

# INSPECTION REPORT

**ST. MARY'S INFANT SCHOOL**

Baldock

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117384

Headteacher: Mrs Val Morris

Reporting inspector: Mr Douglas Hayward  
21234

Dates of inspection: 6<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> November 2000

Inspection number: 225262

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

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## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Type of school:	Infant
School category:	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils:	4 to 7
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	St Mary's Way Baldock Hertfordshire
Postcode:	SG7 6HY
Telephone number:	01462 892347
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs S Welch
Date of previous inspection:	September 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Douglas Hayward 21234	Registered inspector	Mathematics Science Information and communication technology History Equal opportunities	What sort of school is it? The school's results and achievements How well are pupils taught?
Peter Dannheisser 1165	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Vera Grigg 12331	Team inspector	English Design and technology Geography Religious education Special educational needs	How good are the curricular opportunities offered to pupils?
Gail Robertson 24137	Team inspector	Under-fives Art and design Music Physical education	How well is the school led and managed?

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

St. Mary's is a small voluntary controlled Church of England infant school situated on the outskirts of Baldock in Hertfordshire. The school is for girls and boys aged 4 to 7 and serves an area of privately owned, rented and housing-association accommodation. Most of the pupils live locally, although a small number travel from further afield. The single storey building dates from 1956 and comprises six classrooms, a hall, a dining room and administration offices. It has two playgrounds and fields and shares a large site with the junior school to which most pupils transfer at the age of seven.

St. Mary's admits children to a reception class at the beginning of the term in which they reach their fifth birthday. Currently there are 137 pupils on roll, including 19 children in the reception class who started school at the beginning of the autumn term. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals, 9 per cent, is below the national average. The number of pupils with special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average. The number of pupils with statements of special educational need is below the national average. Tests given to children shortly after they start school show that their attainment on entry is generally below that expected of children at the age of five.

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

**St Mary's is a lovely, happy, welcoming school which cares very well for its pupils. It provides a very good standard of education and has many strengths, such as the quality of teaching and high expectations of what pupils can achieve. It is very popular and is well managed. The school provides very good value for money.**

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

- It helps pupils to make good progress and achieve high standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they are seven years of age.
- It helps children under five to make a very good start to their schooling.
- It provides teaching that is good overall and is often very good or excellent. Teachers are hardworking and work well as a team. They have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and plan work that is challenging and enjoyable.
- It helps pupils with special educational needs to make good progress. Their work is well planned and they have lots of good support in classes and small groups.
- It provides a broad range of interesting subjects.
- It has very strong leadership. The headteacher, well supported by staff and governors, manages the school very well.
- It forms very good links with parents. Parents think the school is very good. They feel that the school takes notice of them and provides them with good information, and that they are very welcome.

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

- In some subjects there is too much work done on worksheets.
- The school does not always make the best use of individual targets for pupil improvement.
- The school should continue to monitor teaching and learning on a regular basis.
- Subject planning. At the moment there are too many planning documents in use and they could be reduced in number.

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

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

The school was last inspected in September 1996, when it was judged to provide satisfactory value for money. It has successfully tackled all the key issues that were pointed out in that inspection report. Standards for children under five were sound and have improved considerably since then. Standards in most subjects were average in the last inspection and now they are above average in almost all subjects. The school's results were below average in national tests in reading, writing and mathematics in 1996. In the 2000 tests, results were above average in all three subjects. Standards of teaching have improved considerably. In 1996, 18 per cent of teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory. In this inspection there was no unsatisfactory teaching and there was more than five times as much very good teaching than in the previous inspection. The progress that all pupils make, including the more able pupils and those with special educational needs, has improved considerably.

since the previous inspection. The range of subjects that pupils learn about is much better than it was and teachers with subject responsibility have spent a great deal of time writing new and up-to-date policies. Pupils' attitudes to school and to their work are now very good. Links with parents were very good in 1996 and remain a strength of the school's work. In the previous inspection the quality of management was judged to be sound. It has improved considerably and is now very good. The school now provides much better value for money and is very well placed to improve even further.

## STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
Reading	A	D	A	A	well above average A
Writing	A	D	A	A	above average B
Mathematics	A	E	A	A	average C
					below average D
					well below average E

During the inspection it was judged that standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics are above average at the end of Key Stage 1. The standards that pupils attain in national tests have been above average, or well above average, for the last four years, except in 1999. This was because many pupils in that year had special educational needs. Standards in art are well above national expectations. In science, information technology, design and technology, geography and history standards are above national expectations. In music and physical education, standards are in line with those expected of pupils of this age. In religious education, pupils attain standards that are in line with the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are eager to come to school and they enjoy their lessons. They like and trust their teachers.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Consistently good. Pupils play well together. Parents agree that pupils' behaviour is good in school and on visits to places of interest.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships between staff and pupils are very strong. Pupils work well together in lessons.
Attendance	Good. It is better than in most infant schools. Punctuality is very good.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

<b>Teaching of pupils:</b>	<b>aged up to 5 years</b>	<b>aged 5-7 years</b>
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Good

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

During the inspection over 30 lessons were observed. Teaching is never less than satisfactory. It is at least good in three-quarters of all lessons and very good, and occasionally excellent, in four out of every 10 lessons. This is high-quality teaching that is found throughout the school. The teaching of children under five is never less than very good. All teachers have high expectations and their teaching of English and mathematics is particularly good. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs in classes and in small groups is good and helps them to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The school rightly places great importance on developing pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics. It also teaches a wide range of other subjects and pupils achieve good standards, for example in science, information technology and history. Pupils' artwork is particularly good. Their colourful paintings and drawings are beautifully displayed around the school.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Work is carefully planned in English and mathematics to help pupils improve. They receive very good support in class from teachers and classroom assistants and when they are taught in small groups.
Provision for pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Pupils are aware of the difference between right and wrong and there is a very good community spirit. They work happily together. Trips to places of interest, visitors to the school and celebrating important days in many faiths help to develop pupils' understanding of their own and other cultures.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Staff know pupils very well and support them in their learning. All adults take very good care of them. The school works very closely with parents.



## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	There is clear educational direction for the work of the school. The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide very good leadership and have brought about many improvements since the last inspection. All staff provide good support.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The newly formed governing body is very enthusiastic and supportive. Governors have already learned a great deal about their role and are keen to become further involved.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school very successfully looked at ways in which it could improve since the last inspection. It carefully considers how it can continue to improve pupils' test results at the age of seven whilst still teaching a broad range of interesting subjects.
The strategic use of resources	The school plans very well for the future. It uses its budget very well to provide good quality teaching and classroom support and a very well equipped, clean and attractive building. All these have a positive impact on pupils' education and progress.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Fifty-nine parents, 43 per cent, returned their questionnaires and 14 parents attended the pre-inspection meeting.

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They feel that their children like school and make good progress</li> <li>• They think that behaviour is good in classes and on trips to places of interest</li> <li>• They feel that teachers have high expectations</li> <li>• They think the school is well managed and led</li> <li>• They think that the school helps their children to become mature and responsible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some parents have concerns about the amount of homework their children receive. Some parents think there is not enough and others do not want an increase</li> <li>• A wider range of activities outside lessons</li> </ul>

The inspection team agrees with parents' positive views. The work that pupils are given to do at home, for instance reading and spelling, is sometimes not thought of as homework by some parents. Nevertheless, it plays an important part in developing pupils' skills. Those parents who do not wish to see an increase in any homework feel that their children already work hard in school and need time to enjoy clubs and activities in the evenings and at weekends. There are no after-school clubs, but the school hopes to start up its lunch-time recorder clubs again. Visits to places of interest, visitors to the school and links with various community groups enrich the curriculum.

## PART B: COMMENTARY

### HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

#### The school's results and achievements

##### Children under five

1. After several weeks in the reception class children are given simple tests to find out how much they know about language and books, their understanding of number, how well they approach learning and about their early social skills. The amount that children know varies slightly from term to term and from year to year. Overall, however, the tests over the last three years show that most attain slightly below the level expected for children at this age. Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 show that the school does not consider pupils' low scores at the age of five to be any obstacle to successful learning. Despite many children starting school with below average scores, by the time they are seven most pupils attain levels that are above those in other schools throughout the country.
2. Children under five make good progress. They benefit from a caring, supportive and very skilled teacher and classroom support assistants and from their very well planned lessons and activities. The progress that children have made since they entered school in September has enabled many of them to achieve the blue 'stepping stones'<sup>1</sup>. This means they are well on course to attain the *Early Learning Goals*<sup>2</sup> at the end of the reception year and some are in line to achieve beyond that.

##### Key Stage 1

3. The results of the tests and assessments in the year 2000 at the end of Key Stage 1 show that the percentage of pupils reaching Level 2<sup>3</sup> and above was above average in reading, writing, mathematics and science. The percentage of pupils attaining the higher Level 3 was well above average in all four subjects. In comparison with those in similar schools, results at St. Mary's were well above average in all four subjects.
4. These results are much higher than in 1999, when they were below the national average in reading and writing and well below average in mathematics. This is because the group of pupils who took the tests at end of Key Stage 1 in 1999 contained a large number with special educational needs. Nevertheless, the school was very pleased with the progress that those pupils had made since the reception class. Their results when they entered the reception class show that their attainment in all the areas in which they were tested, and particularly in language, literature and mathematics, was well below expectations. In fact, the school identified that the pupils' results were likely to be much lower than usual and very sensibly used its budget to employ additional classroom support assistants to provide extra help for them. This had a significant impact on their progress.

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<sup>1</sup> To help teachers of children under five plan appropriate activities, the 'Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage' document identifies 'stepping stones' that show the knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes that children need to learn in the foundation stage in order to achieve the 'Early Learning Goals'.

<sup>2</sup> Early Learning Goals – these are targets for learning for children by the end of the reception year. They refer to personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy skills, mathematical development, knowledge and understanding of the world, and physical and creative development.

<sup>3</sup> Levels – by the end of Key Stage 1 pupils are expected to attain Level 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. Those who achieve Level 3 are, therefore, attaining above nationally expected levels.

