. The low level of attainment in writing dragged down the overall test score for pupils in English at 11 in 1999 to below average.
3. Reading standards are average in both key stages though again achievement is better in Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2. There is more emphasis on teaching specific skills in the infant classes whereas in the junior classes there is a tendency to simply listen to pupils read.
4. In mathematics and science, standards are average at the end of both key stages. This is reflected in the 1999 test scores at 7 and 11, both nationally and compared to similar schools. In mathematics, numeracy standards are stronger than those in shape, space and handling data. Opportunities are sometimes missed to apply skills in a practical way, both in mathematics lessons and in other subjects such as science. In science, pupils have a particularly good knowledge of life and living processes, partly due to the emphasis the school gives to environmental education. They are not so strong at designing and carrying out experiments because they get fewer opportunities to undertake this sort of work.
5. Since 1996, taking English, mathematics and science together, the trend in attainment at 11 has been broadly in line with the national trend. The targets set for pupils in English and mathematics at 11 in 1999 were realistic and achieved. Those set for 2000 in English were not achieved and those set for 2001 are ambitious. The group of pupils who took the tests in 2000 included a larger than usual number of pupils with special needs and pupils who joined the school in the later junior years. Targets set are, by and large, appropriate.
6. Progress for pupils with special needs in Key Stage 1 is good, with most pupils meeting the targets set for them by their teachers. At Key Stage 2, special needs

pupils do not make the progress they should because the learning targets set are not always appropriate or well written. Stated pupils throughout the school receive full support. Higher achieving pupils are not sufficiently stretched when teachers give them easy worksheets to complete or set them work which does not build on what they have done before.

7. Pupils reach average standards in most other subjects of the curriculum. Standards in art, geography, history, physical education, religious education and music are similar to those found in most schools. A particular strength of the work in geography and history is the use of visits to places of interest and fieldwork which motivate the pupils. In physical education, pupils reach above average standards in swimming by Year 6. In information technology, standards for the oldest children are still below average because the improved achievement now being seen up to Year 4 has not yet worked its way through to Year 6. Standards in design and technology are better than in most schools.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

8. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good in Key Stage 1 and good overall in Key Stage 2. Pupils' personal development and the very strong relationships apparent throughout the school are two of its significant strengths. Pupils have retained the qualities reported at the time of the previous inspection. Their positive attitudes to learning are enthusiastically reinforced by their parents who ensure they come to school regularly and on time.
9. The youngest children are particularly eager to complete 'homework' tasks set by their classteacher and meant to last a full week. Usually, they return them after the weekend, keen for more. They also respond very well to an extensive range of practical activities that spark their interests. They are tenacious and persevere with tasks until completed successfully, such as the little boy who would not be beaten by the difficult task of putting up the ironing board in the home corner. He tried for several minutes with no success, stood back and looked at it carefully then just pulled the two halves apart, very pleased with his achievement. The reception children really enjoyed a blustery walk on the 'Millennium Trail' during which they were very observant and eager to extend their knowledge.
10. Older pupils also respond better to activities with a practical slant and these make a significant contribution to their learning. They are enthusiastic about projects and trips and are keen to participate in the varied range of extra-curricular activities organised by the school such as hockey, netball and music. Some older girls rushed to the Year 6 area one lunchtime to find they had just missed a choral speaking practice – their despair at being too late summed up their feelings very well.
11. Behaviour is very good overall and there have been no exclusions from school in the past year. Children in the Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1 behave very well. They are always attentive in lessons and are eager to participate in all the activities. They work very well with all the teachers and additional adult helpers and produce a very good volume of work. For example, some of the youngest children worked very well with a helper, icing and decorating biscuits. They constructed funny faces out of small sweets and were delighted with the results. Pupils in Year 1 concentrated very hard as they practised their handwriting; they listened really carefully to the teacher and you could hear a pin drop in the classroom as they carefully rewrote the letters in their exercise books. Most pupils in Key Stage 2 behave well and are trustworthy as they move around the school. The majority work hard and are very well mannered. Now and again, when teaching does not grab their attention, one or two pupils become restless and their concentration wanders. For example, some Year 3 boys 'drifted off' during the whole class shared reading at the beginning of a literacy hour. They found it very

difficult to make a valuable contribution in the following discussion. Some Year 5 pupils were not fully involved in all the activities during an information technology lesson; they were slow to respond to the tasks set and did not make the progress expected.

12. Pupils' personal development is very good and is a strength of the school. Pupils respond readily to any opportunities the school offers to take on responsibility. Many pupils are class monitors and this helps them to become better organised and to learn the value of service to others. The very popular and absorbing environmental activities embraced by the school offer pupils first hand experiences of recycling and cutting down on waste. For example, pupils have drawn eye-catching surrounds for all the light switches to remind the last one out to 'switch it off'. Frequent opportunities to participate in educational visits also extend pupils' experiences of the wider world and help them to behave responsibly. Staff often receive praise from the public when they take pupils out; they know very well how to behave in different social settings. The residential visit to France for the oldest pupils allows them to live and work with peers and adults in a different environment and this adds to the strong personal development programme. The school sets pupils individual targets for development, pupils set their own targets and they evaluate how well they achieve them.
13. Relationships between pupils and adults and between pupils themselves are very good. Pupils know staff care about them and they co-operate very well. All pupils, including those whose first language is not English, are very well integrated into all aspects of school life and this leads to a harmonious working environment.
14. Levels of attendance are good throughout the school and are above the national average. Pupils arrive on time and there is a prompt start to the day. Attendance levels are slightly better than those reported at the last inspection.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

15. Teaching is strongest in Key Stage 1 where most is very good and in the Foundation Stage (reception) where most is good. The quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 ranges from very good to unsatisfactory, with most satisfactory. In 96 per cent of the lessons seen, teaching was satisfactory or better, in 22 per cent very good or better and in 4 per cent unsatisfactory. All the unsatisfactory teaching seen was in Key Stage 2.
16. In their first year in school, children experience effective teaching in both reception classes. This is rooted in an approach which on the one hand sets a warm, quiet, and encouraging atmosphere, yet at the same time sets high expectations for good behaviour and achievement. This gives the children the confidence that comes from feeling secure, which helps them to attempt new tasks readily and to enjoy new experiences. The reception classrooms are well organised to provide children with ideas and support for their learning, such as well displayed numbers, letter shapes and useful 'key words'. This encourages their independence as, for example, when they refer to letters on the wall display instead of asking the teacher for help. Good progress for children of differing abilities and experience is ensured by the way teachers observe and record details of what they have achieved. They build on this knowledge in the work they give to the children, so that pupils progress at the fastest rate possible. The way in which staff work as a team to plan their lessons ensures that both classes are given equally valuable experiences. Now and again, adults over direct the children so they are not given enough space to think for themselves. Whilst the purpose of activities is usually made clear to the children, this is not always so.
17. In Key Stage 1, teaching shares many of the good features of the Foundation Stage and this provides pupils with a consistent experience. They are still subject to the same high expectations to which they respond well. Staff bring learning alive through practical and relevant activities, which are presented in a lively and confident way.

Again, the classrooms provide useful prompts through labels, lists and displays to help pupils with their current work. This reflects the teachers' understanding of their pupils' needs. Teaching of basic skills in literacy and numeracy is strong in this key stage. Teachers share clear aims for lessons with the pupils. This helps them to focus on the skills they are being helped to develop, and enables them to know how well they are doing. For example, in a Year 1 lesson on writing an ending for a story in full sentences, the teacher explained in simple terms what the target for the lesson was. She then led them to consider how the story of 'Red Ted at the Beach' might end, using skilful questions such as 'What do you think might happen from what we know about the story so far?' Checking of the pupils' ideas at the end of the lesson was used to praise good efforts and to reinforce the original aim of learning to write in full sentences. Although much of the teaching shows flair in this key stage, there are occasional weaknesses. For example, whilst support staff make a valuable contribution to supporting activities, they are not always actively deployed during lesson introductions or summaries. Pupils are occasionally restricted in the amount of work they can produce in lessons when they are kept too long on the carpet for the introduction.

