

THE MILESTONE SCHOOL

Gloucester

LEA area: Gloucestershire

Unique reference number: 131557

Headteacher: Vincent Stroud

Reporting inspector: Michael McDowell
1405

Dates of inspection: 24th – 27th September 2001

Inspection number: 230098

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community special
Age range of pupils:	2 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Longford Lane, Gloucester, Gloucestershire
Postcode:	GL2 9EU
Telephone number:	01452 500499
Fax number:	01452 500602
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Ms. K. Hawkins
Date of previous inspection:	Not previously inspected

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1405	Michael McDowell	Registered inspector	Religious education, English as an additional language	How high are standards? How well is the school led and managed?
8941	John Fletcher	Lay inspector		How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
27056	Kathleen Cannon	Team inspector	Information and communications technology, modern foreign language	How well are pupils' taught?
11239	Sue Flockton	Team inspector	The foundation stage	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
2480	Christine Gilder	Team inspector	History, geography, conductive education, Equal opportunities	
13101	Michael Kell	Team inspector	Science, physical education	
27429	Margaret Smith	Team inspector	English, special educational needs	Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development
22948	Mary Vallis	Team inspector	Art, music	
23587	Alastair Younger	Team inspector	Design and technology, mathematics	Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development

The inspection contractor was:

Penta International,
Upperton House,
The Avenue,
Eastbourne,
BN21 3YB

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Milestone is a very large special school formed in 1998 by bringing together three smaller schools. It provides for 267 boys and girls aged between 2 and 16. The majority has moderate or severe learning difficulties and a minority of these has emotional and behavioural difficulties as well. Of the remaining pupils, a significant number have complex communication difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorder, and a smaller group has physical or sensory disabilities. There is also a small number of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. There are 177 boys and 90 girls on roll. Of these 21 boys and 9 girls, aged under five, attend part time. The proportions of pupils within majority and minority ethnic groups is about average for schools of this type across the country. Six pupils, (2.9%), are from Black Caribbean families; one, (.5%), is Chinese, and five, (2.4%), are from other minority groups. A small number of the white pupils come from European but not British families. Only one pupil has English as an additional language and is at an early stage of language acquisition. There are also two traveller children on roll. Most pupils have statements of special educational need but a minority, about 30, are still having their needs assessed. Many, mostly in the foundation stage, are transferred to mainstream schools. The school draws its pupils from a wide socially and economically mixed area. About 31% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is about average for schools of this kind. The school, which has "Beacon" status, is housed in an attractive, large, carefully extended and newly renovated, single story building.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The Milestone is a very good school with many excellent features that fully justify its status as a Beacon School. It offers special education of very high quality. Leadership and management are outstanding and the standard of teaching is very good and pupils learn very well. Pupils' progress, therefore, is better than might be expected. The school gives excellent value for money

What the school does well

- Children in the foundation stage achieve very well and get off to the best possible start.
- The progress made by pupils of all ages and across the range of special educational needs is better than expected; they achieve particularly highly in English, art, geography, history, French, swimming and religious education. Older pupils achieve very well in art and science.
- The leadership and management of the school are excellent and have enabled it to achieve and maintain high standards.
- Teaching of very high quality with many excellent lessons enables the pupils to learn effectively and grow in confidence and the curriculum is very good.
- The care of pupils is excellent; procedures to ensure the health, safety and protection of pupils are clear and well known. Academic and personal progress is monitored very effectively.
- Provision for personal development is very good and, in particular, provision for social development is excellent.
- Parents have a very good opinion of the school.

What could be improved

- The school has no weaknesses of such seriousness that they should be immediately addressed as key issues within the action plan that the governors will prepare in response to this report. A few more minor shortcomings, which the school may wish to address, are identified within the text of the report.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

There has been no previous inspection.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets.