5. It is clear that 1999 was an exceptional year as far as the school's results at the end of Key Stage 1 are concerned. Since 1997 the percentage of pupils attaining Level 2 and above in reading, writing and mathematics has been either above or well above average, other than in 1999. The percentage of pupils achieving the higher Level 3 has increased year by year, except in 1999, in reading, writing, mathematics and science. During the inspection, standards at the end of Key Stage 1 were judged to be above average in reading, writing, mathematics and science. The school is successfully managing to maintain high standards with seven-year-old pupils.
6. The school has set up various strategies to help speed up pupils' progress and improve their results at the end of the key stage. To do this it uses a number of assessments to form a view of the ability range of each group of pupils and to monitor their progress as they move through the school. Some of the assessments, such as those carried out within a few weeks of children starting in the reception class, are carried out under the auspices of the local authority; they identify areas, for instance mathematical understanding, that the school feels can and should be developed. It then shares the children's results with their parents and enlists their help to undertake activities at home that will help to develop the children's mathematical ability which will be tested again at the end of Key Stage 1.
7. Many schools now refer to this eventual progress, in relation to what they could do when they started school, as '*value added*'. It indicates how influential the school has been in furthering the pupils' progress. There is very good evidence that work at St. Mary's builds logically and progressively from year to year on what pupils know and can do. Additionally, there is very little difference in the progress made by pupils in different classes within the same year group. This indicates that shared planning and monitoring of standards of work ensure that pupils make consistent and equal progress. St. Mary's has now started to consider how more thorough individual targeting and monitoring of standards of work can help to further improve pupils' learning.
8. The standards attained in literacy by pupils in Year 2 are above average. The school's methods for implementing the National Literacy Strategy have been very effective in raising standards at the end of Key Stage 1. The shared planning that teachers have undertaken since the introduction of the Literacy Hour has been well supported by lesson observations carried out by the headteacher and the subject co-ordinator.
9. Pupils' good literacy skills are clearly apparent when they read for pleasure. There is an obvious desire around the school, such as in notices and book displays, to promote pupils' interest in reading. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the display of books written by the author Mick Inkpen. They know what '*authors*' and '*illustrators*' do and can talk about their favourite characters in books and give reasons why they like them and find them interesting. More able readers have good strategies for reading unfamiliar words, such as identifying a part of the word or looking for clues in the pictures. They have a good understanding of alphabetical order and know why they would use contents and index pages in non-fiction books.
10. The good progress they make in reading matches that in their written work. There is clear evidence in pupils' books from reception to Year 2 that in their written work pupils make good progress in presentation, handwriting, spelling, style and content. For example, shortly after children enter school they are dictating sentences that the teacher writes down, such as, '*I held up a potato when we sang, "See, here are red apples".*' Soon afterwards pupils are writing short sentences underneath the teacher's writing and later still they are writing descriptions about the smell and feel

of autumn leaves, *'Min smel lik it is an apple and it fels ruf on the frunt and it is smuv on the bac'*. By Year 1 their ability to write short sentences has improved in accuracy and vocabulary, *'It's time for bed little fox, cerl up in your nice cudlee box'*. By the end of Year 1 their writing has improved still further, especially in terms of expressive language, the accuracy of spelling and now the inclusion of grammar. *'Two children were playing where the waves skim and brake, making sandcastles and decorating them with beautiful sparkling shells. Neither of then notice when something crawled onto the boy. "Yikes somethings got me!" he screamed.'* Finally, by Year 2 there is further progress so that writing becomes more mature and sensitive, *'The autumn race is here again. Crunch, crunch, go the boots. The leaves fall all around us, twisting in mid-air. Something falls. The biggest conker I've ever seen. I feel the cold air closing in around me'*. The consistent progress made and good standards attained by most pupils are evident in their different responses to the story starter, *'I looked out of my bedroom window and saw....'* Pupils' imaginative and well-written responses ranged from dragons breathing fire through their window, to monsters who had come to play with their Lego!

11. The contribution of literacy to other subjects is often good and very constructive in developing their literacy skills, but opportunities are sometimes missed. Pupils have good opportunities to write up their exploits using the Victorian household items that were brought from Hitchin Museum for them to try out. The expressiveness of their writing, such as *'the coal scuttle was soooo heavy!'*, gives a clear indication of how much they learned. Writing about their experiments with different materials gives rise to writing that is scientific in content but also displays the sort of descriptive language found in their poetry. *'This is a key and it is made out of metal. It is little and has a tiny hole in the bottom. It is hollow and light.'* There are good links between literacy and information technology, such as when pupils word-process descriptions of *'aliens'* for a class book. There are occasions, however, when an over-reliance is placed on pupils completing worksheets as a way of recording their answers or what they have done. While worksheets form an important part of the pupils' writing experiences, some opportunities to develop their skills are lost by not encouraging written reports in their own words.
12. Standards in numeracy are above average. Pupils have rapid recall of number facts and use them well in their calculations. They use a wide range of strategies to work things out in their heads and their understanding of mathematical processes is good. Standards in science are above average. By the end of the key stage pupils have experienced a wide range of scientific concepts, such as forces, circuits and healthy bodies and diet. Although they have good opportunities to develop their understanding of an analytical approach to science, there are too few planned opportunities to develop their ability to predict what will happen and to test their predictions by *'fair testing'*. In both mathematics and science the completion of many worksheets is often at the expense of allowing pupils to write up their investigations in their own words.
13. In the foundation subjects, pupils make very good progress in art. They make good progress in design and technology, geography, history and information technology and achieve standards above those expected of pupils at this age. Pupils make sound progress in music and physical education and achieve standards in line with national expectations. They achieve standards in religious education that are in line with the requirements of the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus.

14. The majority of pupils with special educational needs make good progress and some make very good progress and require progressively less support, or are removed completely from the school's register of special educational needs because they are attaining in line with their classmates. Pupils make good and often very good progress when they are supported in small withdrawal groups for literacy and numeracy activities. Teachers carefully plan work that matches their ability. With very good support from classroom assistants pupils identify letters, sounds and blends and use them to make a variety of words that they use in sentences. Pupils' individual education plans are generally good and contain clear, specific targets for improvement.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

15. In their pre-inspection questionnaires and in conversations with the inspection team parents confirmed that their children enjoy coming to school. Registers are completed twice a day and they conform to requirements. The school works closely with the educational welfare officer who visits twice a term. She meets the headteacher and follows up any individual concerns. Attendance figures are above national averages for primary schools and punctuality is good.
16. Pupils quickly learn how to relate well to each other. In the playgrounds pupils share play equipment and show a considerable ability to co-operate. They are encouraged by the mid-day staff to play games. They are friendly and helpful to visitors and they are considerate and respect one another; for example, they quietly wait their turn to collect their meal at lunch-time.
17. In assemblies, pupils are attentive. They listened carefully and quietly to the headteacher as she described how pupils, parents and the school were preparing Christmas parcels for children in eastern European countries. Some pupils showed the parcels they had prepared at home with evident pleasure and the 'oohs' and 'aahs' from the assembled school were evidence of the pupils' enthusiasm and involvement.
18. Pupils are courteous and move carefully around the classrooms. They work well together and are able to sustain their attention and interest. Pupils are expected to work well together from the youngest ages and generally succeed very well. For example, five-year-old children were able to work in groups making words from cards with letter combinations. They enjoyed making up 'silly sentences' from word cards designed to fit together like a jigsaw. The youngest children in the reception class thoroughly enjoyed taking part in a lesson built around the preparation and making of carrot soup. They were totally fascinated, watched and listened intently, shared and demonstrated the ability to concentrate, ask questions, and take turns beyond the expected level for their age.
19. Pupils with special educational needs have a positive attitude to learning. They are eager to attend withdrawal sessions and in those sessions and in class they try very hard to achieve. They behave well and understand that they must take their turn when answering. They listen carefully to instructions, and try very hard to follow them carefully, and are not disheartened when they don't succeed, but are keen to try again. Pupils with special educational needs are eager to take on the areas of responsibility, which they do seriously. For example, a pupil has the responsibility of organising a chair for the deputy headteacher in assembly, which he does conscientiously.

20. Pupils are often enthralled, especially when they are encouraged to take part in experiments and investigations, and they are good at sharing equipment and helping to tidy up at the end of the lesson. They move from activity to activity quickly and quietly. Class teachers consistently apply the behaviour policy and the 'golden rules', which pupils understand well and are able to describe in detail.
21. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good. This is evident both in classrooms and around the school. Pupils get on well with each other and show respect for each other and for their teachers. Pupils mostly show a genuine eagerness to take an active part in lessons and show their work to visitors, and they remain focussed on the tasks in hand. Pupils are confident, happy and able to work well with each other and take the presence of visitors in their stride.
22. Pupils clearly like and trust their teachers and they know who to go to if there is a problem. All pupils are given a reasonable amount of responsibility as they go through the school and enjoy helping out, clearing up, delivering registers and helping on sports days. They take an active part in the many charitable activities involving the school and community.

#### **HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?**

23. The quality of teaching promotes good and frequently very good standards. Teaching is never less than satisfactory. In fact, it is at least good in three-quarters of lessons and it is very good, and occasionally excellent, in four out of every ten lessons. This is high quality teaching that is found throughout the school. Teaching is never less than very good in the reception class and has a positive impact on the rate of progress that children make when they enter school. Ninety-five per cent of parents in their pre-inspection questionnaires thought that teaching was good.
24. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the previous inspection. In 1996, 18 per cent of teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory. Only 6 per cent of teaching was judged to be very good, compared with 40 per cent in this inspection. In the previous inspection the teaching of pupils with special educational needs was good and it remains so. Relationships between pupils and teachers and their secure subject knowledge are still strengths of teaching. Weaknesses identified in that inspection, such as a lack of structure to tasks in the reception class, low teacher expectations and classroom assessment, have improved significantly. The marked improvements in the quality of teaching are due to the following: some changes in staffing; staff support for and implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies; detailed planning in the reception class and a keen awareness of the best teaching methods to use with children under five; and an increase in lesson monitoring by the headteacher, deputy headteacher and literacy and numeracy co-ordinators.
25. There are several reasons for good, very good and excellent teaching, many of which are common across the range of subjects. A major factor behind the best teaching is the way in which teachers have high expectations of their pupils. No matter that the majority of these pupils start school with attainment that is below average, it is not perceived as any sort of obstacle to attaining high standards. Teachers' high expectations are often most apparent during literacy and numeracy sessions. The best lesson introductions are about what the pupils can and will achieve. They raise the self-esteem of pupils and their belief in themselves. The impact of this is clear in the way that pupils approach their work and the high standards they achieve.
26. Another reason is the planning process, also identified in the previous inspection

report. Teachers plan carefully to ensure that their lessons are well matched to pupils' abilities. Work is usually purposeful, challenges pupils and keeps them fully occupied. Teachers make sure that a good range of resources are available for practical activities, that the lesson builds well on what the pupils already know and that it gives them subject knowledge that they did not have before. The quality of day-to-day planning in foundation subjects does not always match the high quality planning in literacy and numeracy. Lesson objectives are not always so clear. Planning in literacy and numeracy has benefited from the school's shared approach to planning between classes in the same school year. The teacher in the reception class plans very well to ensure that the children experience a wide range of exciting, stimulating activities. Classroom assistants support carefully planned activities very well in all classes. Teachers deploy them in classrooms very effectively to provide help where they are most needed. The ways in which they can support individual pupils and small groups are carefully identified during the planning process. Teachers have recently spent a great deal of time developing new planning systems but some planning documents are rather cumbersome and, in some cases, duplicate planning in other documents.