18. In Key Stage 2, some subjects are better taught than others and more is expected of pupils in some lessons than in others. The lively presentation of a practical music session in Year 5 illustrated how pupils can be motivated to work with pace and effort and become totally engrossed in their work; they even put the instruments away to a musical rhythm. There was a similar response by pupils to an investigative activity on methods of joining paper in Year 3. Both occasions demonstrated how enthusiastic introductions and well-chosen activities could result in good progress for all pupils. However, this is not always the case. Whilst teachers frequently work hard to capture pupils' imaginations in their introductions, some lessons feature activities that lack excitement and add too little to pupils' learning. Too many worksheets, for example, feature dull tasks that do not engage children's interest sufficiently. Having to measure lines drawn on a worksheet is a poor substitute for measuring real objects. This is one of the reasons why the teaching of literacy and numeracy is more ordinary at Key Stage 2. Another reason is that insufficient use is made of information on pupils' previous attainment when planning their next work. Some pupils end up working on tasks that are too easy, others on tasks that are too hard. For example, three quarters of a Year 3 class worked at a level 2 mathematics task when a significant proportion had already achieved level 3 in the previous term.
19. Not enough is expected of pupils in the way they present their work in either mathematics or English, particularly in Key Stage 2. As a result, many pupils believe that an untidy piece of work is good enough. Marking can sometimes reinforce this with comments such as 'super work' attached to work which does not represent pupils' best efforts.
20. A strength of teaching throughout the school is that teachers have good relationships with their pupils, maintain good control, and obviously care about them. Effective strategies such as the use of 'traffic lights' to convey the teacher's view of behaviour, work well. Some teachers build successfully upon pupils' good behaviour more than others by expecting them to work collaboratively and independently. Joint planning and close working relationships are strong features of Key Stage 1 and they also apply to teachers' work within year groups at Key Stage 2. Communication between year groups, however, is not effective, resulting in some instances in pupils observing 'We've done this before'.
21. Teaching of information technology is mostly good and staff have worked very hard to raise their levels of expertise, particularly in teaching specific keyboard skills. Not all show the same confidence when working in the computer suite but they are tapping

into the expertise of the co-ordinators to further improve. Practical work in design technology is a strong area, supported by good teachers' subject knowledge.

22. Teaching of pupils with special needs is good for Foundation and Key Stage 1 pupils. Their targets are appropriate to their needs and they make good progress in developing basic skills. This is also true for some older pupils. However in some classes, pupils' individual learning plans lack the detail needed for teachers to be able to check their progress. Also, the level of challenge in their class activities sometimes fails to take their learning needs fully into account.

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

23. The school teaches all subjects including religious education and meets its statutory requirements. The curriculum provides a broad range of worthwhile opportunities for the pupils in the foundation and infant stages and in the junior stage provision is satisfactory. There is a good balance of activities within the different subjects in the foundation and infant stages but in the junior key stage, parts of some subjects are not given enough attention. For example, older children do not undertake enough challenging science investigations and they spend too much time studying living things at the expense of finding out about materials and physical processes. Planning for information technology covers the development of skills well but there is not enough attention given to planning for use of those skills in other subjects. In the infant classes, activities link together particularly well and throughout the school there are good examples of work which links design and technology, science, history and information technology.
24. In Key Stage 2, the school groups pupils in ability sets for literacy and numeracy work. However, it does not get the best out of this arrangement when teachers' planning fails to take account of the differences of abilities still present within the groups. High achieving pupils, in particular, are not stretched enough and do not make as much progress as they might.
25. An appropriate emphasis is given to literacy and numeracy as the school follows the guidelines provided nationally and by the local education authority. The literacy strategy is more successful in the infant than junior classes because it has been better adapted to the needs of the children, with teachers making clear what it is pupils need to learn.
26. The curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage is good and meets their needs. There is a range of high quality practical activities in all areas, which are effectively planned to meet the standards set out for them (the Early Learning Goals). There is a good balance between practical experiences and activities led by the teacher.
27. Pupils with special needs receive their full entitlement to the National Curriculum. Those with statements or currently being assessed by outside agencies are satisfactorily supported. However the pupils in the infant classes make better progress because their learning programmes are clearer and their targets more precise and well matched.
28. The personal, social and health education programme (PSHE) offered to pupils is a well-considered programme that links together general health education, sex education and a drugs' policy to ensure pupils receive a clear understanding of how best to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Separate PSHE sessions allow pupils to discuss a variety of issues which feed into their emotional and moral well being whilst other health information is incorporated as part of the science curriculum. During a Year 3 science lesson on dental care, for example, pupils first studied different categories of teeth along with their functions. They then considered how to keep their teeth healthy and,

after listening to their classteacher describe his way of avoiding too many daily 'sugar attacks', they all mapped out their own 'good food day'. Pupils sucked their breath in shock at the graphic diagrams produced by the teacher as he showed pupils the extent of the damage caused by too many snacks.

29. The community makes a very considerable contribution to pupils' learning. For example, the school seeks out local expertise to support different initiatives such as the Eco School Award. A local stonemason came in to make the sign for the environmental Millennium Trail and this is now a major focus for school and community alike in the school grounds. Other community members come in to share their expertise with pupils. For example, a Country Park Ranger who originally came to talk about the environment to pupils continued a strong association with the school as a governor.
30. Very constructive relationships are maintained with local pre-school groups and nurseries and this helps new children to settle happily into the school's routines. Beneficial links are established with local secondary schools although pupils transfer to many different ones. For example, the support of teachers from one secondary school has helped in the improvement of design and technology. Valuable links exist with a number of further education colleges and pupils benefit from the presence of student teachers in classrooms. Additional support from students and other helpers enables pupils to make better progress in their learning.
31. The school makes very good provision for pupils' personal, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and this fosters a very positive learning environment in which pupils become increasingly mature, rounded and independent people. This is a slight improvement on the already strong position at the time of the last inspection.
32. Good provision for pupils' spiritual development is evident during collective worship which is used by the school as an opportunity to celebrate the worth and value of each individual. In one assembly, the headteacher encouraged pupils to consider the parable of the Talents. He linked this well with the central ethos of the school – 'you must try your best as that is what makes Dowson School so special'. Staff encourage pupils to celebrate the wonder of the natural world in their written and creative work. Displays of artwork in halls and corridors illustrate, for example, the beauty of the oak tree as it changes with the seasons or of the landscape in winter. Some of the more thoughtful written work displays the reflections of Year 6 pupils about the weather, as in 'Sunny eats the clouds and drinks the rain, His flaming hands comfort me through the day'.
33. There is a very strong moral culture in the school, founded on the principle that each individual respects the rights of others, works hard and celebrates achievement. Pupils are taught the difference between right and wrong and outstanding examples of good behaviour or effort are recognised each week in the Celebration Assembly. There are very clear guidelines for parents and pupils about the expectations the school has concerning good behaviour and these are upheld by the vast majority of children. Pupils are encouraged to consider the plight of those less fortunate than themselves; they raise large sums of money for charity and are particularly generous about donating 'special gifts' to overseas appeals, telling children in far flung countries about what their special gift has meant to them in the past.
34. The school also offers very good provision for pupils' social development and this has a significant impact on their personal and social development as they experience new situations. One of the strong features of the school is the sheer number of educational trips and visits pupils experience. Other particularly successful events and activities include The Millennium Way, National Poetry Day, the school's 'Eco Status' and the

use of sports specialists. The very good range of extra-curricular activities adds to this provision and enables a large number of pupils to play additional sports, learn to play a musical instrument or gain additional skills. Some of the themes for collective worship also support this area very well. For example, in a Year 3 assembly, pupils considered the role of the peacemaker; the teacher stressed the fragility of peace and how important it is to live in peace with other members of the community. Topical themes illustrate vividly some important aspects of a healthy social life. For example, the display board in the hall featured the Olympic Spirit and posed a number of telling questions for pupils such as 'Have you set yourself a goal?' and 'Are you well prepared?'

35. Provision for pupils' cultural development is also very good and enables them to gain a better understanding of their own rich heritage. Pupils are encouraged to participate in trips to museums, places of worship, natural beauty spots and concerts. They learn a great deal about the local community and participate in a number of traditional pastimes such as Well Dressing and country dance. Pupils and parents accompany staff on theatre and concert visits, for example to the Halle Orchestra Family Concerts, and this increases their knowledge and understanding of the place of music and cultural activity in their lives. The school tries hard to ensure pupils have a good understanding of the beliefs and religions of other cultures; for example they visit a Mosque and have links with a Muslim cleric. Displays update pupils knowledge of what is happening around the world and this gives them a better understanding of their own place in the wider world.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

36. The headteacher and all adults working in school take very good care of pupils; they feel secure there and enjoy coming to school. The provision of pastoral care is a very high priority. Parents are very appreciative of the support all staff offer their children; they feel that the school is very successful at helping pupils to enjoy their time at school and that it offers their children very good guidance and support. Inspection findings confirm these views. The school has maintained the high quality of pastoral provision reported at the last inspection.
37. Child protection arrangements are very good and are known to all adults in the school. The headteacher is designated responsible for this area and he ensures that staff are kept up to date with procedures. The school also has successful experience of caring for 'looked-after children' and effective liaison takes place between the school and local support agencies to ensure the well being of these pupils.
38. The health and safety co-ordinator works well with the school's governing body and caretaking staff to maintain a safe and secure working environment for the whole community. Public access to the large school site poses particular problems with regard to dogs fouling the grassed areas; this is an ongoing problem with no easy solution that governors and staff continue to monitor closely. Staff take care to ensure pupils' safety in classrooms and around the school buildings. Although there is no separately fenced, outdoor play area for children in the Foundation Stage, staff supervise outside activities very carefully.
39. There are detailed policies in place to monitor and promote good behaviour, though staff do not always follow them as closely as they might when dealing with the small number of pupils who show long term behaviour problems. The school needs to develop better strategies to support these pupils. Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are good and ensure that the majority of pupils attend school regularly. Registers are carefully completed and the school pursues any unexplained absence diligently.