Progress in:	by Year R	by Year 6	by Year 11	
speaking and listening	A	A	A	
reading	A	A	A	
writing	A	A	A	
mathematics	A	B	B	
personal, social and health education	A	A	A	
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	A	A	A	

Key	
very good	A
good	B
satisfactory	C
unsatisfactory	D
poor	E

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

Children in the foundation stage get off to a very good start and achieve highly. For pupils at all levels of ability, and across the age range from 5 to 16, achievement is better than expected; in a significant number of subjects the progress made is even more marked and pupils achieve highly. Pupils do very well in English, geography, history, French, swimming and religious education. Progress is also very good in science for those aged 11 to 14 and in art for those aged 14 to 16. In only one subject, design and technology, is achievement less than good although it is, nevertheless, satisfactory. Here, progress is held back because the range of work that can be attempted is limited by lack of specialist accommodation and resources. Twelve pupils gained grades in the GCSE examinations at the end of the summer term 2001 and certificates and awards from national accrediting bodies. Pupils make very good progress in personal, social and health education and towards the targets that are set for them at reviews of their statements and in their individual education plans. The school has set a range of targets for school improvement. These are realistic and based on what is known about the pupils' capabilities. Most of the targets were achieved. Targets based on accreditation of learning at age 16 were met in most cases.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good; pupils are cheerful and pleased to be in school; they happily co-operate with their teachers during lessons. They help one another and work effectively together in collaborative groups.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good; pupils behave very well and respond to instructions readily. They achieve their behaviour targets where these are set for them and they show respect for adults and for one another. There have been no permanent exclusions in the past year.
Personal development and relationships	Very good; at an early stage, pupils develop strong relationships with their teachers and those who care for their needs within the school. By the time they are ready to leave, pupils are more independent and take more responsibility for their own learning and for managing their own needs.
Attendance	Good; attendance is good and there is very little unauthorised absence. The school has very good strategies to ensure attendance.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 – 6	Years 7 – 11	
Quality of teaching	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	

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

Very good; teaching is of high quality. Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects and of their pupils. Planning is very good, lessons run smoothly and learning is strongly promoted. Pupils respond very well; over time, they take increased responsibility for their own learning. Teaching of children in the foundation stage is very good. Teaching in English is very good; some outstanding lessons lead to remarkable, insightful responses from the pupils. Very good strategies are employed to develop the basic skills of speaking, listening, reading, spelling and writing. Teaching in mathematics is of high quality, and half of lessons observed were very good or excellent. Strategies to promote the development of numeracy are very good and pupils learn very well and make positive progress. Overall, teaching in science is of high quality with a substantial proportion of very good lessons and pupils learn well, especially between the ages of 11 and 14. Teaching is of high quality in art where it is particularly good for secondary pupils. Design and technology is taught well but limitations in provision lessen the impact of teaching on pupils' progress. Very good and sometimes excellent teaching in French ensures that pupils learn confidently and well. In music, teaching is good, and very good when a specialist teacher takes the lesson. Information and communications technology is taught confidently and well. High quality teaching promotes effective learning in History, geography, physical education and religious education. Teaching of personal, social and health education is very effective and strongly promotes the personal development of pupils. Methods such as Conductive Education, Treatment and Education of Autistic Children and Children with related Communication Handicaps, (TEACCH), techniques, or Picture Exchange Communication, (PECS), are well used to help meet all pupils' special educational needs very well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good; the curriculum is very well planned and organised and meets statutory requirements. Provision for pupils with greater or more complex special educational needs is first rate. The school enables all its pupils to take part in the fullest possible range of activities and lessons.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good; the school provides excellent opportunities for social development; pupils are fully involved both in the school and the wider community. Moral development is founded on a clear set of expectations about behaviour. Many opportunities within assemblies and the curriculum promote spiritual and cultural development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Excellent; the school has clear procedures for ensuring the protection, safety and welfare of its pupils. Assessment of pupils' attainment and personal development are remarkably thorough. The school meets the special needs of its pupils very well.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the head teacher and other key staff	Excellent; the outstanding leadership given by the head teacher and others in leadership roles, coupled with management of a very high standard, has enabled the school to become very effective, very quickly.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Very good; the governors are ambitious for the school, have very good knowledge of what it does well and of those areas where improvement is necessary. They play a full part in shaping it as it develops. They fulfil their statutory duties.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent; the school has developed a very clear policy and a range of strategies to keep its performance under review. It sets appropriate targets for pupil performance and evaluates progress towards these.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent; the school makes the best use of the resources available. Grants are used extremely effectively and, by comparing its achievements with those of similar schools, it improves its performance.