27. Teachers' very good use of questioning is a third reason for high quality teaching. Lessons invariably start with a brisk question and answer session in which teachers pose searching questions to find out what pupils know. Their questioning adds pace and urgency to the lesson. For example, in a very good literacy lesson the teacher posed questions designed specifically to make pupils think about why animals might have become extinct. In a very good numeracy lesson the teacher's questioning emphasised the mathematical process, *'How did you do it? Is there any other way he could have done it? Can anyone explain another method?'* She was more interested in how the pupils reached their answers than the actual answer itself. Teachers' questions also form part of their on-going assessment process. In their lesson introductions they use questions well, such as *'Who can tell me'...*? and, *'Can you remember what we said last week'...*? to revise the content of previous lessons to find out what pupils have remembered. They also use questioning very well during the course of the lesson to find out what pupils understand. Their very good use of praise goes hand in hand with this on-going assessment and is part of the process of building confidence and self-esteem. *'Excellent!', 'Well done!', 'Good girl!'* are frequently heard. *'Am I going to be amazed?'* *You **know** you can do it!'* and, *'That's a really good answer'*, are all commonly used strategies to inspire the pupils to greater efforts.
28. Teachers usually manage their lessons very well. They start and end promptly and introductions and plenary sessions play an important and positive part in the lesson. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour very well. They insist on correct procedures that Key Stage 1 pupils often find difficult, such as not shouting out, raising hands to answer questions and not talking when others are answering. They use sand timers to add urgency to lessons and to impose visible time limits on group activities. A small number of boys, many with special educational needs, sometimes find it difficult to maintain concentration for long and are tempted to annoy others. Teachers use their management strategies effectively with these pupils. They also use their classroom support assistants well to work with these pupils; for example, during lesson introductions they listen attentively to their responses to teachers' questions which may not be as quick as other pupils' but are regarded as being just as important.
29. In lessons where teaching is satisfactory but not as effective, there are times when the pace of lessons drops and the difference in the rate of learning between satisfactory and very good lessons becomes apparent. Satisfactory lessons lack the

pace and tension that are so obvious in high quality lessons. Because the demands on pupils to participate in lessons are not so obvious and intense there is time for them to become distracted and *'switch off'* or *'take a back seat'* in lesson activities. In short, there is no pressure on them to achieve high standards in the same way that there is in very good lessons.

30. The quality of teachers' marking is inconsistent. The best examples of marking reflect the support that teachers provide in their verbal comments to pupils during lessons. These written comments are often humorous, such as *'Gosh, you must have been very afraid!'* and always refer specifically to the content. Good marking of younger children's work provides very useful comments about the context of the work, such as information about a piece of writing that is unaided or a problem that two children tackled together.
31. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs in small withdrawal groups is never less than good and is occasionally very good. It is effective because of the variety of activities that reinforce and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. For example, pupils played a number game with counters and also used a *'hanging number line'* to help them learn and order numbers. Learning is made fun and much praise is given for the small steps that pupils make. Lessons have pace and not a moment is wasted. Day-to-day assessment is used well to move these pupils forward in their learning. Other staff provide very good support in class lessons, ensuring that these pupils understand what is taught and that they remain focused, and they are encouraged to respond. Class teachers effectively use the targets set in their individual education plans to further these pupils' learning.
32. Teachers set homework that supports the work of all pupils in school. In their pre-inspection questionnaires over 60 per cent of parents indicated dissatisfaction with the amount of homework set, but did not add written comments to indicate where they felt provision could be improved. At the pre-inspection meeting all parents present felt that enough homework was already set and they did not want the school to set any more. Homework is mainly in the form of reading books and spelling lists that some parents do not regard as *'homework'*. The school provides good information to parents about the part it expects them to play and many home-school diaries contain regular dialogue between the school and home.

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

33. There has been an improvement in curriculum planning since the previous report. The curriculum is now well planned and existing schemes of work are being revised in the light of the new requirements of the National Curriculum. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught, as is religious education. The school provides a high quality curriculum for children under five. The school has very effective strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy.
34. In Key Stage 1, the school rightly places an emphasis on literacy and numeracy but still provides a wide range of other subjects. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop literary skills in other subjects. For example, when studying history, pupils wrote at length about articles used in kitchens in the past. Numeracy is also well promoted and it extends into other subjects such as geography and design technology. Occasionally subject planning places more emphasis on worksheets than on pupils recording things in their own words. The curriculum is considerably enhanced by the wealth of visits and visitors, which provide pupils with an awareness of their own environment and culture. All pupils have access to the full curriculum.



35. The school's time allocation for subjects is generally sound. It is reviewing its current provision in line with the requirements for Curriculum 2000. A strong feature of the curriculum is the planning for the development of skills necessary for each subject and the thoroughness with which the school has planned a two-year *'rolling programme'* to ensure that concepts are revised. This is evident from the schemes of work which have been developed since the last inspection and the massive programme of long-term, medium-term and short-term planning that the school has completed. Currently there are too many planning documents in place to ensure clarity and simplicity. School-produced documents tend to overlap, they sometimes duplicate nationally produced curriculum guidance and are not all necessary for the planning process.
36. The provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is good. Issues such as healthy eating are effectively explored through science. Pupils have opportunities to understand the dangers of drugs, including tobacco and alcohol. The quality of learning opportunities provided for pupils with special educational needs is very good. The effectiveness of teaching strategies for their literacy and numeracy is also good. Pupils with special educational needs have well constructed individual education plans, with targets that are well matched to their needs. Their targets are understood and effectively used by teachers. There is a combination of withdrawal and support within classes, which relates to pupils' specific needs. These include emotional and behavioural problems as well as literacy, numeracy and motor skills.
37. The provision for extra-curricular activities is good. In their pre-inspection questionnaires 48 per cent of parents indicated that they would like to see a wider range of out-of-school activities in the form of clubs. Whilst there are no after-school clubs opportunities are available in the lunch hour for pupils to carry on with their work. For example, some pupils added to their artwork and produced still life drawings of a good standard. Also the wide variety of experiences outside the classroom in the form of visits to places of interest and visitors to the school add significantly to pupils' experiences.
38. The community plays a very important part in the life of the school. There are strong links with the local church and this is reflected in the outstanding patchwork panels depicting a walk to church. These are frequently exhibited in the community. The school is also an important focus for the floats in the Baldock festival. Visits to the school by the local museum curator and a visit by the road safety lady make a positive contribution to pupils' learning and understanding of the community.
39. The school provides well for pupils' personal development. Provision for the spiritual moral, social and cultural development of pupils is very good and is a strength of the school. Pupils' spiritual development is promoted particularly well through assemblies and lessons such as religious education and art. This was seen when pupils were singing, *'We are praying Lord'*, and they put their hands together to emphasise that the words had meaning for them. The daily acts of collective worship encourage pupils to reflect on the needs of others. For example, in an assembly about *'Operation Christmas Child'*, they were told about children who had very few possessions of their own but who would receive the gift boxes that they were packing.
40. Provision for pupils' moral development is very good. The school has developed rules that guide behaviour around the school, which pupils understand well. They know the difference between right and wrong. The school encourages good behaviour and achievement through commendations. Members of staff provide very

positive role models, which give pupils effective examples of good behaviour and insights into what is right and wrong. Any incident is dealt with immediately and fairly. The school has a very strong caring ethos and it makes effective use of its 2000 resolution, *'We care for each other'*. This has resulted in pupils showing concern for others, for example, ensuring that pupils who are alone have someone to play with when outside.

41. The provision for pupils' social development is very good. During many lessons pupils have the opportunity to work together. When offered opportunities to do so, pupils readily share ideas, such as in art and design and technology lessons. Pupils with special educational needs are fully involved in the life of the school. Teachers value these pupils and their work and this has a beneficial effect on their self-esteem. Pupils' understanding of the needs of animals was enhanced by the visit of the *'Animal Warden'*, who showed pupils rabbits, and talked about caring for them. Pupils take part in many fund-raising activities, some of which they initiate. They are encouraged to take responsibility in the school and to act as ambassadors for the school. For example, pupils at the termly church service greet parents and visitors. Pupils' social development is enhanced when they go on visits and walk to church, where they take their place in an adult environment.
42. Pupils' cultural development is very good and has improved since the time of the last inspection. They are provided with many opportunities to understand their own and other cultures, particularly through art, music and history. The breadth of the school's art curriculum is particularly impressive and it includes the work of many artists. The school offers pupils opportunities to explore the richness and diversity of other cultures, particularly through geography and history. For example, they experience theatre and professional musicians, and children in the reception class experienced a *'make believe'* Chinese restaurant in their classroom.

#### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?**

43. The staff and governing body contribute to the provision of a caring school in which the personal needs of the pupils are met very well. There is a very positive atmosphere and the teachers know their pupils well. Parents and pupils say that all the staff are kind and supportive. Pupils' personal, social and emotional development is carefully tracked. The school records any problems with pupils' conduct and tracks the behaviour of pupils having special difficulties in this respect. It works closely with parents to support their children. Certificates and other special awards are given to pupils at Friday assemblies with an explanation of why they were deserved. Pupils are well aware of these rewards and were eager to explain to visitors their significance, how many stars they had been awarded and what they had been given for.
44. The school monitors attendance well and works closely with the educational welfare officer when necessary. Most absences are accounted for and authorised. The school follows up the few unexplained absences, but only after about three days of absence and this is an unnecessary delay. Registers are well kept and conform to requirements.
45. There are many opportunities for pupils to discuss feelings, attitudes and behaviour with each other. This is often done in circle time, during class and school assemblies and science sessions when the curriculum covers issues of health and safety, cleanliness and relationships. In addition visitors who come to the school provide valuable opportunities to involve pupils in discussion.