40. The school offers very good support for the youngest children when they enter the Foundation Stage. The induction programme is well considered and children start school without unnecessary anxiety. The school ensures that all parents and pupils receive as much support and information as possible before the children move on to secondary school.
41. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment in English, mathematics and science are good though they are not well developed in other subjects. Baseline testing of children when they enter the reception classes gives a clear indication of their language and mathematical development. Statutory national curriculum tests for seven and eleven year olds as well as annual standardised tests in years 3, 4 and 5 provide regular information about pupils' progress. Test results are analysed to identify broad levels of attainment within year groups. The information gathered however, is not used well enough to set appropriate future targets for those groups, particularly for pupils who are capable of higher achievement. In some lessons work does not build on what pupils have already achieved, resulting in tasks being repeated or pupils working below their levels of ability. Consequently learning does not progress quickly enough. Procedures for gathering assessment data have been maintained since the previous report but use of the information to plan for pupils' progress lacks the rigour which was previously reported.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

42. Parents hold the school in high regard and express very positive views about it. These are reflected in their questionnaire replies and in discussions with inspectors. They feel the school is effective in involving them in its life and work and they hold the headteacher in high esteem.
43. Links with parents are strong and they make a significant contribution to children's learning. Very high quality written information is sent to parents in the school's prospectus and governors' annual report. These documents both contain much detailed information about the work of the school. They provide parents with a really clear overview of daily routines along with a good flavour of the ethos central to the work of the school. Parents of pupils in each year group receive a specific pack of information at the start of the academic year that outlines all the major programmes of study for the year. Parents can then offer appropriate levels of support for their children's learning. Curriculum meetings are also arranged by the school to provide explanations for any new initiatives such as the literacy and numeracy hours. These are well supported by parents who gain a better understanding of what the school is trying to provide for their children.
44. The quality of teachers' comments in the annual written reports to parents is very good; these end of year reports provide parents with a very clear picture of what their children can do and what they need to do next to improve. The vast majority of parents are happy with the quality of feedback they receive from the school about the progress their children make and appreciate both the formal and informal opportunities to talk with teachers.
45. Parental involvement in the work of the school is very good. Parents support the Home School Agreement and back up the pastoral side of the school's work. A good number of parents support the work of the school in a variety of ways, for example as classroom helpers, accompanying pupils on educational trips, fundraising for resources or offering administrative support. The Parent Teacher Association is very successful. It raises considerable funds for school resources and also organises a number of very enjoyable social occasions for parents and pupils which add to the strong community feel of the school.

46. The school maintains a very close dialogue with parents on many aspects of school life and gives careful consideration to any concerns they raise. The quality of relationships between parents and the school has improved still further since the previous inspection.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

47. Leadership and management are satisfactory. At the time of the previous inspection the quality of leadership and management of the school was described as very high. During the past four years, many of the school's strengths have been sustained. For example, the school still clearly meets its aims in providing high standards of care, fostering good relationships and behaviour, and promoting pupils' personal development. However, the headteacher and key staff have not driven through successfully some of the changes needed to promote the highest levels of attainment, particularly in English.
48. There were no key issues identified for the school in the previous inspection. Nevertheless, to their credit, the headteacher and governing body identified areas for improvement mentioned in the text of the report and built an action plan around them. This has led to better achievement in information technology and a more appropriate curriculum for the youngest children. The headteacher and governing body have worked hard to bring about alterations to the junior building, particularly to improve the circumstances for teaching of the national literacy and numeracy arrangements. The breadth of the pupils' education has been much enhanced by the school's achievement of Eco-Status. The school continues to be held in high regard by its parents and is popular.
49. The governing body is effective and fully involved in making significant decisions through its well organised working groups. It works tenaciously to protect the best interests of the school; for example in maintaining admissions limits or developing the site and buildings. Governors, through the curriculum group, have a good awareness of the school's performance and specific weaknesses such as pupils' low achievement in writing. However, they need to be more rigorous in finding out how well the actions being taken to bring about improvement are working.
50. The school has not pursued vigorously enough the remedying of weaknesses in writing and further raising achievement in mathematics and science in Key Stage 2. The headteacher does not observe and evaluate teaching on a regular basis so weaker aspects are not identified and improved. This most affects Key Stage 2. Whilst the school development plan addresses improvements in the literacy and numeracy teaching arrangements, it does not get to the heart of the problem of low standards in writing. Action plans do not set out specific and measurable targets to show how much better pupils might be expected to perform as a result of changes and how the improvement is to be brought about.
51. In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, and in some other subjects, teachers share management responsibilities. There is one coordinator in each key stage and no one has overall responsibility. Whilst this arrangement works for overseeing planning and resources, it does not support best progress for pupils across the whole school, so the co-ordinators' effectiveness is reduced. Teachers in one key stage do not know as much as they might about practice in the other and share their strengths. In handwriting, for example, there is no consistent development from reception to Year 6. Coordinators in Key Stage 2 have too little impact on improving standards and teaching. For example, they do not check samples of pupils' work, so poor marking and presentation go unchallenged.

52. The school collects information on pupils' performances, for example through analysing test results. This information is increasingly being used to set targets and allocate support for individual or particular groups of children; for example those who need a boost to reach the average level at the end of years 2 or 6. The school has a broad knowledge of its weaknesses, for example in writing and assessment practice. Where it falls down is in trying to work on too broad a canvas, rather than monitoring closely to narrow down and tackle the precise causes of low achievement.
53. The school uses its financial resources well. Its modest budget is used to support the main areas identified for development. It has made good use of its additional national funding for information technology. Value for the money spent on special needs is satisfactory, though the return is better in Key Stage 1 than Key Stage 2. There are sufficient staff though the deputy headteacher carries too many areas of responsibility. The classroom support staff make a valuable contribution to pupils learning. They are not best employed when listening passively to the introductions or summaries to lessons but they are good at supporting activities. The additional adult help in the computer suite is critical to its success.
54. The school gives due attention to gaining best value from its work. It compares its performance to similar schools and has for some years consulted parents through questionnaires to find out if the school is meeting their needs. The governors' current activity in trying to establish breakfast and after school clubs is a response to parents needs.
55. Accommodation is adequate. Space in the infant building is used well by the staff. Sensible alterations to the junior building allow for a reduction in distractions during the literacy and numeracy hours. The school site is impressive. The grounds lend themselves to development for environmental studies and the school has seized opportunities with initiatives such as the 'Millennium Trail'. There is no separate fenced area for reception pupils to play but they are well supervised at these times.
56. Resources are adequate, sufficient to teach all subjects. Information technology resources are much improved since the previous inspection. In literacy and numeracy, some of the teaching aids the infant teachers have made themselves are very valuable. Although the school has tried to adjust its timetable to best accommodate the literacy and numeracy arrangements, it is not always successful in making good use of the time before and after these sessions.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

57. The headteacher and governors should now take action on the following issues:

(1) Improve standards in English, especially writing by:

- giving more attention to developing pupils' language through speaking and listening activities;
- *in Key Stage 2:*
 - implementing a specific programme for developing writing.
 - teaching specific reading and writing skills more rigorously;
 - expecting more of pupils in the quality of their handwriting and presentation of work;
 - demanding higher standards of written English through improved marking;
 - setting clearer objectives for pupils' learning in lessons and sharing them;

- providing more interesting activities for pupils during literacy lessons.

(Paragraph references 2, 3, 17, 18, 24, 25, 47, 50, 75-86)

(2) Improve management by:

- the headteacher implementing a programme for regularly observing teaching and evaluating the standards of pupils' work, and acting on the findings.

(Paragraph references 17, 18, 19, 20, 47, 49, 50)

(3) Make better use of information about children's achievements by:

Management

- analysing test results more closely for specific weaknesses to identify groups or areas of the curriculum to be targeted for improvement.

Teachers

- using fully the information available from assessments to plan work which builds closely on what pupils have done before and which better challenges high achievers.

(Paragraph references 6, 18, 41, 50, 52, 79, 84, 85, 94, 101, 113, 125, 130)

(4) Further improve the support for pupils with special needs in Key Stage 2 by:

- raising the quality of targets within specific learning plans;
- ensuring all class teachers reflect these targets in the work they give pupils in lessons.