Accommodation is excellent overall although the planned design and technology room has not yet been provided. There are sufficient, well-qualified teachers and other staff to meet the needs of the pupils and the demands of the curriculum. Learning resources are of high quality and professionally managed within a resource base.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>The great majority of parents believe that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching is of high quality and the school is open and approachable. • Their children enjoy going to school and Teachers expect their children to succeed. • The school is managed very well and it maintains contact with them and gives them the information they need. 	<p>A very small proportion of parents believe that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children are offered too little to do outside of lessons • That their child is given too little homework • The school does not keep them sufficiently informed about how their child is getting on.

The inspectors' findings support the positive views of the parents about the strengths of the school. Evidence does not support the view that there is insufficient activity offered beyond lessons. The school makes good provision for extra curricular activities. For many pupils homework is not appropriate but it is offered, when necessary, in accordance with the policy of the school. The evidence that the school works closely with parents is clear.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Children in the foundation stage do very well. They achieve highly and get off to a very good start. At first, they are unable to listen and have very few words or none at all. Through high quality teaching, they begin to communicate effectively. By the age of five, they follow spoken instructions that are reinforced by sign where necessary, and they listen to stories. They make increasing use of speech to communicate their wants, needs and ideas.

2. Pre-reading skills develop very rapidly. Children learn letters and a few can recognise their name when written, or familiar labels. As a prelude to writing, they make marks on paper with increased confidence. They acquire a range of skills necessary to learn in mathematics. They come to know and join in counting rhymes and learn to match objects by shape and colour. Across the age range of early learning goals, very good progress is made.

3. Pupils aged 5 to 16 at all levels of ability achieve well as they respond to the provision made for them. In English, pupils do much better than could be expected. Good use has been made of the principles of the National Literacy Strategy. Where necessary, specialist techniques such as TEACCH strategies, PECS, and Conductive Education are skilfully used to make the lessons understood by all pupils and to help them to learn as much as possible. Listening skills are effective and the social conventions, such as turn taking, are established. Higher attaining pupils tell their news and they remember and retell stories. By age 7, pupils communicate effectively using the system that is most effective for them, speech, sign or symbol.

4. By the age of 11, significant further progress is made and pupils make good use of the language and literacy skills they have acquired in other subjects. Higher attaining pupils by the age of 14 are familiar with many stories and plays. They talk about characters in these, and about their motives, and this shows their very good understanding. For those for whom symbols and signs are a medium of communication, there is clear extension of their confidence and competence.

5. Pupils across the age range make accelerating progress in writing and they achieve very well. The strategy of pupils sharing their writing tasks is used effectively throughout the school. While younger pupils make marks that are meaningful to them on paper, higher attaining pupils aged 11 write sentences independently. By the age of 14, writing is sufficiently good to allow higher attainers to write down their response to books and plays with which they are familiar. By the age of 15, pupils are well placed to attain the Certificate of Achievement in English. Their writing is clear and makes use of standard punctuation.

6. In mathematics, pupils do well and meet the individual targets set for them regardless of their levels of attainment. They get a good start, gaining familiarity with a range of words that are used in mathematics, related to shape, size and the manipulation of numbers. Those with the most extreme difficulties use switches or mannerisms to communicate their recognition of shape or colour. By the age of seven, many have made a start on gathering and presenting data. Those aged 11 are increasingly competent in solving simple sums and writing down their answers. They begin to learn their times tables

and higher attainers solve problems involving money or length and weight. Pupils in their final year prepare for external accredited examinations. Higher attainers enter for the General Certificate of Secondary Education. Last year three pupils achieved a grade. Entry level certificates in mathematics were gained by eight pupils.