46. Pupils have other experiences that help them mature into responsible and caring individuals. These include religious education and visits to local places of interest. Pupils develop an understanding of and respect for other peoples' beliefs and customs and are introduced to a range of music and art from cultures other than their own.
47. Behaviour standards are good overall and classroom strategies for helping pupils to participate to their fullest ability are successful. Staff concentrate on reinforcing success. There are special assemblies and pupils celebrate each other's achievements. Staff are fully aware of child protection procedures and the headteacher takes part in local area meetings and keeps colleagues fully informed.
48. The premises provide a very clean and pleasant environment that is respected by the staff and the pupils. The displays, which so enliven the school, are well maintained. Staff take good care of their pupils and ensure that they are sensible and safe. Healthy eating and understanding of how to lead a healthy life are promoted.
49. There are members of staff trained in first aid and a good medical room where staff carefully look after the inevitable bumps and grazes, recording all incidents. There are regular professional checks on the safety of portable electrical appliances, fire extinguishers and physical education equipment. The school and grounds are generally very well maintained and safe for adults and pupils. Nevertheless, the school governors do not ensure that there is regular monitoring of health, safety and security issues through regular and formally recorded audits.
50. There are good procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and recording their progress. These start with children under five and find out whether they attain the levels expected of them nationally by the age of five. It continues through Key Stage 1 until they transfer at the age of seven. The school uses the information from assessments very constructively. For example, in 1999 it recognised from assessments that the cohort contained a larger than usual number of pupils with special educational needs. In response the school employed an additional number of classroom support assistants to work specifically with pupils requiring additional help. The school has also addressed the issue identified in the previous report of failing to provide challenging work for more able pupils. Work is now well planned for all abilities. It uses the results from national tests at the end of Key Stage 1 constructively to identify strengths and weaknesses in provision.
51. Although teachers keep thorough class records indicating pupils' attainment and progress in literacy and numeracy, they have yet to develop evaluation sheets for all foundation subjects in order to provide a full picture of each pupil's learning across the breadth of the curriculum. The school recognises that it needs to develop its individual target setting procedures in order to be more specific about the progress that each pupil is predicted to achieve. Annual reports to parents are comprehensive. Parents at the pre-inspection meeting felt that the reports showed that teachers know their children well, were accurate and provided points for improvement.
52. The school is very effective in assessing and monitoring pupils who have special educational needs. These assessments are used as a basis for appropriate support. Assessments include a comprehensive range of academic, physical, emotional and behavioural needs. The breadth of assessment is excellent and results in support that is well focused on pupils' particular needs.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

53. In their pre-inspection questionnaires and at the pre-inspection meeting parents were very positive about the school. They appreciate what the school has achieved and agree that it works closely with parents and actively encourages them to contribute. The school's links with parents are a strength of its work.
54. Parents feel that the staff are approachable. Parental involvement in school has remained high since the last inspection. They attend special events such as the meetings about numeracy and literacy and the annual concerts, and a very large number of parents and guardians come to meetings with teachers to discuss their children's progress. Many parents and grandparents contribute to the school's work. They listen to readers, work with small groups, support pupils on computers and help to prepare material. During the inspection, several parents were in school helping to prepare Christmas boxes for eastern European children and others were actively involved in classrooms.
55. Parents are given plenty of opportunities to help their children's learning at home. They enjoy using the learning packs which the youngest children take home and like reading with them. They make comments in the pupils' reading diaries to maintain regular contact with their children's teachers. There is a lively parent-teacher association which helps to provide funds through a variety of social activities.
56. The school has very good relationships with parents of pupils with special educational needs. Parents are informed as soon as there is an area of concern. The majority of parents attend review sessions. Parents know that the co-ordinator for special educational needs and the support teacher are always available. When immediate contact is necessary, parents are seen before or after school. There is a strong commitment by the majority of parents to support their children who have special educational needs.
57. There are many opportunities for parents to meet the staff, including introductory meetings and nursery visits before their children start school. Letters are informative and clearly set out. Parents are sent a considerable amount of information about school activities, including information about the curriculum. Most parents have contributed to and signed the home/school agreement which emphasises the value the school places on keeping parents informed and involved. They respond well to requests for help on school journeys, parent-teacher association events and even a conker competition!
58. The school places great importance on helping pupils through working with parents. For six weeks each term all parents of pupils in the reception class are offered courses to, '*Help your child with mathematics and English*'. A crèche is available for younger siblings and many parents attend more than one course and often form lasting friendships. The school makes good use of the playgroup's classroom for these purposes. In addition, parents and grandparents of some pupils who would benefit from the extra support are invited to family numeracy sessions. While their children are receiving specialist teaching, they meet with the numeracy tutor to work at their own level mathematically and find out how they can best help their own children. Then parents, grandparents and pupils spend time together learning and playing mathematics games. The school was eager to pioneer this scheme, which was instigated by the county mathematics department and North Hertfordshire College and funded by the Basic Skills Agency. The school has successfully involved several parents and pupils, who take part enthusiastically.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

59. Leadership and management are very good and are strengths of the school. The headteacher provides very good, strong and effective leadership. The headteacher and deputy headteacher, who are well supported by all staff, provide clear educational direction for the work of the school. Many improvements have taken place since the previous inspection and the school has a clear sense of purpose and a commitment to improvement that is shared by all that work in it. There is a strong team ethos, relationships are very good and staff and governors share the headteacher's view of the school's direction. All parents in their pre-inspection questionnaires quite rightly recognised the leadership and management of the school as being very good. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection when leadership was judged to be sound.
60. The headteacher is very well supported by the deputy headteacher with whom she works closely and who plays a significant part in the work of the school. Together they are very effective in implementing change and in monitoring progress, for example, the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and the school's planning, assessment and record keeping. They inspire a strong sense of teamwork and motivation in staff and this enables all to make a positive contribution to the school's development.
61. The involvement of the governing body is good and has improved since the last inspection. Governors are very supportive of the school, the headteacher and the staff. They are a relatively new governing body formed after the joint governing body with St Mary's Junior School was disbanded due to new legislation requiring each school to have a separate governing body. Since their establishment in January 2000 they have played an increasingly significant part in the school's management. There is an effective committee structure set up to assist them in decision making. Meetings are well structured with agendas and minutes. Governors make good use of their experience, skills and management in the wider world outside education and fulfil their legal responsibilities effectively. They take a keen interest in the work of the school and their understanding of their roles and responsibilities is developing well. They are well informed about the work of the school, recognising areas in need of improvement as well as its many strengths. They have not yet undertaken regular health and safety checks. The headteacher and governing body together have a clear strategic view of the school as expressed in the very good school development plan. It contains suitable priorities which are all linked closely to improvements in specific standards in the work of the school. All items are costed fully and have criteria for judging success. There is an ongoing review of the targets and all staff are aware of what is intended and the extent of everyone's responsibilities.
62. There is a comparatively recent programme for monitoring classroom practice that is at an early stage of development. The headteacher and deputy headteacher monitor the teaching and learning through direct classroom observation, a careful scrutiny of planning, work sampling and discussion with the children. The subject co-ordinators monitor the teachers' plans and the pupils' work, but have not yet undertaken monitoring of teaching, with the exception of literacy and numeracy. In its strategic planning document the school has identified dates for monitoring to take place. The role of the subject co-ordinators has improved since the last inspection. They now play an important part in ensuring that standards are raised and that developments in their subjects keep pace with national requirements.
63. There is very good and effective management of special educational needs. It is organised by a committed co-ordinator and is based on a comprehensive and informative policy. There is a clear rationale to the allocation of the support teacher

and support staff, which relates to the greatest need and the type of need for these pupils as it arises. Care is taken to determine whether their needs are best met by withdrawal sessions focusing on pupils' specific needs, or by support in the class for those with a lesser need or with poor social skills. There is excellent liaison with the governor for special educational needs. The school gets very good support from specialist agencies.

64. The school is making the best possible use of all available resources to achieve high standards of work and very good provision. The school's finances are very well managed and its resources are most effectively deployed. The budget is planned initially by the headteacher and the secretary according to the educational priorities identified in the school development plan and the principles set by the governors, for example the importance of small class sizes and a high level of support staff. Prudent financial management has ensured a good level of experienced staff, a high number of classroom assistants and other necessary staff, a well maintained building and a well-resourced, attractive school.
65. The governing body receives up-to-date financial information from the school's computerised systems which places them in a strong position to consider spending alternatives. The school receives grants under the standards fund for staff training and is successful in bids made for specific grants, for example a small schools grant. These grants are used well for the purpose intended and have a positive impact on standards attained. The most recent audit recommendations have been carried out. Day-to-day financial control and administration are very good. The school secretary has a very good understanding of the financial systems. She is very efficient and provides a very welcoming first contact with the school.
66. The school is well staffed and all teachers have appropriate qualifications. They are part of a strong team that offers mutual support and they are highly valued by parents and children. All staff are fully aware of both their own and others' roles and responsibilities. This is a good improvement since the last inspection. Teachers are well deployed to make the most effective use of their skills and knowledge. All staff members have a management role and clear job descriptions that provide guidance on their roles. The arrangements for the induction of new staff are appropriate.
67. In addition to the teaching staff, there are a generous number of classroom assistants who provide very good support for class teachers and make a significant contribution to pupils' progress. They are always well prepared for lessons through their knowledge of lesson plans and learning objectives that teachers share with them. Teachers and assistants supporting pupils with special educational needs make a very good contribution to the quality of education for these children.
68. Teachers make effective use of the school accommodation and grounds. The school occupies a large and very pleasant site. The building is very clean, in good decorative order and very well maintained. The excellent displays throughout the building demonstrate the value the school places on children's work and enrich the environment. Classroom space is used very well to provide interesting, stimulating areas for learning. The large hall is used effectively for physical education, acts of collective worship and concerts. The two outside playground areas are sufficient in space and there is a grassed area for pupils to use. There are a sufficient number of books in the library and big books to share with the children.
69. Taking into consideration the children's attainment on entry to school, the quality of teaching provided, the attainment of pupils by the age of seven, the breadth and balance of the curriculum, the quality of leadership and the cost of education per

pupil, the school provides very good value for money.