(Paragraph references 6, 22, 27, 53, 85, 92)

58. In addition to the key issues above, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the plan. These are indicated in paragraphs 7, 124, 127 (completing the implementation of the scheme of work for ICT across Key Stage 2); paragraphs 4, 23, 97, 101 (improving pupils' investigative skills in science) and paragraph 4, 91 (improving the opportunities for pupils to apply their number skills).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	67
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	17

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	21	36	37	4	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 – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)		433
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals		60

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs		7
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register		45

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	16

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	8
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.9
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0
National comparative data	0.5

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	35	30	65

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	27	29	33
	Girls	28	30	27
	Total	55	56	60
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	85 (89)	86 (86)	92 (89)
	National	82 (83)	83 (79)	87 (84)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	29	31	29
	Girls	30	26	27
	Total	59	57	56
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	91 (88)	88 (91)	86 (86)
	National	82 (81)	86 (81)	87 (84)

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
	1999	30	34	64

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	21	23	25
	Girls	25	23	28
	Total	46	46	53
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	75 (66)	72 (66)	83 (86)
	National	70 (65)	69 (59)	78 (69)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	21	19	25
	Girls	25	24	28
	Total	46	43	53
Percentage of pupils	School	72 (61)	67 (59)	83 (70)

at NC level 4 or above	National	68 (65)	69 (65)	75 (72)
------------------------	----------	---------	---------	---------

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	14
Chinese	2
White	415
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 - Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	14.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	30
Average class size	31.1

Education support staff: YR - Y6

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	198

Financial information

Financial year	1999/ 2000
----------------	---------------

	£
Total income	692588
Total expenditure	696082
Expenditure per pupil	1601
Balance brought forward from previous year	2660
Balance carried forward to next year	- 834

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	433
Number of questionnaires returned	177

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	65	32	3	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	55	39	2	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	54	42	1	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	56	11	2	6
The teaching is good.	62	36	0	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	46	42	9	1	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	68	28	2	0	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	64	33	0	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	45	50	3	1	2
The school is well led and managed.	68	29	1	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	57	41	0	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	27	46	15	1	12

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

59. The children in the reception classes get off to a good start due to good teaching and well-planned and organised learning experiences. The strengths identified in the last inspection have been sustained and improvements made, especially in the quality of the curriculum and the development of an agreed early years policy. On entry to school, the children's attainment is similar to that expected for their age, and they make good progress and achieve well. At the time of the inspection, the children were still only attending either the morning or afternoon sessions but many had made noticeable strides especially in reading, writing and number work. Inspection evidence indicates that by the end of the year, the children will have attained the nationally agreed standards (the early learning goals) in knowledge and understanding of the world, and creative development. Many will have exceeded them in personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy, mathematical development and physical development. This good attainment provides a springboard for work in Year 1.

Personal, social and emotional development

60. This is strength of the provision and is an integral part of day-to-day classroom life. The children start school with well-developed skills in getting on with others and in taking care of their own needs. The adults build on and develop these skills in the way they interact positively with the children and in the way they organise the rooms so that everything is easily accessible. They treat each child as a valued individual and make time to talk about home and what they are doing. For example, when the children got undressed for physical education sessions, the adults talked to them about how to take off certain items and where to place them so that they would be easy to find later. This was a good example of the way the adults help the children to organise themselves. They expect the children to make their own decisions, help them to help themselves and praise them when they succeed. Their calm, warm and supportive approach accounts for much of the good initial progress made by all the children, including those with particular needs.
61. Although they had been in school only a short time, the children had clearly settled quickly and were enjoying learning. They were confident, happy and keen to try all the activities. They know where things are kept and ask for help from adults when needed but also show good levels of concentration and a developing determination to do things for themselves. The children play happily on their own or with others, often for long periods, and many share and offer items readily. They are interested in what others are doing. They are drawn to activities where there is an adult but show developing self-confidence and willingness to continue when the adult leaves. They show concern for others. For example, the children thought of many ways to cheer up one of 'The Three Little Pigs' who was sad at losing his home.

Communication, language and literacy

62. The children are making good progress due to good teaching. Pupils' work from last year shows that by the end of the year, all the children were reading and writing sentences independently. They were spelling simple words correctly and using their knowledge of letters to have a go at more complex words such as 'barbyqyw' (barbecue). Higher achieving writers and readers were doing as well as children a year older.

63. The teachers have given much thought to promoting this area of learning. They have taken national guidance into account and are actively promoting relevant text, sentence and word level elements from the national literacy guidelines. The coordinator is using her English knowledge and expertise well to develop the children's early reading and writing skills, and to ensure the same provision for all children in the reception year. The adults work hard to help the children see themselves as readers and writers. Attractive displays encourage the children to take an interest in books, captions, words and letters. The writing areas have something new each day and the children are already in the habit of taking books home and changing library books. Tales, such as 'Goldilocks and The Three Bears' are used very effectively to provide linked experiences such as listening to the story on cassette or retelling the story using toy bears or felt pieces.
64. The children have good speaking and listening skills. They are confident talkers and often give lengthy explanations and descriptions of what they have been doing. Most openly ask questions and converse easily with adults who are particularly sensitive to those children who are more reticent or for whom English is an additional language. The adults encourage the children's speech through skilful questioning, comments and the use of new terms such as 'nutrients', introduced when discussing the roots of trees during a walk. The children listen attentively at such times. They enjoy stories and know that the author writes the story. When writing their own versions of 'The Three Little Pigs' the children had a go at writing, often including letters from their names and occasionally words copied from elsewhere in the room. They remembered the major events and often referred to key phrases such as 'and they all lived happily ever after'. Most children recognise some letters and know their sounds; for example, they enjoyed sorting out the objects for the 'm-tray'. The teachers and nursery nurses observe the children closely and record their progress. By using such information, teachers are beginning to demand more and more from individuals and making sure that there are opportunities for some to revisit activities and practise skills.

Mathematical development

65. The children are making good progress and the class, group and individual activities are allowing children to achieve well. The teachers are placing high emphasis on the children learning and using numbers in a practical way. This is in line with national guidance. Last year, the completion of workbooks constrained the progress and achievement of some children, most especially the higher attainers. All did the same work irrespective of what they already knew.
66. The completion of meaningful tasks, such as putting the wooden spoons from the three bears' cottage into order according to length, shows that a significant number of children already have a sound awareness of comparison and how to describe it. Similarly, counting and sorting challenges, such as organising the farmer's animals in fields or counting the number of bottles on the computer screen, show that many children know and recognise numbers to 10 and beyond. One boy realised his error and quickly reversed the number 6 to make 9 when he turned over another jigsaw piece with 6 on it saying 'that must be a 9'. The higher attaining children readily cope with problems such as 'If the farmer had one more cow how many would he have?'.
67. The teachers and nursery nurses intuitively make effective use of daily routines such as baking to talk about numbers and to encourage the children to apply what they know. When the teacher questioned the children about the sponges they could use to make prints, the children correctly identified the shapes they would make and counted the number of sides on each.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

68. Most children have sound general knowledge from their experiences outside school. They are interested in new things and look carefully at items pointed out by others such as a ladybird on a log. The teachers are developing a good programme of activities in and out of the classroom that is building on the children's natural curiosity and sense of wonder. Both classes are taking weekly walks along the school Millennium Trail to observe the changes as autumn progresses. At such times the children's attitudes and behaviour are exemplary. They are highly absorbed in what is happening. The adults draw the children's attention to features such as the distant hills, poisonous berries and the need for care, the colours of the leaves and the wind rustling in the trees. Good use is being made of photographs and items collected to record these walks and to encourage the children to recall what they saw, heard, felt and smelt. A visit to Stockley Farm in the summer term provided good opportunities for children now in Year 1 to see a farm and get close to the animals. Their picture maps of the farm layout showed a good awareness of different features and their location.
69. The children have quickly become used to recording the day of the week and the weather. They ask questions about what others are doing and are quick to notice when things are different. When playing with construction toys they were fascinated by the way they bent over 'like a bridge'. The encouragement of the adults to 'see what happens' is also helping the children to make good progress in using the computer keyboard and mouse.

Physical development

70. The current short sessions using the wheeled toys, whilst well supervised, are not providing enough challenge and are in danger of becoming stale and repetitious. The children pedal, steer and pull the tricycles and trolleys with ease. They already have well-developed skills, good balance and move confidently. Several children showed good skills in handling fiddly objects. Having dried her hands after playing in the water tray, one girl very carefully held the corners of the towel to fold it edge to edge and then repeated the action. Sessions in the school hall using the gymnastics equipment are well planned and skilfully managed by the teachers. The circuit of tasks and the adults' exhortations to 'see if you can ...' encouraged the children to try different movements. The children worked hard and several began to create short sequences of movements including rolls and jumps as well as climbing up, through and over equipment at different heights.
71. The children move around the classroom and playground safely and sensibly. They control their actions well, stepping over items on the floor and avoiding others as they get what they need. Many show good hand/eye co-ordination in using dough, jigsaws and pencils, brushes, scissors and other tools as part of day-to-day classroom life. They cope easily with the basic controls on the computer and tape recorder.