7. Achievement in science is good overall and for pupils aged 11 to 14 it is very good. Between 7 and 11, there is good development of pupils' understanding of themselves and the world around them. They acquire skills in observation, drawing and recording in the course of planned investigations. They come to distinguish between living and non-living things and they become familiar with physical forces such as gravity and electricity. They are confident in their knowledge of healthy eating and of how to preserve their teeth.

8. Between the ages of 11 and 14, pupils' learning takes off as an increasing emphasis is placed on investigation and experiment. By the age of 16, pupils are well placed to gain accreditation for their learning. They enter for the GCSE science, (single award), in which five pupils gained a grade in 2001. Eight pupils also gained "entry level" certificates in science.

9. In almost all other subjects, pupils' achievement is good or better. In art, pupils achieve well overall, but very well between the ages of 14 and 16, when a significant number attain standards in line with those found in mainstream schools. In both history and geography, achievement is very good across the age range. In French, achievement is also very good and those with complex learning needs make excellent progress. Achievement in physical education is good overall with very good progress in swimming. In religious education achievement is very good for pupils of all abilities.

10. In music and information and communications technology, achievement is good overall. In design and technology, good progress is made by pupils who are aged 7 to 11 but thereafter progress is slowed by shortcomings in provision, and teaching and achievement in the subject is satisfactory overall.

11. Pupils make very good progress in personal, social, and health education and they meet the targets set for them in their individual education plans very well.

12. The progress made by pupils with complex learning difficulties including autistic spectrum disorder is very good. Those with profound and multiple learning difficulties also achieve more than might be expected.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

13. Attitudes to school are very good, pupils arrive smiling and respond with enthusiasm when welcomed by staff. Because of high expectations and very good teaching, pupils show interest in their work in class, and make good efforts to achieve. This is especially true of pupils with profound and multiple difficulties, who work strenuously to make their contribution. Year 9 pupils, leading an assembly, demonstrated their enthusiasm by bringing treasured mementoes of their birth, and talking about them to the rest of the Key Stage.

14. The school has a good behaviour policy, with appropriate rewards and sanctions, which is implemented consistently. Incidents are graded according to their seriousness and there are clear guidelines for action, including the involvement of parent for the more serious incidents. There is good recording and monitoring. However, most pupils behave very well in class because lessons are interesting and often exciting. Pupils share in the

setting of behaviour targets, most of which are regularly achieved. Moving around school, the majority of pupils take pride in their good behaviour, showing respect for staff, visitors and each other. Lunch times are well-organised social occasions when pupils show good table manners and are polite and friendly. Outside recreation is well organised, with separate areas for the more vulnerable pupils, for those whose special needs call for a secure area and greater supervision, for active games including climbing frames, and for football. Therefore, behaviour is very good.

15. There have been no permanent exclusions. Temporary exclusions have reduced in frequency and are due to a very small number of pupils.

16. Pupils' ability to show initiative and take responsibility increases as they move through the school. In Early Years, children help to clear away after lessons, and at lunchtime. Primary pupils take responsibility for their equipment, and the collection and return of the register. They take turns well, queue patiently for lunch and clear away carefully. They looked after visitors well at lunchtime, explaining the system, and offering help. Senior pupils show independence and initiative. They have their own common room where behaviour is orderly, and run the school council, making decisions, for example about school uniform.

17. Relationships in the school are very good, between staff and pupils and between pupils and their peers. Pupils regularly work in pairs or groups and co-operate well. In a drama lesson in Year 9 very productive group work was observed, with clear signs of emerging leadership qualities. The respect shown to pupils by all staff results in a growth of self-esteem, which enables pupils to show respect for each other.