## **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

70. In the context of its many strengths, and in order to maintain and improve the high quality of pupils' learning and the standards they attain, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- (1) review the use of worksheets in lessons to ensure:
  - a. that there is not an over-dependence on pupils completing them;
  - b. that pupils have sufficient opportunities to develop their writing skills by recording their answers in their own words;

**(paragraphs 11, 34, 84, 87, 93 and 101 of the main report)**

- (2) review arrangements for assessing pupils' progress to ensure:
  - a. that assessment information is used to track the progress of individual pupils so that effective targets can be set for their learning;
  - b. that assessment information is used to evaluate pupils' progress in foundation subjects;

**(paragraphs 51, 87 and 104 of the main report)**

- (3) review the part played by subject co-ordinators in the monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure:
  - a. that the school continues to allocate time for them to monitor the quality of teaching in their subject areas on a regular basis;
  - b. that the co-ordinators consider a range of ways, such as a scrutiny of work and discussions with pupils, to evaluate the impact of teaching on their progress and learning;

**(paragraphs 24, 62 and 81 of the main report)**

**The following minor points for improvement should be considered as the basis for an action plan:**

review the current planning documents with a view to reducing their number in order to avoid duplication and to ensure clarity and simplicity;

**(paragraphs 26, 35 and 96 of the main report)**

review the governors' current arrangements for carrying out regular health and safety checks.

**(paragraphs 49 and 61 of the main report)**



## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	33
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	24

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
2	12	11	8	0	0	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	YR – Y2
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	137
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	12
<b>Special educational needs</b>	YR – Y2
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	27
<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0
<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	4
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.1
National comparative data	5.4

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.6
National comparative data	0.5

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	36	21	57

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 2 and above	Boys	33	33	35
	Girls	20	20	20
	Total	53	53	55
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 2 or above	School	93 (83)	93 (81)	96 (85)
	National	83 (81)	84 (83)	90 (87)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 2 and above	Boys	33	35	35
	Girls	20	20	20
	Total	53	55	55
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 2 or above	School	93 (85)	96 (85)	96 (78)
	National	84 (82)	88 (86)	88 (87)

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

### **Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	135
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 - Y2**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21
Average class size	27

#### **Education support staff: YR - Y2**

Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	114

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### **Financial information**

Financial year	1999 / 2000
	£
Total income	307,415
Total expenditure	303,773
Expenditure per pupil	1,959
Balance brought forward from previous year	10,998
Balance carried forward to next year	14,640

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate 43%

Number of questionnaires sent out	137
Number of questionnaires returned	59

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	63	37	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	56	42	2	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	32	63	0	0	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	47	15	3	10
The teaching is good.	53	42	0	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	47	46	5	2	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	75	24	1	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	51	49	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	44	49	5	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	66	32	0	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	47	53	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	19	29	19	2	31

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**

71. The quality of education for children under five is good and provides them with a very good foundation for the next stage of their education. There are excellent induction arrangements, which include a visit by the teacher to the Weston Way Nursery School, many visits to the school for the children, two meetings for parents and a most informative parent handbook. Children are admitted into school at the beginning of the term in which they are five. At the time of the inspection there was only one reception class containing 19 children. An additional class will be opened in January. Those children admitted in April will join one of the existing classes or join a newly-formed third class.
72. The curriculum offered is good. It is broad and balanced, comprehensively covering all areas of learning, and it includes parts of the literacy and numeracy strategies where appropriate. The emphasis is on very good quality experiences in children's learning. The parents are fully informed of their children's work and progress through informal discussions and a formal interview.
73. Although children have a wide range of abilities, their attainment on entry shows a higher percentage of below average levels than expected of children at this age. The results of early assessments carried out on children within the first seven weeks of entry are shared with parents. They are fully involved in supporting their children's learning from the very beginning. Parents are expected to support their children in attaining the targets set for them in numeracy and literacy. To support their learning at home teachers have prepared '*home learning packs*' of activities. Overall, all children, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. All children benefit from the caring, supportive environment and well thought-out, structured learning opportunities provided. Most children are well on course to attain the '*Early Learning Goals*' at the end of the reception year and some are in line to achieve beyond that.

**Personal, social and emotional development**

74. Children make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development and are on line to achieve standards that are above those expected for their age. Children are happy and confident and are able to establish effective relationships with other children and adults. They have a positive attitude to school and want to take part in the exciting range of activities and learning. They work well both as part of a group and independently. They concentrate well and persevere in their learning. Children use their initiative and solve problems, seeking help only when needed. They are willing to help each other, for example when working in paired activities. Children are interested in the activities they are set and are eager to explore new learning. They demonstrate independence in selecting an activity or resources and in dressing and personal hygiene. They are most considerate of others. They take turns, share fairly and understand the principle of standing in a queue. The teacher and support assistant make very good provision for personal, social and emotional education, particularly by establishing consistent routines and expectations of behaviour. Staff provide good role models and the necessary support for children to grow in confidence and learn the skills of independence. They really enjoy teaching this age group and a close bond is developed. Staff and children share fun, humour, worries and concerns with each other.

## Communication, Language and Literacy

75. Children are on course to attain the expected standards by the end of the reception year, and some will exceed them. They listen very well and with increasing understanding, and talk confidently in formal and informal situations; for example, children fluently retell events in their lives. They take note of the individual or group they are talking to including the teacher, support assistant, visitor to the school or other children and respond appropriately. Children speak clearly and have a developing vocabulary. They enjoy reading to themselves, to an adult or in a group. Most children try to read simple texts with confidence and expression. They are developing a good awareness of the sounds letters make to help them read unfamiliar words. The teacher uses the introductions to literacy sessions well to reinforce basic literacy skills and knowledge of books. Children share books most effectively during these sessions. They know about authors, titles, illustrators and front and back covers, and enjoy using the technical language of literature. Many are beginning to form upper and lower case letters with a reasonable degree of accuracy. Most communicate meaning in pictures, letters and some words. Children with special educational needs are very well supported. The use of computers and tape recorders encourages them to enjoy reading and writing. Staff provide a wide range of practical and purposeful activities that encourage children to express their ideas and observations; for example, they look closely at vegetables and describe how they taste and feel. They take part in role-play of going to the shop and the '*Chinese restaurant*'. They discuss with the support assistant how they are going to decorate their rockets. The good range of well-planned and imaginative activities helps children to have confidence in communicating.

## Mathematical development

76. Nearly all children are on course to exceed the outcomes expected for five-year-olds in mathematics by the end of their reception year. They make very good progress. Almost all can count and make sets confidently to ten. Children are well aware of numbers. In a lesson on everyday objects they recognise that there are 12 small packets of crisps in a large bag and the price is stamped on the packet as well. Preparing for the '*toys picnic*' they discuss the shape of the tablecloth needed and the number of cups required for the rabbit and his friend. The teacher has a very good understanding of the needs of young children and provides interesting mathematical experiences to ensure that children practise the essential skills of counting, pattern making, measuring and the exploration of shape. Good examples include the use of numbers in cooking '*Peter Rabbit's carrot soup*', the use of the sand tray for emphasising essential mathematical vocabulary such as '*full*' and '*half-full*' and creating patterns of symmetry with vegetables when designing a face. The strong emphasis on the use of correct mathematical vocabulary ensures that children can apply this knowledge well in everyday situations, for example at registration time when counting children present and the number of lunches they require.

## Knowledge and understanding of the world

77. Children are on course to achieve the standards expected at the end of the reception year. They are encouraged to observe, explore and describe the world around them through well-planned topics. The teacher provides a wide range of interesting and different challenges and these encourage children to be alert and eager to find out something new. When making carrot soup the teacher clearly explores the meaning of '*liquidize*' and children listen to the motor '*whizzing*'. The teacher uses excellent questions to encourage children's curiosity and thinking skills, such as, '*Is the motor going faster?*' As milk is poured in she asks, '*Is the mixture getting bigger?*' Children

use information technology confidently in small groups and in pairs to practise pattern making and painting. They recognise the names of the different parts of the computer such as, 'keyboard' and 'mouse' and are able to use these effectively. They show an understanding of where they live by creating roads and built up areas with the small world toys. They organise themselves in the role-play shop understanding the different roles of shopkeeper and customer. They talk about different vegetables when making soup and breakfast foods from around the world. They have more limited opportunities to explore the immediate outside environment. There are no fenced areas in which they can do so, although work is soon to start on this project. Children enjoy observing and talking about the fruits and vegetables from other lands that are displayed on the art table. Staff provide good opportunities for children to talk with adults and observe carefully. Evidence of this is found in work such as painted self-portraits, in which eye and hair colour is accurately recorded and details such as 'pupils', 'eyelashes' and 'hair bunches' are carefully observed. The well-resourced art area ensures that children have good opportunities to select materials to make models. Very good adult support from the classroom assistant ensures that children's cutting and joining skills develop well.

### **Physical development**

78. The majority of children are on course to achieve expected standards by the end of the reception year. There is an excellent selection of large apparatus in the gym and a wide range of small apparatus for children to explore. These are well used and staff provide interesting and challenging activities that ensure that children make good progress. In the playground the children move at speed and are aware of others, rarely bumping into each other. In good weather the children use the outdoor activity equipment well to learn to climb and balance safely. Their fine manipulative control is developed well through activities such as holding paint brushes, squeezing 'playdough', handling small pieces of puzzles, writing with pencils under close staff observation and many other worthwhile activities.

### **Creative development**

79. Children are on line to achieve expected standards by the end of the reception year. They all know their colours and select different paints and crayons in their work. They use suitable techniques to work with a variety of textures, for example different coloured papers for autumn leaves, numbers of doors made with new clay and decorated, and unusual media to experiment with such as vegetables and salad ingredients. This activity fascinated the children. They carefully studied Giuseppe Arcimboldo's work before composing vegetable pictures. The results were photographed so that the ingredients could be used again. Children are imaginative and creative; for example, in the 'Chinese restaurant' they used orange and straw coloured wool to represent noodles when cooking a meal in the wok. They explore sound through listening to different kinds of music whilst having their mid-morning drink and singing nursery rhymes and other appropriate songs. The staff ensure all resources are used well for children to develop their creative skills. The children respond by showing their evident enjoyment.

### **Teaching**

80. Since the previous inspection the quality of teaching and the provision made for children under five have improved immensely. There is now a clear comprehensive policy in place for the early years. The quality of teaching was never less than very good and was occasionally excellent. The many outstanding features of these lessons included the teacher's high expectations of children's ability to learn; for

example, in a lesson when the teacher was developing children's early reading skills using picture clues and predicting outcomes and checking whether they are accurate. Another strength was the teacher's questioning to make children think very carefully; for example, *'What is new in the sand tray? Yes, a funny, shaped spoon. It is a ladle. Why do you think the ladle is in the sand this week?'* The teacher's excellent resources encouraged the children to use them and learn; for example, the *'Chinese restaurant'* is decorated with Chinese lanterns, chopsticks and wok, all ready to serve the chop suey and lemon chicken!