Creative development

72. The provision for the children's creative development is sound but not as rich or stimulating as other areas. The co-ordinator has used corridor space to create areas for all the reception children to take part in role play as well as sand and water play. However, support staff and parents tend to supervise these activities and the quality of play and experience is not always as lively as the sessions when the children retell stories using puppets or toys. For example, opportunities are missed to link this even more closely to the chosen themes, such as turning the house into the three bears' cottage or providing space and resources for the children to construct the pig's house of 'bricks'.

73. The children like singing and are quick to remember tunes, often singing along to computer programme music. They know the names of several percussion instruments and how to play them. A small number can keep a steady beat and tap out rhythms.
74. The children are taught different techniques and skills using different tools and materials. They learn to mix and use different paints and as a result know that purple can be made from red and blue. They use different papers to create patterns and mould clay to make houses. Few choose to paint however, and the restricted choice of paints does little to encourage them.

ENGLISH

75. Standards are low at the end of Key Stage 2 and have fallen since the last inspection when attainment was judged to be high and a strength of the school. The school has not kept pace with the upward national trend in English standards. It has also failed to meet its target for Level 4 attainment in this year's national tests for eleven year olds. A higher percentage of pupils reached the higher Level 5 this year but this is largely due to pupils' skills in reading as standards in writing are low. Standards in spelling, punctuation and handwriting are below average. This contrasts markedly with the satisfactory standards at the end of Key Stage 1. In the reception year and at Key Stage 1, the pupils make good progress due to the very good quality of teaching and the lively approach to the teaching of reading and writing. At Key Stage 2, although the overall quality is satisfactory, the teaching is not strong enough to sustain the good progress and standards slip, especially in writing. Too little consideration has been given to developing the pupils' skills in speaking for different purposes, particularly its effects on the quality of their literacy across the curriculum.
76. The school's Key Stage 1 national test results have dipped slightly since the 1996 inspection but remain close to the national average. Nearly all pupils attain the level expected for their age in reading and writing. The more able writers, however, are not being introduced early enough to features such as the correct use of speech marks and joined handwriting to ensure that they attain the higher Level 3 by the end of Key Stage 1.
77. Standards in speaking and listening are satisfactory but there are some weaknesses that affect the quality of pupils' writing. At the age of seven and eleven, the pupils converse easily with others but even at eleven, the use of 'we was' and 'what' as in 'the pesticide what they are spraying' spills over into pupils' writing. Older pupils often find it less easy to speak fluently at length, to justify their opinions or to talk with assurance about particular topics. Year 5 pupils struggled to debate possible arguments for and against closing the public right of way through the school grounds. While they identified relevant issues, they lacked the skills of putting their case fluently to others. The pupils find it easy to make statements but less easy to describe and exemplify. This also typifies their writing. The majority cope well with the format and content of letters, instructions, reviews and reports but the quality of stories, poems and other expressive pieces suffers from the lack of description and development of ideas. Pupils do not always immediately question what they do not understand. This is most apparent when pupils read. Many gloss over words and subsequently fail to grasp the nuances of the text.
78. Standards in reading are satisfactory. Pupils make initial good progress but at Key Stage 2, progress is only satisfactory. The pupils get off to a good start in the reception year and at Key Stage 1 due to the high emphasis on learning to read and the teachers' encouragement to look at and talk about books. The continuing support of parents at home provides valuable opportunities for pupils to rehearse and hone their reading skills. Many of the reading scheme books are outdated but recently purchased

- books used for group reading sessions are of good quality and interest the pupils. A group of Year 1 pupils cheered when they heard they were to read an information book. Key Stage 1 pupils read fluently, accurately and confidently. They use a range of strategies to tackle new words and their good understanding of what they are reading comes through in their asides about the text and also in their use of expression. They pick up on the ways their teachers read aloud and know that authors use features such as exclamation marks to tell the reader 'to read with some feeling'.
79. At Key Stage 2, pupils' reading logs show much variation in the number of books read and the times that an adult hears them read either at school or at home. One pupil was only on page 12 of a novel started in September. Teachers hear pupils read in group reading sessions but do not focus enough on teaching specific aspects. The level of challenge is not always high enough and the teachers' reading records do not provide sufficient information to help them identify specifically what individuals need to learn next. The enthusiastic, animated reading of the Year 3 pupils is less evident in other year groups. Many talk about reading at home and regular visits to the local library. This clearly has an impact on their reading choices as pupils talked about favourite authors and books, but they were less forthcoming about books read at school. Year 6 pupils use their reading experience well to comment on aspects of the author's style such as Wilson's narration by the key character and Dahl's use of descriptive language. They know how to find information in reference books using the contents page, index and captions to scan for key words. This ensures they manage successfully in using information books in other subjects.
80. In writing, standards are satisfactory at Key Stage 1 but not high enough at Key Stage 2. A scrutiny of pupils' work from last year shows that standards are lower than expected for pupils' ages especially in Years 4, 5 and 6. The pupils make at least satisfactory progress at Key Stage 1. They are explicitly taught how to construct stories and how to punctuate sentences. They develop a positive attitude to writing and to having a go at spelling. Pupils make good use of the classroom 'word wall' and also the cards which remind them of letter combinations and how letters are formed. By the end of Year 2, many pupils are writing lengthy stories. They use good phrases such as 'sadly Lucy said goodbye' to set the scene and tone. Their handwriting is neat, showing some joins, with simple words spelt correctly. Good use is made of themes to develop the pupils' writing in other subjects. Year 2 pupils wrote impressive accounts of the roles of knights and jesters showing not only good knowledge of Mediaeval times but also good writing style. However, despite this generally good progress, higher achievers should be pushed harder.
81. By the end of Key Stage 2, however, pupils' work is often not as well presented or as well constructed. Few pupils have a mature, legible joined handwriting style. Frequent spelling errors and slips in punctuation, even when work is being copied, lower the quality of stories and reports. In all classes, pupils learn spellings regularly and practice aspects of grammar and punctuation but they do not consistently use this knowledge in their writing. Similarly, too few pupils have developed good working habits of checking and correcting their work or of taking pride in presenting their work accurately and neatly. This is compounded by the teachers' acceptance of pupils' errors and poor presentation. Pupils do not have enough experience of redrafting and revising their work.
82. The quality of teaching is inconsistent across the school. At Key Stage 1, in all classes, the teaching is most frequently very good and occasionally outstanding. Much Key Stage 2 teaching lacks the strengths seen at Key Stage 1. For one class of Year 3 pupils there is often good teaching but the overall quality of teaching at Key Stage 2 is satisfactory. However, common weaknesses, as in low expectations and the frequent lack of explicit teaching of what pupils need to know to improve their reading and writing, have a negative impact on the pupils' progress and attainment over time. In the

one unsatisfactory lesson seen, there were weaknesses in the teaching of handwriting. This is an important issue given the low standard of handwriting at Key Stage 2.

83. At Key Stage 1, the teachers have secure subject knowledge and a good understanding of the strategies outlined in the National Literacy Strategy. All use questioning, demonstration and activities very effectively to engage the pupils and to alert the pupils to what they need to know. The pupils are reminded of what they have done and queries such as 'Where in the contents page does it tell us where to find ...?' promote an open, shared approach. Year 1 pupils liked helping the teacher to edit her 'mistakes' in her story about Red Ted and Year 2 pupils worked hard on their small whiteboards to compile lists of words ending in 'oat' and 'oast' before their teacher used their words to make a class list. The teachers share high expectations of the pupils' behaviour, of what the pupils can achieve and how work will be presented. They present a good model in their own preparation, presentation and organisation of resources. As a result, the pupils know what is expected of them, are keen to learn, and see themselves as readers and writers.
84. This positive, systematic and often exciting teaching is less evident at Key Stage 2 where many lessons are pedestrian in challenge and pace. The teachers plan conscientiously and draw on the National Literacy Strategy but not all make it sufficiently clear what pupils need to learn. Frequently the teachers expect all pupils do the same task irrespective of their level of attainment. Too little attention is given to discussing with pupils how language is used and in encouraging them to use appropriate technical terms. When this is done effectively the pupils learn quickly. A Year 3 teacher used the pupils' ideas well to define a synonym and then went on to show pupils how they could apply their knowledge of the alphabet in using a thesaurus. There are few such chances to use practical tasks rather than exercises and worksheets, and to match the task closely to the purpose of the lesson. Year 6 pupils lost time writing answers when the focus was on reading and locating information in the passage from 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe'.
85. Unlike the Key Stage 1 staff, Key Stage 2 teachers lack slick routines for moving the pupils from class to group tasks. In many lessons, time was lost in telling pupils their tasks, reassuring them and organising what they needed. The teachers too readily accept work of a low standard. This is reflected in the marking of pupils' work when much is marked as correct, 'good' or 'super duper' when there are errors and the standard of presentation is poor. Very few teachers identify points to help the pupils improve next time. Information from marking and teachers' own daily evaluations is not being used consistently to inform planning and target setting. Consequently, pupils' progress is slower than it need be and pupils, including those with special educational needs, are not achieving as well as they could. This is evident in the pupils' work from last year in most classes when the potential shown by pupils in the autumn term has not been fully realised the following summer.
86. The coordinators have a good understanding of the weaknesses in standards and the literacy action plan for this school year rightly places the emphasis on raising standards in writing. It is less clear on how this will be done. The school has yet to identify clearly the aspects to improve, especially in teaching.