18. Pupils are progressively aware of the impact of their behaviour on others, and parents feel that they are encouraged to be sensitive to the feelings of people around them. Awareness of feelings is promoted through lessons such as literacy and drama.

19. Occasional bullying, usually verbal is dealt with firmly and pupils are aware of procedures. They are encouraged to talk to someone if they have a problem. The school council plays a role in the elimination of oppressive behaviour.

20. Attendance is good and pupils are pleased to come to school. Punctuality is enhanced by the prompt arrival of the transport provided for the pupils. The school takes effective steps to ensure attendance and limit unauthorised absence.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

21. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall, and this is reflected in the pupils' high levels of achievement. One in ten lessons are excellent. Teachers of all year groups maintain these high standards. There is no unsatisfactory teaching.

22. Teachers have a secure knowledge of their subjects. Their well balanced and efficient lesson planning together with good organisational and behaviour management skills, create a good learning ethos in which the pupils work with enthusiastic and positive attitudes. Teachers know their students well consequently their levels of expectation are realistically challenging. Very good use is made of individual education and behaviour plans, to inform lesson planning. This ensures that the needs of all pupils are well met and that subject targets are appropriate.

23. All teachers use a range of strategies to promote learning, often through a multi-sensory approach, such as in religious education, where learning is reinforced through the smell and taste of cooking, the feel of water, the sight of pictures, the touch of feathers and the hearing of voices. The pupils work hard and well paced and varied lessons promote maximum concentration and effort. There are good cross-curricular links between subjects.

24. In Year 9 history for example, the Renaissance period is linked to English, through Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*; to art, where the pupils examine a portrait of the *Mona Lisa*; and to information and communication technology, where they use digitised photos of themselves to create their own renaissance style portraits. This effectively reinforces learning over a range of subjects.

25. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good, with pupils understanding what is expected from them, therefore inappropriate behaviour is minimal. In all years, independence is actively promoted. For younger students this may be simply returning registers, but older students are encouraged to show visitors around, engage in work experiences or take responsibility for aspects of their own learning such as using the Internet for research.

26. Because teaching is so well founded and secure, pupils across the age and ability range learn very well. They are interested in their lessons and they try very hard to do their best. A good feature is the degree to which they collaborate with and help one another. Older pupils take some responsibility for their own learning. For example, they make good use of information and communications technology to discover information they need or to enhance their work.

27. Assessment forms an integral part of the teachers' lesson planning and is effectively used to inform future planning, which creates progressive continuity, and enables a smooth transition for students as they move up the school. Written work is consistently marked and skilled question and answer sessions at the close of lessons highlight what students have learned as well as promoting an awareness of their own learning. Beautiful displays, featuring subject material and samples of the students' own work, further reinforce this awareness.

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

28. The school provides pupils with a very good range of learning opportunities, which generally meet statutory requirements and give pupils a broad experience of all the subjects of the National Curriculum and Religious Education. At present, there are some gaps in the curriculum for Design and Technology, but these will be addressed when the necessary accommodation is completed. The curriculum for the under fives which is based on the areas of learning for pupils at the foundation stage, is also very good. There are good opportunities for accreditation for pupils when they are 16.

29. The planning of schemes of work, which are being developed with different subjects being focused on each year, is exemplary, with clear outcomes for pupils of different abilities. Half-termly and daily planning are based on these schemes. The planning is based on the programmes of study in the National Curriculum, and for those aged 14 to 16, on the syllabi for accredited courses. The school ensures that as many pupils as possible have these opportunities for accreditation and pupils are able to take GCSE and Certificate of Achievement examinations where this is appropriate. In addition, there is accreditation through the National Skills Profile, the AQA Unit Award Scheme and the Accreditation for

Life and Living schemes. The latter allows pupils to be accredited for their skills, whatever level they have reached.