## ENGLISH

81. At the end of Key Stage 1 pupils' attainment is above average and all pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. This is an improvement since the last inspection, when standards were judged to be sound. National tests and assessments over the last four years show consistently high standards in English. The exception to this was in 1999, when the group of pupils included many with special educational needs and standards fell to close to the national average. In the most recent 2000 tests, the percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 and above in reading, 93 per cent, and writing, 93 per cent, was above the national average. The percentage of pupils achieving Level 3 was well above average in both reading and writing. In comparison with those in similar schools, results at St. Mary's were well above average. These standards were confirmed by work seen during the inspection. The subject benefits from an enthusiastic co-ordinator who monitors progress effectively and assessment is used well to provide support where necessary, for example by additional support from classroom assistants or in small and effective withdrawal groups. This is an area of improvement since the previous report.
82. Pupils have good speaking and listening skills. These were clearly evident when teachers gave detailed instructions that they then followed, for example in a lesson with many different activities, including design and technology, art, working on the computer and listening to a tape. Pupils listen and understand and this was evident when, after a story about dinosaurs, a pupil asked why they had become extinct. Pupils explain their choice of words well. For example, a pupil explained that he liked the words *'curly whirly'* because they reminded him of autumn leaves falling to the ground. Pupils take turns when speaking and listening and respond to what other pupils say. This was seen when they spoke animatedly about science and added to information that other pupils had given. For example, when talking about parts of the body and digestion, a pupil added that, *'the first stage of digestion takes an hour'*.
83. At the end of Key Stage 1 pupils' standards of reading are above national averages. They quickly learn letter sounds and make good progress in learning to read. At the end of Key Stage 1, the majority of pupils recognise that sounds can have different spellings, such as *'oi'* and *'oy'*. Pupils read confidently and with pleasure. They explained the meaning of *'author'*, *'contents'*, *'fiction'* and *'non-fiction'* when referring to books. All pupils are confident in using the library to find information. They talk with understanding about stories that they have read. For example, when retelling the story of *'Digger gets stuck'*, a pupil explained that she liked the section best when



the dolphin is returned to the sea because he will then live. Resources are good, both in the supply of big books, for whole class teaching, and in a variety of reading schemes and fiction to suit the individual learner and extend the most able readers. Books are accessible throughout the school and pupils are encouraged to use them out of lesson time. Reading books are sent home with pupils daily and the reading diaries form an important dialogue with parents.

84. The standard of pupils' writing is above national averages. They draft and redraft their work, for example when writing poems about autumn. They develop a love of language and vocabulary and are encouraged to use words imaginatively in their writing. For example, pupils had to give an imaginary name to a dinosaur and names given included '*Humungosaurus*'. A pupil added that his dinosaur was a herbivore, and explained that this meant that he only ate vegetables. They enjoy finding synonyms, which included '*gigantic*' and '*enormous*' as alternatives to the word 'big'. Much of pupils' writing is of a considerable length, and by the end of Key Stage 1 they write in clear sentences with a good use of speech marks and internal punctuation. Their handwriting is joined and fluent. Much of their writing is imaginative. For example, a pupil wrote about looking out of the bedroom window and seeing a tiger eating flowers and drinking from the river, who finally found a bucket, sat in it and sailed away. Their written work often makes a significant contribution to other subjects, for example in history when they described using Victorian kitchen utensils. There are occasions, however, when too much use of worksheets denies them opportunities to write up accounts in their own words. For instance, there are few examples of pupils writing up any investigations in mathematics or science.
85. Pupils make good progress in all aspects of English from the very good foundations laid down in the reception class. They are encouraged to learn to listen to others, and speak to each other, to the class and to the whole school. Through the high status given to books and reading, pupils make good progress in learning to read and to love books. Pupils' writing is given a high priority and is seen around the school, including notices made by them to direct visitors to different classes. This encourages pupils to achieve high standards in writing.
86. Pupils enjoy their work in English. They take part enthusiastically; for instance, when they could not help but join in the reading of a poem. All pupils take part well in lessons, for example when they were looking for rhyming words. They are desperately keen to start on the tasks set and work very hard. They are excited about the tasks when working and understand that they must work independently when in groups. They are keen to do well and are eager to read out their work, but appreciate that they have to take turns and not all can be involved. Because of the high level of motivation inspired by the teachers, all pupils make good progress in the lessons and over time.
87. The quality of teaching is never less than good, with one in four lessons being very good. Teachers plan effectively and take careful note of what pupils have learned in previous lessons. They have a secure knowledge of the literacy hour. Very good use is made of classroom support assistants, who ensure that pupils stay focused on the lesson, listen carefully and work hard to complete the task. Teachers read texts with dramatic input, which holds pupils' interest and motivates them to succeed. The feedback given is always positive, even when '*wrong*' answers are provided. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' work and their behaviour, which contributes to the good progress that pupils make. They have good relationships with pupils and encourage them to succeed. Good use is made of groups of pupils sharing the same text to ensure that they understand and pupils are questioned carefully to make them think. For example, when reading about '*mixed up triplets*'

pupils were asked what could have been done to avoid the confusion. Teachers take every opportunity to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding; for example, when the word 'oil' was discussed, the teacher added that when it is put on to working parts it lubricates. Teachers sometimes rely too heavily on worksheets that do not always provide sufficient challenge and do not help pupils to see progress in their learning. However, work generally has a good level of challenge, although pupils do not currently have individual targets for improvement.

## MATHEMATICS

88. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment is above average and they make good progress. The inspection findings show that there has been considerable improvement since the last inspection. Standards then were judged to be broadly in line with national expectations, although work for more able pupils was considered to lack challenge.
89. The judgement in the current inspection is in line with the pupils' results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2000. In those tests the percentage of pupils attaining Level 2 and above, 96 per cent, was higher than the national average. The percentage of pupils attaining Level 3 was well above the national average. In this year's tests the percentage of pupils attaining Level 3 has risen to 46 per cent compared with 24 per cent in 1999. In comparison with those in similar schools, results in mathematics at St. Mary's were well above the national average in 2000.
90. With the exception of 1999, when a large number of pupils had special educational needs, results in mathematics tests over the last four years have been above or well above the national average. The steady and consistent improvement in the school's results is due to several factors. The teaching has become much more effective since the introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy. The school has used the results of tests more effectively to plan work, better planning is in place for pupils of different abilities, including more able pupils, and the co-ordinator's management of the subject is very good.
91. The school's implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy is clearly helping to improve attainment. The emphasis given to 'quick fire' mental arithmetic activities at the beginning of lessons plays a large part in effectively developing pupils' understanding and use of numbers and their rapid recall of addition and subtraction facts. Even very young pupils are confident at working out sums rapidly 'in their heads'. Additionally, there is a greater shared approach to mathematics and it is an area of work that is featured in the work of the whole school and shared in display on walls; for example, the 'autumn' display features a competition to find the 'biggest' and 'smallest' conkers. The school's commitment to developing an awareness of numeracy is also shown by its eagerness to take part in the 'family numeracy lessons' that are held in school every week. These provide good opportunities for parents and their children to share in the enjoyment of numeracy activities and develop the numeracy skills of those who take part.
92. Pupils enter Key Stage 1 with levels of attainment that are just below those expected nationally. By the end of the key stage they work confidently with large numbers. Pupils in Year 1 are able to count to 50 from different starting points. They can order numbers correctly, add and take away small numbers, count on in twos and tens and recognise that there are 'more' or 'less'. In a very good lesson when shown bags of sweets containing different quantities one pupil points out that, 'One has a few sweets and some have more in them'. Another says, 'There's a different amount in each bag'. Pupils in Year 2 are very quick at spotting patterns in mental arithmetic

work that will help them find answers. For example, when they were asked to add up in their heads what three numbers made, one pupil answered, 'I knew that 6 add 4 makes 10 and I just added 3 on to make 13'. Another said, 'I knew double 5 makes 10 and I added two more to make 12'. A third pupil explained, 'I started from 6 and counted on in twos to make 14'. By the end of the key stage pupils can identify and name three-dimensional shapes, such as cuboids and cones and use correct mathematical vocabulary, such as 'faces' and 'edges'. They can tell the time and write it in numbers, measure accurately in centimetres, work out fractions of numbers, use money and work out change confidently. They cover a wide range of work and present their findings neatly and accurately.

93. In the past there has been an over-reliance on using and completing worksheets in mathematics. This has reduced problem-solving opportunities for pupils to try things out for themselves, to make mistakes and to correct them themselves. There is also little evidence of data handling incorporating the use of information technology or using the word processor to write up their mathematical investigations. Pupils do, however, have good opportunities to use programmable robots in their work on estimating length and angles of turn. When good links are made between mathematics and other subjects, pupils learn that mathematics has a practical application in everyday life. For instance, in their work on two-dimensional shapes one pupil wrote, '*When my bag was empty it was a flat rectangle. I filled it up and when it was full it made a cuboid*'. In their work in geography pupils have very good opportunities to apply their skills in mathematics and information technology when they use a mapping program to draw routes around a 'town' and an 'imaginary island'.
94. Pupils make good progress in mathematics as they move through the key stage. Considering that pupils enter school with below average attainment in mathematics, their progress and attainment are significant. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Their areas of weakness in mathematics are identified clearly in their individual education plans. Well-targeted support in lessons from teachers and work that is well planned for all abilities ensure that they make good progress. Talented classroom support assistants provide patient, constructive help. A teacher provides very good levels of additional help for pupils with special educational needs in small withdrawal groups on a regular basis.
95. Pupils' attitudes to mathematics are good overall and are often very good. They are interested and enthusiastic learners. They listen well and respond to questions quickly and enthusiastically, especially in their mental arithmetic work. They settle quickly to their tasks and work hard to complete them. The overall impression these pupils give is of confidence in their own ability as mathematicians. The National Numeracy Strategy has had a tremendous impact on their mathematical capability. Parents at the pre-inspection meeting felt that there had been a real improvement in their children's enthusiasm for and ability in mathematics. Pupils concentrate in lessons, work well independently and co-operatively and are keen to find answers.
96. The quality of teaching is very good overall and has a marked impact on the high standards that pupils attain. Consistently very good features, such as planning, high expectations, pace and questioning are found in lessons. Teachers enjoy the success of teaching the National Numeracy Strategy. Their confidence has gradually grown with the advice they have received from the subject co-ordinator about how to improve. They know that the strategy has helped to improve pupils' standards in mathematics as well as their own teaching and subject knowledge.