MATHEMATICS

87. Attainment in mathematics at the end of both key stages is broadly in line with what is expected nationally. Pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 have a satisfactory understanding of number and shape. They add and subtract accurately numbers to 20 and begin to show good awareness of larger numbers, for example when counting in tens. They can name two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes and are aware of how some

- of these are found in every day things. Pupils in Year 6 have good mental agility. Most know their multiplication tables and apply this knowledge appropriately to solving number problems. They draw and measure angles accurately and can calculate areas of shapes. Most have a working knowledge of percentages and their decimal equivalents.
88. These standards currently seen in the school reflect those attained in the 1999 national curriculum tests for seven and eleven year olds, which indicated average attainment nationally and when compared with similar schools.
 89. Key Stage 1 standards have remained fairly steady over time. School data (not yet published) for 2000, suggests that pupils continue to match the national level. At Key Stage 2 the picture is broadly similar, following a dip in attainment in 1997. The Year 2000 national tests suggest that standards may have dipped slightly in a group which had a higher than usual proportion of pupils (25 per cent) on the school's register for special educational needs.
 90. The recommended national numeracy guidelines have been implemented effectively in the school and are helping pupils to develop better number skills. Mental arithmetic skills are improving well and pupils are able to explain the processes they use when solving number problems.
 91. Other aspects of mathematics such as shape, measurement and data handling in Key Stage 2 are covered adequately within mathematics lessons but pupils have too few opportunities to apply the skills they learn in a practical way. For example, pupils do not use mathematical skills often enough to record the results of science investigations. In a mathematics lesson observed, a good opportunity to apply measuring skills in a practical way was missed. Instead of using a range of measuring equipment to find the perimeters of objects around the classroom, pupils were given worksheets.
 92. Pupils in Key Stage 1 who have special educational needs make good progress because of the quality of support they receive. Pupils in Key Stage 2 who are on the register do not always make the progress they should because the work provided does not sufficiently match the learning needs identified in their individual plans.
 93. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. There is stronger teaching in Key Stage 1 where most lessons were judged to be very good. In Key Stage 2, most lessons seen were at least satisfactory but there were also two unsatisfactory lessons seen. Standards of teaching in this key stage are below those reported in the previous inspection. Throughout Key Stage 1 the approaches to the teaching of mathematics are consistent. Teachers expect much of the pupils and make learning targets clear at the beginning of the lesson. Consequently children know what they should achieve and work well towards targets. Teachers and classroom assistants work well together in building skills and knowledge in a systematic way. Lessons are well planned and prepared ensuring that lesson time is used productively. Good classroom displays and thoughtful use of resources to encourage practical investigation of number ensure that pupils are well motivated and eager to learn. As a result they behave very well and make good progress in their learning because they enjoy what they do.
 94. The quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 is inconsistent. Teachers have individual strengths which they use well. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, the teacher's good subject knowledge lead to clear teaching about fractions. As a result most pupils were clear about the task they had to do and they tackled it confidently. In a Year 3 lesson, the teacher's planning identified precise learning targets and consequently teaching was well focused and brisk. Sometimes lively mental arithmetic sessions at the beginning of lessons motivate pupils, challenging their mental agility. However these good features are not evident in all lessons. At times pupils are not motivated because

the pace of mental sessions is too slow. In one lesson the teacher's lack of subject knowledge made it more difficult for pupils' to understand the purpose of estimation. Teachers take too little account of what pupils already know when setting work as shown when pupils in Year 3 reminded the teacher that they had already done the work given to them whilst in Year 2.

95. Management of the subject is satisfactory. The key stage co-ordinators meet regularly to discuss strategies. They have reviewed the policy and produced an action plan which is realistic in its aims. Measures have already been taken to address some of the issues identified in the plan. Monitoring of teaching quality, however, is a weakness. Although monitoring has been undertaken, it has not led to effective action to improve standards in Key Stage 2. Good classroom practice is not sufficiently shared across the key stages.

SCIENCE

96. The present Year 2 pupils are achieving average standards. This is an improvement on the teacher assessments for pupils who were in Year 2 in 1999, when they did not do as well as pupils in other schools across the country or in schools similar to Dowson. Pupils make satisfactory progress as they move through the junior key stage and by the time they are eleven, they maintain these average standards. This reflects the 1999 national test results when pupils achieved standards in line with schools across the country and in schools similar to Dowson.
97. The work seen in Key Stage 1 pupils' books during the inspection shows that they gain satisfactory knowledge across all aspects of the subject. In Key Stage 2 pupils build on their scientific knowledge better in some areas than others. Their knowledge of living things is above average because they have a lot of opportunities to consolidate what they have learnt through practical experiences. However, their knowledge about materials and physical science is only just average. They do not always remember what they have been taught because they do not have enough practical experiences in these aspects to develop their understanding. This was indicated clearly in discussion with a group of Year 6 pupils. They could, for example, describe a demonstration intended to show how friction affects the movement of objects but they could not remember the point of the demonstration. When they were asked what friction was, they could recall only that it was 'something to do with a slippery floor.'
98. Standards are not as high as they were judged to be at the time of the last inspection. In particular, pupils are not as capable as they were in finding things out for themselves through their own investigations. In Key Stage 1, pupils build progressively on their previous learning. This is not the case in Key Stage 2. Teachers plan together what they are going to do within year groups but not sufficiently what is to be taught in successive years. This means that pupils sometimes repeat work that they have done before without learning anything new. Evidence of this was seen in Year 6 pupils' books where they had completed a very low level worksheet to indicate whether they would be able to see a candle flame through glass, tissue paper and wood. This task is something much younger children would be expected to do. Another constraint is that teachers give pupils prepared worksheets in almost all lessons rather than asking them to record for themselves. The nature of the worksheets prevents them from putting forward their own ideas. Different worksheets are prepared so that pupils of all abilities can read them but the content is the same. This means that pupils who are capable of learning more are not challenged to achieve their full potential.
99. Teachers use the subject effectively as part of the health education programme. For example, pupils in the infant classes learn about keeping healthy through taking exercise and eating a balanced diet. This is followed appropriately in Year 3 when pupils learn about the harmful effects of some foods on their teeth.

100. In Key Stage 1 the standard of teaching in the lessons seen was good. The teachers planned interesting activities for the pupils to learn about themselves. By the end of one lesson, the pupils knew that their hearts beat faster after exercise and that their chests expand when they breathe in because their lungs are full of air. The pupils gained this knowledge through measuring their chests and using stethoscopes to listen to their partners' heartbeats. They found these practical experiences exciting and enjoyable and as a result, learning was good. In Key Stage 2, the standards of teaching seen varied between satisfactory and very good with most good or better. In the very good lessons the teachers challenged the pupils well to use their knowledge of the parts of a plant to dissect two flowers and identify the parts. They used questions well to check the pupils' knowledge before the practical activity. Through practical experience the pupils realised that although flowers may look very different, they all have the same essential organs.
101. Although the quality of the teaching seen in individual lessons during the inspection was good overall, its impact on pupils' learning over time is only satisfactory. This is because of the weaknesses in planning and in challenge to all pupils to achieve their full potential. Throughout the school, pupils need to be encouraged more to think for themselves, either about how to find things out or to present their findings. Because a lot of practical work is very teacher-directed pupils have too little understanding of how to carry out investigations, particularly how to make a test fair.
102. The Key Stage 1 co-ordinator has a good overview of what is happening in the infant classes. However, this knowledge is gained informally as she does not monitor teaching and learning, for example, through looking at pupils' work. The Key Stage 2 co-ordinator has little idea of what happens in other classes though she is aware of the weaknesses in the subject. The school has made a start to whole-school planning with the adoption of the latest national guidance. Broad areas of study have been allocated that will build progressively on pupils' knowledge but no attention has yet been given to deciding how this knowledge will be developed and how pupils' skills of investigation will be improved.