30. Almost all pupils in the school have statements of special educational need, and the information from these is used to set targets in individual education plans. No pupil is disadvantaged from any aspect of the National Curriculum. For younger pupils with physical disabilities such as cerebral palsy, who require a significant level of help to develop mobility skills, there is a Conductive Education programme which is very well integrated in to the areas of learning for early years pupils. In addition, for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder elements of the TEACCH programme are used in the delivery of the curriculum.

31. The school has made very good progress with the implementation of the National Literacy and National Numeracy Strategies at Key Stages 1 and 2, and the National Literacy Strategy has already been introduced into Key Stage 3. These strategies are being well adapted to meet the needs of pupils. Communication, language and literacy are very well promoted across the curriculum.

32. The school provides very good opportunities to enrich the curriculum. A range of visits gives support to pupils' learning in different areas of the curriculum. For example, pupils have visited Shurdington and Hazelfield Garden Centres to look at plant growth, Burford Wildlife Park to look at habitats, and the Tewkesbury Tudors Museum. They have compared towns and villages during visits to the Forest of Dean and Gloucester, been involved in a "sound walk" at Painswick and have taken a boat trip to look at rivers. Visits to places such as Tewkesbury Abbey, the Mariners Chapel, Hardwick Church and Gloucester Cathedral have allowed for comparisons between different types of church building. Exciting projects such as "Global Awareness" have been supported by a number of visits, and by visitors to the school. While opportunities for extra curricular activities are, of necessity, limited because of the difficulties with transport, pupils have good opportunities for lunchtime clubs for sports and computers. Pupils at all Key Stages are able to take part in residential experiences linked to activities such as water sports visiting, for example, South Cerney and Stackpole.

33. Provision for Personal, Social and Health Education is very good. There are clear policies for Personal, Social and Health Education, including the statutory requirements for sex education and drugs awareness. There are very good cross-curricular links with many other areas of the curriculum. A policy has been written for citizenship, and a curriculum is being developed, considering elements of citizenship already covered in other subjects, and those aspects that will need discrete teaching. As an "in focus" subject this year, the curriculum for Personal, Social and Health Education is being redeveloped where necessary.

34. Provision for careers and work related education is very good. Pupils from year 9 have a programme of careers education. There are close links with the local careers adviser who visits the school on a regular basis to interview pupils, to attend transition reviews and to participate in some lessons. Pupils in years 10 and 11 have the opportunity to participate in "Challenge to Industry". Pupils, who are thinking of transferring to local colleges, have the opportunity of visiting those colleges and of participating in taster courses. Where appropriate, pupils undertake work experience. For some this is within the school setting, while others have a range of opportunities in the community, including a farm, a leisure centre, a garage, a restaurant and a graphics agency. Pupils are well prepared for this experience, and their work is carefully monitored.

35. The school has excellent links with the community, which contribute to pupils' learning. The school is involved in an Education and Business partnership that aims to promote links between the school and businesses. As part of this there have been "Challenge to Industry" days in which pupils in years 10 and 11 have been involved. Originally this involved those pupils with moderate learning difficulties, but the school has been involved in developing a similar day for pupils with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Several local businesses such as banks, building societies, and supermarkets have been involved in this project. Many of the curriculum related visits which pupils undertake are within the local area. Visitors from the community are involved in talking to pupils about aspects of their work; for example, there have been visits from the fire brigade, the police, a paramedic and a lifeguard. A radio appeal for help in creating the sensory garden led to the involvement of many members of the community on a voluntary basis, while others regularly help with swimming for the pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

36. Links with partner institutions are excellent. Pupils aged 14 to 16 have opportunities to participate in courses of varying lengths at different colleges, for example, Hartpury Agricultural College, Stroud College and Gloucestershire College of Art and Technology. There are links with several local schools, for example, some pupils aged 11 to 16 have been to Oxstalls School to make use of facilities for Design and Technology and sports. Several pupils from local secondary schools help in the Milestone once a week with activities such as IT. The early years classes have had a primary school link through the Education Action Zone, (EAZ), and there are close links with those primary schools where pupils are being included. There are links for sports, and through the "Challenge to Industry", with other special schools. All of these enhance pupils learning experiences.