97. Teachers' planning is carefully geared to pupils' abilities so that activities extend higher attaining pupils and consolidate work for those pupils who find mathematics more difficult to grasp. Lessons are well paced and fun. Teachers' questioning during the mental arithmetic sessions to find out what pupils know is very good and usually 'fast and furious'. *'Why is thirty special and where will we find it on the number square? Can we find it by counting in tens? Is it less than forty? Can we find ninety-two? Is that ninety-two? Let's tell him what that number is.'* Teachers use a variety of very good strategies to make the lesson challenging and exciting; for instance, in one lesson the teacher cleverly changed the volume of her voice from very quiet to very loud to emphasis different points. They use resources very well, such as whiteboards and large number charts, invariably involving the pupils actively in recording answers on them. They carry out frequent and accurate on-going assessments to find out what pupils know and can do. Their relationships with pupils are very good and they provide lots of praise such as, *'Excellent!', 'Well done!' and 'Good girl!'* Their comments are designed to make pupils feel confident about *'having a go'* and clearly emphasise the importance of attempting to work out a problem rather than the correctness of the answer. That is the importance of the mathematical process. For example, teachers' comments such as, *'Let's go for it!' or 'Am I going to be amazed by what you've done?'* and, *'Well done! You know what to do!'*, have an obvious impact on raising pupils' self esteem as mathematicians.

## SCIENCE

98. Very few lessons were timetabled during the inspection. Judgements, therefore, are made additionally on a scrutiny of pupils' work, planning documents and discussions with pupils. By the end of Key Stage 1 attainment is above expectations and pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. This is an improvement since the previous inspection when standards were judged to be in line with national expectations.
99. In the 2000 teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 the percentage of pupils who attained Level 2, 96 per cent, was above the average for all schools. The percentage of pupils attaining Level 3, 33 per cent, was well above average. Science results at the end of Key Stage 1 have improved considerably over the last four years; for example, in 1998 and 1999 no pupils attained Level 3 in science. In comparison with those in similar schools results in science at St. Mary's were above average.
100. Pupils in Year 1 develop a good awareness of different types of materials, for example natural and man-made, and their properties. They have a good scientific vocabulary and use descriptions such as, *'rough', 'smooth', 'dull' and 'stretchy'*. They also know what *'transparent'* means and can talk confidently about paper that has both *'transparent'* and *'opaque'* qualities. Pupils use simple equipment well and make accurate observations of what happens when they are carrying out tests and experiments. They can make good, reasoned guesses about what will happen based on their knowledge of materials. They can describe in everyday terms opposite properties, such as *'hollow'* and *'solid'*, and write detailed and accurate descriptions of different objects; for example, *'This bottle is made out of plastic and it is transparent. It has a handle on a hinge and the top can unscrew.'*
101. Pupils in Year 2 study the different seasons, light sources and life cycles of animals. One pupil writes, *'The caterpillar is turning a pinkish brown. This means it is ready to turn into a pupa. To make it extra safe it spins a cocoon.'* They carry out investigations on sounds inside and outside school; for example, *'A bird can hear a worm squirming through the mud'*, and link their work well to other subjects. In

mathematics they count the number of cars outside by listening to the noise they make, and in design and technology they design a musical instrument. They make predictions about whether items will be attracted to magnets and whether things will sink or float. They construct circuits to light bulbs and investigate forces; *'If you put a car on a small slope it won't go very far, but if it is on a steep slope it will go a long way'*. They associate the development of a healthy body with a suitable diet and understand terms such as, *'balanced diet'* and *'energy'*. They contribute thoughtful ideas to discussions about the harmful effects of an excess of unhealthy foods; for instance, one pupil knows that too much salt is bad for you. Another knows that a popular orange coloured drink is not natural orange juice and contains *'additives'*. They can name and know the function of the *'heart'*, *'stomach'* and *'brain'* and know that a *'pulse'* indicates the flow of blood. When too much emphasis is placed on completing worksheets it restricts pupils' investigative work and allows too few opportunities for them to make hypotheses. When opportunities are provided, pupils are capable of astute observations based on sound scientific knowledge. For instance, they can surmise that cardboard is a better cover than paper in wet weather because it has more *'layers'* to *'absorb'* the water.

102. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress throughout the school. More able pupils progress well, as can be seen by the number attaining the higher level in assessments at the end of Key Stage 1. Pupils gradually develop their scientific knowledge and are adept at applying the fact to situations they have not encountered before. They develop their ability to record their investigations neatly and accurately.
103. Pupils have good attitudes to science. They show a keen interest and enthusiasm and are keen to contribute ideas for discussion. Even if they do not know the *'correct'* answer they are very good at making *'educated guesses'* without worrying whether they are going to be *'wrong'*. They work very well in small groups, listening to others and sharing equipment sensibly. They are well aware of how important good behaviour is in experiments and the need to observe safety rules.
104. Of the two lessons observed, teaching was good in one lesson and very good in the other. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use correct scientific terminology, such as *'nutrients'*, *'properties'* and *'investigations'*. Teachers plan their lessons carefully, their lesson objectives are clear and they make very good use of resources. More use could have been made of information technology in both lessons and, generally, it is under-used in science throughout the school. Teachers do not consistently develop older pupils' ability to predict what will happen and carry out fair tests. In the best teaching, very good questioning makes pupils think very carefully about what has happened and what might happen. By careful questioning, teachers cleverly find out what pupils know, although this information is not always used well to set targets that will challenge more able pupils. Teachers deploy classroom assistants very effectively to support pupils.

## **ART AND DESIGN**

105. Art is a strength of the school. The way in which teachers display children's completed work shows how much emphasis is put upon the importance of developing pupils' creative ability. The very good quality of provision and the celebration of pupils' achievements are commendable. The school has maintained pupils' good standards since the last inspection. All pupils, including those with special education needs, make very good progress in art by the end of Key Stage 1. In the previous inspection it was judged that pupils make good progress in investigating and developing their techniques in art and design. This has been

improved. Pupils' work includes sketching, observational drawing, drawing from imagination, painting, printing, weaving and three-dimensional work. Pupils experiment with different media. They use very careful control with charcoal, chalks, pastels and water colours.

106. From the evidence provided by pupils' work in classrooms and by work kept to show progress it is clear that pupils are building on and extending their techniques and skills. Their progress is very good. Pupils in Year 1 looked carefully at wood as a natural material in their science topic. They explored the wood grains and knots and made printing blocks with string following these lines and knots. The 'woody' texture is felt through the eyes in the finished picture of repeating prints. They drew still life wooden objects; for example, one of their musical instruments whose noise seemed to be captured in their colouring. In Year 2, pupils studied still life pictures of various artists' techniques for their still life sketches of three pieces of fruit. Pupils paid particular attention to the shading and light effects to produce mature pieces of work. They use a wide variety of resources and techniques for drawing, printing and collage and explore a range of media, including textiles, as they move up through the school. Their work is large, lively, colourful, expressive and exciting.
107. Pupils' artwork is well linked to other areas of the curriculum whenever possible, for example their '*autumn*' topic. Pupils made batik leaves and observational drawings of leaves. Their evident enjoyment of Mick Inkpen's book, '*Happy Birthday Kipper*' is clear in their large class picture of Kipper and his friends enjoying the birthday cake. Pupils enjoy art lessons very much and talk with enthusiasm about their work. They work carefully, become very involved and concentrate for long periods of time. They persevere very well with tasks and use equipment sensibly and carefully. Pupils in Year 2 had great fun in interpreting Matisse's picture of the '*snail*'. They certainly appreciated the careful paper tearing that the artist used, when trying this technique themselves.
108. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers plan their art lessons very well to develop specific skills. Their high expectations of pupils' ability in art can be seen from the high quality of finished items and the care with which they are displayed. For example, this is evidenced in the wonderful display of '*conkers*' drawn by the pupils which is then laminated to capture the shiny skins. Teachers' own knowledge and expertise in art are high.
109. Art makes a positive contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They are taught in a visually very stimulating environment. From the time visitors and children enter the school gate they are presented with different patterns and media. Alongside the school main door is a magnificent wall sculpture of characters from the '*Owl and Pussy Cat*'. Once inside the wonderful patchwork hanging, '*Going to church in all seasons*' greets the eye. These panels won second place in the schools' '*Quilt Championship*' and represented British schools in the European Championship.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

110. Only one lesson was timetabled. Judgements are made, additionally, on a scrutiny of work, planning documents and discussions with the subject co-ordinator. Standards in design and technology are above national expectations and have improved since the time of the last inspection.
111. Pupils create ideas using their own knowledge. This was seen when pupils examined musical instruments to see how sound was created before constructing their own instruments. They use labelled drawings well to communicate and try out ideas. This was seen in their use of information technology when designing wheeled vehicles. They choose materials and tools carefully from which to make their finished product. They also have good cutting and making skills. Pupils are aware of the suitability of materials for their intended purpose. For example, they explained that they had to cover boxes with paper, because otherwise paint would not stick on shiny surfaces. Pupils' finished products are of a good standard, for example the wheeled vehicles showing the construction of axles. Pupils evaluate well by looking carefully at their finished product. For example, a pupil wrote that, *'there should have been fewer leaves on my bookmark, which would have made the flower stand out'*. Pupils make good progress in design and technology. They quickly gain confidence and competence in using different materials and in joining and finishing their models.
112. Pupils enjoy design and technology. They listen carefully to the design brief and prepare their design and list of equipment with thought. Pupils work hard and take great care to produce work of a good standard. They are proud of their finished products and are eager to talk about them.
113. The lesson seen was good. Planning is good, with a clear focus on the design process. A good range of resources were used, and the pupils were encouraged to explore these and to use prior knowledge to discover how the instruments produced sounds. In order to move pupils on in their learning, the teacher scribed for them when they were working out the materials that they needed. The teacher encouraged pupils to think and to work out for themselves whether they could paint the shiny surfaces of the boxes that they had chosen. At all stages, pupils were required to show initiative and to make their own decisions, which gave them a sense of purpose in their designing and making. There are very good relationships between teachers and pupils, which motivate them to achieve well.