ART

103. Standards are broadly typical of most schools. The level of work in Key Stage 1 is similar to that at the time of the last inspection but in Key Stage 2, it is not judged to be as high.
104. The best achievement is seen in observational drawing and colour work. Year 6 pupils, for example, have produced good quality pencil drawings of plants, fruits and vegetables, most of which show a grasp of shape and proportion. Work in Year 5 and 6 sketchbooks shows that experimenting with tones and different materials has allowed pupils both to develop techniques of shading and gain practice in combining interesting materials for their collage work. Year 3 pupils have worked successfully on identifying colour and matching it, using extracts of fabric and wallpaper as a stimulus.
105. At this early stage of the school year, reception pupils have already worked using a wide range of media. Similar work is planned with pupils in Key Stage 1 later in the year. So far, pupils have worked mainly with coloured pencils, rather than charcoals, pastels or paint.
106. No full art lessons were observed but pupils in both key stages were seen at work. They apply themselves diligently to their tasks and aim for high standards. Year 2 pupils, for example showed good imagination in drawing the unseen portions of an extract torn from a magazine cutting. However, coloured pencils being the only choice of medium available limited their potential achievement. Some of the best art experiences come from the use of visits and visitors, and these lift the quality of the

curriculum. Activities such as using felts and wools to match the colours of ethnic arts from around the world, gave Year 5 pupils an insight into the complexity and beauty of traditional patterns. Their visit to the Whitworth Gallery under the guidance of Michelle Leigh, a textile artist, produced impressive work. Links with local Tameside Wardens on making withy rings, or students on a well dressing project are other examples of using local craft expertise to enhance pupils' awareness of artistic possibilities.

107. The recently appointed co-ordinator has a better view of the quality of work in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 1. Plans to develop the recently adopted scheme of work are sensible but there needs to be a more effective way of checking that all classes are being given a sufficiently varied and challenging programme of activity.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

108. Standards in design and technology are better than those seen in other schools. This is an improvement since the previous inspection when they were described in the junior classes as satisfactory.
109. In Key Stage 1, pupils develop their skills through activities such as designing and making sliding and lever mechanisms to push and pull a cardboard model of a person up and down a piece of card representing a pole. Very good lesson planning gives pupils valuable opportunities to study information books and examine the mechanisms of nutcrackers and pliers. Pupils are introduced to technical vocabulary and are expected to use such words as 'pivot' and 'split pins'. A good range of basic tools and equipment is readily available and is used carefully and effectively by pupils to cut out shapes and assemble models. Plenary sessions enable pupils to evaluate their work as they demonstrate how their models operate to the class.
110. In the junior classes, the quality of teaching is generally good. Most teachers have very good knowledge of the connection between designing, making then evaluating. They identify good links with other subjects. For example, pupils have recently completed 'shadufs' as an aspect of their investigations into the Ancient Egyptian civilisation. During the inspection, Year 4 pupils were making purses. They disassembled purses to give them insights into opening and closing mechanisms and produced designs. There are good links with science as pupils test a variety of materials to assess their suitability for use before they choose.
111. Very good teaching in a Year 3 class challenged pupils to think of ways of strengthening paper. During a brainstorming session the teacher posed questions to make pupils think of different techniques which included crumpling and folding. Finally the pupils were asked to consider rolling the paper into a cylinder and the technique was demonstrated. The pace was brisk and pupils were immediately challenged to use the technique to construct a picture frame. They thought up ways to join four paper cylinders to form a square or rectangular picture frame and experimented with glue, paper clips, adhesive paper and plastic display fixing material. A rigidity test was introduced to evaluate the practicality of the joining mechanisms.
112. This form of practical teaching stimulates pupils' interest and encourages them to be creative. Very effective planning ensures that sufficient resources, tools and equipment are available to enable all pupils to complete their tasks. Time is generally used well, although in one lesson the teacher's initial talk about materials was too long, resulting in some pupils losing interest. Teachers skilfully circulate groups working at tasks, giving advice, making suggestions and raising questions. Pupils become deeply involved in their work. They share tools and equipment sensibly. They enjoy the challenge presented by the work and show very good levels of determination to complete tasks. Enthusiastic, energetic and skilled adult helpers make very good contributions to the lessons.

113. Management of the subject is satisfactory. There is good subject guidance with effective planning, supported by a commercial scheme of work. The school uses the national subject guidance to evaluate the pupils' achievements but there is no regular assessment of the progress made by the pupils.

GEOGRAPHY

114. Standards seen in geography are similar to those found in most schools. The school has adapted recent national guidelines as a basis for planning and is now integrating this with the latest national curriculum changes.
115. Throughout the school pupils gain a satisfactory range of experiences, which enable them to develop their geographical skills and knowledge. In Key Stage 1 for example, pupils follow the exploits of Barnaby Bear as he 'travels' around the world. This raises their awareness of far away countries. Year 2 pupils find the answers to questions such as 'What is an island?' by linking their research effectively to literacy lessons. They use a story about the fictitious Isle of Struay and the characters that live and work there.
116. Good use is made of the environment to enrich geographical experiences. The local nature reserve of Werneth Low with its panoramic views provides Year 4 pupils with good opportunities to observe landscape features. Rural localities such as Castleton in Derbyshire also provide interesting insights into life in other communities. Older pupils learn about river systems, noting how the river changes from its source to the mouth.
117. Environmental studies are closely linked to both geography and science. For example, pupils in Year 6 learn about different habitats and study and record changes in the yearly cycle of a tree. The 'Millennium Walk' in the school grounds provides a further rich resource for environmental study.
118. Throughout Key Stage 2, pupils discuss what is happening in the world today. In those sessions they refer to worldwide locations and use a range of maps, including ordinance survey, to pinpoint places accurately. In a Year 3 discussion pupils learned the exact location of Quarrybank Mill, which had been visited by one of the class.
119. Not enough lessons were seen during the inspection to make an overall judgement about the quality of teaching. Scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning indicate that teaching is at least satisfactory. The subject leaders are strongly committed to maintaining the standards reported in the previous inspection.

HISTORY

120. Pupils make satisfactory progress and achieve average standards, though standards are not as high as they were judged to be at the time of the last inspection. A strength of the subject is the very good use that teachers make of visits to stimulate the pupils' interests and bring learning alive. These visits fire the pupils' imaginations and they learn well because they are so interested. A good spin off from the younger pupils' visit to a toy museum is the contribution it makes to their learning in other areas. For example, it reinforces their knowledge of materials in science as they compare the materials from which their own toys are made with those of toys in the past. They appreciate how their own lives are very different from those of people in the past, for example, by considering aspects of life in the Middle Ages.
121. In Key Stage 2 the pupils build well on their understanding of change over time through the study of ancient civilisations and more recent periods. They have very good attitudes to their work and are very keen to learn. They enjoy their visits and their very

good behaviour on these occasions means that they learn a lot. During the inspection, Year 4 pupils visited Bramall Hall as part of their study of the Tudors. On their return they were bubbling with excitement at what they had learnt. They took particular delight, for example, in recounting the gruesome cure for toothache. Discussion with Year 6 pupils shows that they remember a lot of what they have learnt. They are able to draw on their knowledge to give good reasons why they would prefer to live now rather than in Tudor or Victorian times.

122. Through a study of the local area, the pupils have a sound understanding of how places change over time and they can give reasons for the changes. For example, they can recount that 'There are houses now where there used to be fields because more people have come to live in the area.' They come to a good understanding of the importance of historical evidence such as maps, photos and old documents.
123. The standard of teaching in the two lessons seen during the inspection was good. The Year 3 lesson was exciting for the pupils because there was a good variety of activities. The teacher made the work more meaningful by providing a good link to design and technology as one group of pupils made shadufs. Pupils also used the computer effectively to research from a CD ROM. As a result, pupils were enthusiastic and learning was good. While the teaching seen was good, the evidence gathered from looking at pupils' work shows the impact of teaching over time is satisfactory. Pupils' topic folders show that teachers take care to cover the work thoroughly though there are too many tasks based on prepared worksheets. While these are matched to the pupils' abilities in reading, the content does not challenge the pupils who learn more quickly. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to work independently, developing their research skills by finding things out for themselves.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

124. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' standards of work are above average and achievement throughout years 1 and 2 is good for most groups of pupils. This level of achievement continues into the lower end of Key Stage 2, (years 3 and 4) where pupils are still making good progress and attaining standards that are in line with what is expected. Their rate of progress is satisfactory in the upper end of Key Stage 2, but standards here have not yet reached the expected level. This is because the older pupils still have some catching up to do in developing their skills from a previously low level. Improved skill levels are working their way through the school but it will still take a year or two for the standards of the oldest children to reach the norm.
125. Progress for higher attaining pupils is satisfactory, as opposed to good for other groups. This is because skills lessons are mostly pitched at the average level and do not always allow more advanced pupils to work at a faster rate in tune with their level of expertise.
126. Standards are highest in the area of communicating information and working with text. By Year 3, pupils are able to amend and improve written work by adding correct punctuation whilst Year 5 pupils show that they can edit text successfully on screen. In their handling of information and data, Year 6 pupils have made a variety of graphs of their science results. Their work shows an understanding of how such results need to be presented to provide easily retrievable information. In their use of programs to simulate or model situations, Year 1 pupils show above average levels of skill in the way in which they manoeuvre the mouse or utilise tools and icons on screen to manipulate pictures. Younger pupils have good experience of control technology as they program floor robots but this is not replicated at higher levels in Key Stage 2. Research skills are not well developed, as pupils have only used simple programs to find information. More advanced encyclopaedia or Internet work on information finding has not yet been undertaken.