37. Conductive Education is a strong feature of the school's provision in the Early Years and Key Stage 1. Teacher conductors, who have undertaken a specialist initial training course, integrate the learning programmes to promote independence and maximise mobility with the full curriculum range for all pupils. Teaching is excellent, and the contribution made by the whole staff team to children's individual and group learning is outstanding. Close attention paid to the physical supports and instructions needed for each individual, enables pupils whose communication or mobility is severely limited to demonstrate, through action and symbols, their understanding and ability.

38. This approach can also benefit older students and those with the most complex, multi-sensory impairments. The school could now build from this foundation skills and knowledge of other teachers within the school, and in other schools locally, to explore how the benefits of the approach could be applied more widely, to carefully chosen individuals.

39. The school takes its commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity seriously, and is engaged in a range of activities to promote inclusion in mainstream both for its own pupils and by providing support to other special and mainstream schools. There is a clear commitment to securing further resources from the LEA to develop this further.

40. Through the curriculum, the school promotes pupils' understanding of other cultural traditions, heritage and religious beliefs effectively, in work in religious education, history and geography, and in the whole school focus on global awareness. The planned development of data analysis to identify pupils at risk of social exclusion and underachievement is timely. The imbalance of boys and girls on the pupil roll, and the performance of pupils from ethnic minorities, including Travellers will raise awareness of these pupils' needs further.

41. Within the school population, pupils whose additional needs are complex are very well provided for in terms of the curriculum offered, the identification of needs for support and specialised teaching and learning strategies. The emerging use of PECs communication systems, the use of TEACCH and structured teaching methods for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, and conductive education for pupils with cerebral palsy or other mobility difficulties is a strength in the provision. A wide range of accreditation schemes is in use to recognise the academic progress of all pupils, and the most able student are challenges and extended by GCSE and Entry Level Certification in a range of subjects.

Pupils' personal development

42. At the heart of the school is provision for pupils' personal development, which is well ahead of that found in many other schools. The degree to which pupils are made to feel special, for reasons other than their disabilities, is exceptional. That pupils' work is valued is evident in the many beautiful displays around the school, but especially in the murals and installations that form a more permanent reminder of their achievements. A large, new, leisure area, for instance, is incorporating many features inspired by pupils' work, including a relief pattern created by a blind pupil. A great deal of energy is put into regular assemblies, which offer planned opportunities for celebration and contemplation.

43. The school does very well in helping pupils to recognise the difference between right and wrong. In religious education, pupils are helped to understand that people of all races and creeds share many similar views about good and evil. As they grow older, pupils are increasingly helped to understand that as well as rights they have responsibilities. Older pupils are encouraged to apply for simple jobs within the school, and younger ones help with simpler tasks such as helping to serve and clear away at lunchtimes. Staff are adept at praising pupils when they deserve it. They do not ignore errant behaviour but neither do they dwell unduly on it. A younger pupil, for instance, was helped to understand that despite bad behaviour earlier in the day he still deserved a merit reward for the good things he had done since. Older pupils are helped to think about the impact of their actions, rather than simply being told off.

44. There is exceptional provision for helping pupils to become valuable members of society. Far from hiding these children away, the school promotes their involvement in society through hosting fetes and fund-raising activities. It ensures that the maximum possible publicity is gained for all of these events and does a wonderful job in bringing the community into the school as well as getting the pupils out of it. It is a delight to watch pupils, irrespective of their disability, playing team games fairly and with enthusiasm. Pupils with the greatest communication difficulties are given invaluable guidance as to how to conduct themselves through the well-delivered Social Use of Language Programme.