## GEOGRAPHY

114. Only one lesson was timetabled. Judgements are made, additionally, on a scrutiny of work, planning documents and discussions with the subject co-ordinator. Standards in geography are above national expectations and have improved since the time of the last inspection.
115. Pupils have a very good understanding of place. They described Baldock as, *'a town which has more features than a village such as Sandon like a leisure centre and parks'*. They explained that the extensive flooding that they had seen on television was due to very heavy rain, which had filled the rivers and flooded land before the rivers could reach the sea. Pupils have very clear views on the environment, and commented that the local play areas were good because they had separate areas for children of different ages. Also dogs could not get in and there were soft surfaces under the swings to stop children getting hurt. Pupils explained that fumes from cars cause pollution and thought that engines should be invented that do not give out fumes. Pupils have good geographical skills. They recognise the characteristics of

plans as different to maps and use different resources such as aerial photographs with understanding. They use information technology effectively to make imaginary islands. They know and use the four points of the compass and co-ordinates and use these appropriately.

116. Pupils make good progress in understanding the main features of their own environment and in gaining knowledge about other places in the world. They also make good progress in understanding that the environment has to be looked after. Pupils quickly learn geographical skills such as using maps, photographs and globes to find information.
117. Pupils enjoy geography. They readily get involved in discussions, quickly settle to the task set and show care and attention to it, for example by neatly colouring in features in their plans.
118. The quality of teaching is good. Planning is thorough and resources are comprehensive and effectively used. High standards of behaviour are expected. This results in pupils staying focused on the task set and making good progress. Discussions are handled well, allowing pupils to explore concepts such as the features of a plan, which ensures that they are interested and fully understand the underlying principles.

## HISTORY

119. Only one lesson was observed during the inspection. Judgements are based, additionally, on a scrutiny of pupils' work, planning documents and discussions with pupils. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress and attain standards above those expected by the age of seven. This is an improvement since the previous inspection when standards were judged to be in line with national expectations.
120. In Year 1 pupils study teddy bears as part of their '*Old and New*' topic. They make very thoughtful comparisons between bears and are very good at spotting similarities and differences. For instance, two bears belonging to two teachers are amongst the collection they are studying. Both are approximately the same age and are much older than those belonging to the pupils. There are clear differences between the two older bears; for instance, in size and colour, but the pupils immediately recognise the similarities between them. '*They've both got the same shape face and they are both harder and made of rougher material than my bear. They are both itchy.*'
121. Pupils study the development of cycles and compare '*old*' cycles with their own. One of the pupils' grandfathers was a bicycle builder and has been allowed to bring in his father's bicycle to look at. '*Mr Hobb's racing bike is special. It was made for him by his Dad especially for him. It has a Hobb's badge on the frame. It is 40 years old.*' The successful use of artifacts supplied by the Hitchin museum service also has a marked impact on pupils' understanding of life in Victorian times. They have opportunities to handle and use Victorian kitchen and household equipment and clearly enjoyed using some of it despite the difficulties. '*I liked beating the carpet with the carpet beater. It was great fun and made me all dusty.*' '*I liked lifting up the coal scuttle and carrying it. It was very heavy even with two of us carrying it.*' Pupils know the names of some queens and kings and understand that the Victorian period was named after Queen Victoria. They know about famous events and stories, such as the Great Fire of London and King Arthur's round table. A beautiful wall hanging in the entrance hall was made by pupils and shows them walking to church. It is still used in school and by the local community.



122. Pupils' attitudes to history are very good and this is partly due to the way in which history is made to come 'alive' through direct experience of handling artifacts and by visits to places of interest. They treat valued objects with great care and understand that some objects become fragile with age.
123. The quality of teaching in the one lesson observed was satisfactory. Good links were made between history and mathematics when pupils were studying bears; for example, *'If Jodie is five years old and she had the teddy when she was two, how old is the teddy? Can anyone tell me what year that was?'* Teachers use a range of resources imaginatively and link history well to other subjects such as design and technology, information technology and art. They use photographs very well to record pupils' experiences. The subject policy is thorough and takes into account the new National Curriculum requirements.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

124. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment is above national expectations. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection, when standards were judged to be just in line with national expectations. The subject co-ordinator has worked hard to try to ensure that by the end of the key stage pupils have mastered several key skills that give them a degree of independence when they are using computers in the classrooms. There is also clear evidence that information and communication technology is used to support other subjects such as art, geography, history and music.
125. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils use keyboard and mouse controls confidently. One pupil commented that, *'to get rid of the writing on the screen you use the mouse to click on the cross in the top corner and that gets rid of the window'*. The school recognised that whilst many pupils used mouse controls at home when playing games, very few of them had regular experience of using a keyboard to give commands. Consequently they spent a long time locating letters on the keyboard and this limited the time available. Pupils now have regular keyboard practice and a parent helps to develop skill and accuracy in a regular weekly session. Pupils can type text, save and load programs and many can print unaided. They successfully list instructions to move a programmable robot in different directions and use computers well to complement art activities. They have opportunities to use a word-processing program, occasionally using it to write contributions to class anthologies. For example, pupils contributed word-processed sections to a class books about aliens. Pupils had started the lengthy story by writing, *'There, outside on the school field was a spaceship and there was an alien driving it'*. They concluded, after many adventures, *'At dinner time the dinner ladies were amazed and shocked and said, "get those aliens out of this school now and back into space".'*
126. Pupils make good progress throughout the school. Those with special educational needs make the same degree of progress as other pupils. When they are withdrawn for additional support in small groups they have access to programs that are specifically designed to develop their literacy and information technology skills, such as programs that require pupils to *'click and drag'* phonic blends into position to form words.
127. Pupils' attitudes to information and communication technology are good. They learn quickly and enthusiastically. They work well in pairs sharing tasks, taking turns and discussing their work sensibly. These tasks are often carried out without direct teacher supervision. Pupils concentrate well and use equipment safely and carefully.

They listen attentively to instructions and watch in awe to see what will happen with programs they have not previously encountered. In a lesson where pupils were watching the colour printing process, one commented in admiration, *'This is good isn't it?'*

128. Only one lesson with direct teaching was observed and it was good. The activity was well planned with clear expectations of what pupils were required to do. The teacher had very good personal subject knowledge and explained the process of retrieving information from a CD-Rom in a logical and systematic way. The teacher provided a good practical explanation of how to locate words and cleverly provided opportunities for pupils to select definitions of words that she knew were not in the dictionary as a means of showing pupils how to deal with unexpected setbacks. The teacher provided good levels of challenge and extended the range of the activity by explaining how the more difficult *'quick search'* functioned for those pupils who felt confident enough to use it.

## MUSIC

129. Progress throughout the key stage is satisfactory and standards are in line with national expectations. This is an improvement since the last inspection when progress was unsatisfactory throughout the school. Pupils sing well in class lessons and in assemblies. Pitch is at an expected level and pupils have an understanding of phrasing and dynamics. They know the songs they enjoy most and remember the words and actions accurately. They keep the rhythm and beat, clapping their hands and playing untuned percussion instruments.
130. Pupils listen with interest to recorded music particularly when going to and from assembly. They remember the titles from one week to the next, recall the names of composers and can identify some instruments being played. They listen carefully to each other and are keen to participate when performing together. They use the instruments sensibly and carefully.
131. Pupils are enthusiastic about their music and listen well to each other's performances. They work well together on compositions and rhythms. They persevere and concentrate on the tasks and take pride in their performance. Behaviour in music lessons is good except when lessons lack pace and are stopped frequently to ensure that all children are listening carefully. There are regular visits to the school by professional musicians and pupils have the opportunity to listen to string and brass instruments being played.
132. Teaching is satisfactory. It takes place mainly in the school hall, which is very large and acoustically poor. Teachers sometimes use their classrooms, which are better for teaching and learning music. They have suitable knowledge and understanding and follow the sensible scheme of work in their planning to make sure of continuity and progression. They set challenging tasks appropriate to pupils' ages and abilities.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

133. Pupils of all abilities make satisfactory progress and attain standards in line with national expectations by the end of the key stage. This is the same judgement as in the previous inspection. All areas of the curriculum, including gymnastics, dance and skills for games receive appropriate coverage. Pupils transfer skills from one area into another, for instance using balance skills in gymnastics into an outdoor activity.
134. Pupils plan and perform simple skills safely in floor movements. They practise their balancing skills and improve their performance. Although teachers plan for all the required elements of the National Curriculum, only gymnastics and ball skills involving throwing and catching were observed during the inspection. Pupils are well aware of the need for safe practice and recognise the effects of exercise on their body. They can feel the increase in their heart beat and understand the need to rest during the cooling down period of the lesson. They work well and a high level of energy is maintained during the lesson. Pupils listen well to instructions and stop immediately when they are given a signal.
135. Pupils enjoy physical education and their response to lessons is positive with behaviour being always satisfactory or better. They are well aware of the need for safe practice and respond with good levels of enthusiasm and enjoyment.
136. Teaching ranged from good to satisfactory and is sound overall. The teachers plan their lessons using a mix of their own ideas, the scheme of work and BBC broadcasts. Teachers' personal participation in lessons provides pupils with very good examples to follow. The use of good questioning to promote high standards has a significant impact on standards; for example, '*Can you do what Daniel is doing?*' and, '*Are you really trying hard to balance?*'

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

137. Standards overall are in line with the requirements of the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus. However, pupils know few religious stories. They know that Jesus died on a cross, and visits to the local church and to other places of worship extend pupils' understanding. Pupils know the reason for the wearing of the '5 K's' by Sikhs. Pupils' understanding gained from the section that relates to learning about religions is very good. They are thoughtful and ask profound questions about the origins of life and the part that God played.
138. Pupils listen attentively in lessons and respond to questioning. They are keen to add knowledge about the topic discussed. For example, a pupil added that the length of material wound around the head of the Sikh is called a '*turban*'. Where lessons lack pace, pupils tend to chatter and become restless. Pupils are very keen to work on the tasks set and are very ready to talk about their work.
139. The quality of teaching is sound. Teachers base lessons on what pupils already know, for example, that Sikhs worshipped a different God in a '*Gudwara*'. Much of the pace of lessons seen was slow and tasks lacked sufficient challenge to move pupils on in their understanding. There was very good teaching of moral issues. For example, pupils were asked what they would do if asked to do something that they knew was wrong. This was explored at length with them. There is an over-reliance on the use of worksheets, which does not allow pupils to see progression in their learning.

140. The local agreed syllabus is in the process of being changed. Careful monitoring is needed to ensure that there is a good balance between learning about religions and learning from religions. There are currently insufficient artifacts to extend pupils' understanding.