127. The level of pupils' work has risen since the last inspection and most are making faster progress. The new computer suite provides better equipment and better access to good software programmes. Staff confidence has also increased through provision of training courses and the support provided by subject leaders. However, some teachers are still noticeably more confident than others in leading large groups in skill development lessons in the new suite. The school has adopted the nationally recommended scheme of work and is adapting it to meet its particular needs. This makes it easier for teachers to see exactly which skills and experiences they are responsible for providing and offers all pupils a balanced range of activity. At the moment, the school is concentrating hard on building pupils' skills on computers. Whilst this is a reasonable priority, there is not enough emphasis on using these skills in support of work in other subjects, such as story writing or mathematics.
128. Three complete lessons were seen in the computer suite and these ranged from good to very good. Detailed planning, which set out clearly what pupils were to gain from the lessons, helped to sharpen the pace and keep pupils on task. Good organisation, particularly by the subject leaders, such as deciding which pair of pupils would sit at which computer before they entered the suite, saved valuable time and allowed pupils to get straight to work on arrival. Clear instructions, backed up by demonstrations of keyboard or mouse functions, gave pupils a clear idea of what they were being asked to achieve. This helped them to work independently for as long as possible without having to ask for assistance thus developing their confidence and self-esteem. The one feature that separated the very best teaching from the rest was the way in which pupils' performance was closely observed so that common errors could be brought to the attention of the class and rectified quickly.
129. Other teaching sessions were sampled more briefly to gauge pupils' skills and rate of learning. Progress during these sessions was more modest though satisfactory, largely due to teachers being less skilled at organising large groups in the suite. The pace of activity was slower as teachers took longer to settle pupils to tasks and in a few instances, pupils were easily distracted, which reduced their work rate. The task of getting the best out of large class groups in this setting is proving challenging for some staff, even with the valuable support of the classroom assistant and other adults. The solution chosen by Year 4, which is to split the classes into more manageable groups to work in the suite, works well. It enables more individual contact with pupils to ensure that they are coping with their tasks and also promotes a good working attitude by keeping pupils more active on the keyboards.
130. A weakness acknowledged by the subject leaders is the lack of a common procedure for assessing pupils' attainment. Whilst examples of work are sometimes printed out and retained, and some teachers make informal notes, there is no straightforward system to check where each pupil is up to. This makes it difficult for staff to build additional challenge for higher achievers into their plans, based on what those pupils have already shown they can do. As a consequence, lessons are sometimes pitched at the middle level of challenge for all pupils, instead of starting from a higher level for those who are capable.
131. Leadership of the subject is good but there is one significant weakness. The level of expertise and support now available to colleagues is a real strength. For example, there are weekly drop-in sessions where teachers can be given guidance and ideas. Organisation of resources and training are also strong. However, the quality of teaching in the suite needs to be more closely monitored both to spread good practice and to point up any improvements that can be made.

MUSIC

132. Pupils make similar progress to pupils in other schools and achieve average standards. This is in line with the findings of the last inspection. Throughout the school, pupils enjoy the subject and work hard in lessons. Pupils in the infant classes sing enthusiastically and join in well with action songs. Although they have a tendency to shout, they respond well to requests to 'sing sweetly'. They particularly enjoy playing instruments and maintain simple rhythms successfully when playing together. In the junior classes, music provision has been inconsistent in recent years. This was due largely to the teachers' lack of confidence. This weakness has been addressed successfully through good support from a neighbouring authority and the introduction of commercial materials that give teachers more confidence in tackling the subject. The teachers have responded very well to this support and now provide enjoyable experiences that build on pupils' skills as they move through the school.
133. Pupils are offered very good opportunities to perform in concerts. A visiting specialist provides lunchtime tuition to pupils who want to join the choir or play the recorder or keyboard. During the inspection, Year 6 pupils were observed playing keyboards. They had excellent attitudes and worked very well together to refine their performances. The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' personal development as they persevere to learn their parts and gain confidence in performing to an audience. The standard of teaching in both the lessons seen was good. The teachers, in Year 2 and Year 5, used percussion instruments well to stimulate the pupils' interest and improve their rhythmic skills. Their strong relationships with the pupils created a very good climate for learning and as a result the pupils worked hard and made good progress.
134. Musical appreciation is planned as part of the curriculum. Whilst some opportunities are created in music lessons for pupils to analyse and evaluate music, there need to be more. Dance lessons and visits to concerts are well used for this purpose, though during the inspection opportunities were not taken to discuss the music played before assemblies.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

135. Standards in physical education are typical of those found in most schools. This reflects the findings of the previous report.
136. Pupils undertake swimming lessons in years 4, 5 and 6 and by the time they leave the school the majority of them achieve the national standard of being able to swim 25 metres, with many developing strong strokes to swim 50 metres or more. Swimming is a strength of the school. Many of the Year 6 pupils develop good games skills such as hockey techniques of controlling and striking the ball. They work well together in small teams to keep their involvement in small-sided games activities flowing.
137. In three of the five lessons observed teaching was good. These lessons were well planned, with clear objectives that challenged pupils of all skills and abilities. The management of pupils is generally good, though in a Year 3 lesson the pupils were over directed. For example, they did not have to think of ways of combining their jumping and balancing movements and were not challenged to set up apparatus to help them to extend their repertoire of take offs and landings. Pupils respond energetically and some work effectively together, for example in performing 'mirror jumps'. In a swimming lesson, non-swimmers made good progress because they gained confidence in floating using the readily available aids thoughtfully provided by the swimming coach. The class teacher and coach worked effectively together with the teacher taking the more advanced groups. This ensured that they made good progress to perfect and strengthen their backstroke leg kick. The pupils are fully aware of safety rules and follow instructions promptly.

138. In dance lessons the pupils are challenged, through good use of taped music and teacher direction, to perform movements with body and hands. For example, they vary their shape and direction as they successfully interpret the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. They respond imaginatively to the music using different movements to express their feelings, moods and ideas. They form small groups of children who are entranced by the sound of the pipe, following it twisting and turning, and gesturing feelings of happiness as they follow the Pied Piper. Teachers operate the tape expertly, continually re-running it to give the pupils more time to practise their movements.
139. The practice of adults setting out the gymnastics equipment in the infant hall is unsatisfactory as it prevents the pupils from learning to do this for themselves. A very good range of sports clubs meets regularly. This includes a football club for infant pupils. The school takes part in many local inter-school matches and sports meetings.
140. There is a co-ordinator in each key stage. Much work has been completed to ensure that all pupils receive the full range of activities identified in the National Curriculum. The school benefits from many local initiatives and the use of sports coaches. This has helped teachers improve their confidence and ensures a good range of suitable sports equipment is available. Assessment procedures are improving.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

141. At ages seven and eleven pupils reach the standards set out in the local guidelines, making satisfactory progress overall.
142. In Year 2 pupils understand the messages of parables. They begin to see the relevance of such parables as The Lost Sheep and The Prodigal Son to their own lives and examine such messages as forgiveness, thoughtfulness and care for others. The younger pupils have some understanding of other faiths, learning about the Five Pillars of Islam. They know that The Bible and The Qur'an are holy books and are treated with reverence by Christians and Moslems.
143. In the junior classes, the younger pupils add to their knowledge of world religions by studying the Jewish religion. They know of the Israelites time of slavery in Egypt and Moses as God's messenger to the Egyptian Pharaoh. They know of the plagues and the events of Passover which Jewish families continue to remember when they celebrate the Festival of Pesach. By Year 6 pupils have appropriate knowledge of such religious themes as Belonging and that Christians and other faith communities gather at different times to celebrate, remember, share and forgive. They know of the signs and symbols of the Christian religion.
144. Insufficient lessons were observed to be able to make a firm judgement about the quality of teaching. In lessons seen the teaching was satisfactory. Teachers have secure knowledge and their explanations are interesting, always identifying the religious messages and relating them to the pupils' own lives. On one occasion the teacher's explanation about the Jewish Festival of Pesach and the symbolism of the bitter herbs, salt water, nuts and the lamb bone was told to Year 3 class with so much dignity and respect that it was a moment of awe and wonder for the pupils who sat in silence listening intently to every word. Excellent use was made of sacred artefacts to support the explanation. Unfortunately the task chosen for the class to complete was mundane and the opportunity to build on the excellent introduction was missed. In a Year 1 lesson, very good use was made of Prayer Mats and Prayer Hats to introduce ceremonies of the Moslem religion but time was not used well and pupils were not able to extend their insights and record their thoughts and ideas.

145. Good use is made of visits to local churches and other places of worship such as Temples and Mosques. The concept of God is soundly developed throughout the religious curriculum and local ministers and clergy from non-Christian faiths work with pupils in school. The curriculum fully meets legal requirements.