45. Developing pupils' awareness of their own and other cultures is very well addressed. There are extensive opportunities for pupils to visit local places of interest, museums and art galleries and there are a great many books about other cultures. A string of artists in residence has worked with pupils to develop themes. Every pupil participates in 'Global Awareness' weeks, where they gain invaluable insights into life on other continents. These have included Australia, where a native Australian shared with pupils the music, dance and art of his people and America, where pupils in Years 3,4,5 and 6 produced a beautiful, traditional quilt, now displayed proudly in the school. The school has few pupils drawn from cultures other than that of the white European majority. However, through its work in religious education, art and other subjects, it prepares its pupils well for life in a multi-cultural society.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

46. Milestone provides very effective personal support and guidance for pupils and this has a significant impact on the standards they achieve and the progress they make. Within the context of the school, pupils are happy, they respond well to the personal attention, and there is very good evidence to show that the vast majority enjoy and benefit from their time at the school. Teaching, support and therapy staff, who clearly all know pupils very well, effectively and consistently support and help pupils in a caring and understanding way. The procedures to deal with Child Protection issues are excellent and meet statutory requirements. The school is vigilant and sensitive in exercising its responsibilities. The close working of on-site health service specialists with education staff is a strong feature of the school. This contributes significantly to the personal, social and academic development of pupils. The school also enjoys very effective working relationships with the Educational Welfare Service, Educational Psychologists and Social Services.

47. The school has very clear procedures to ensure pupils' health and safety. The investment programme associated with the amalgamation of the three schools took full account of all health and safety requirements and has ensured that the site and buildings are safe and well protected. The site manager and all staff are conscientious in ensuring that any identified health and safety concerns are reported and quickly eliminated. The school has regular fire practices and there are appropriate records of fire prevention and electrical equipment inspections. The resident nursing staff effectively manage the storage, record keeping and dispensing of medicines ensuring that pupils follow their medical regimes accurately. Appropriate first aid supplies are available around the site and first aiders in each key stage area hold up to date accreditation. There are good procedures for dealing with accidents and incidents and clear records are maintained. In lessons observed during the inspection, great care was taken to ensure pupils' safety. In a religious education lesson on Sikhism where pupils had lighted candles, they were made well aware of the dangers and staff were very careful to ensure safe practice.

48. The school has very good procedures in place for monitoring and promoting attendance. Any unauthorised absence is followed up rigorously and there is good evidence of the school working effectively to improve the overall attendance levels. The attendance manager effectively monitors whole school performance whilst working closely with individuals experiencing attendance problems. It is planned to introduce an award system to recognise good and improved attendance and a target to improve further, the already good attendance, has been agreed. The excellent procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour that are consistently applied by all staff have a significant impact on overall standards. Pupils with identified behaviour problems have individual behaviour improvement plans which have sensible measurable targets for improvement and all pupils have individual education plans, many of which contain behaviour targets.

49. Formal review of progress against targets takes place termly but day to day observations and alerts ensure that pupils are closely monitored and that rapid intervention occurs. Teachers and support staff throughout the school consistently promote good behaviour through the excellent use of praise and encouragement and by using reward schemes to publicly recognise good and caring behaviour. A strength of the school is the way in which all pupils' efforts and achievements, no matter how small, are genuinely valued and celebrated. The behaviour code is successfully reinforced by staff encouraging pupils to respect others' views and opinions, and through the expectation that pupils gradually take more responsibility for themselves and for their work. The school has good

procedures in place to deal with bullying and is effective in restricting all forms of oppressive behaviour.

50. The procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal and social development are excellent. Individual education plans contain clear targets for personal development and progress against these is regularly recorded as a result of observation, input from therapists and following daily discussions between teaching and support staff. As they progress through the school pupils are given increasing opportunities to take responsibility for aspects of community life, and to enhance personal and social skills through integration programmes with mainstream schools, through the personal and social education lessons and through interaction with the wider community on outings and residential visits. The careers and work experience programmes provide good opportunities for pupils to prepare for life after school.

51. The school's assessment and monitoring of pupils' learning and personal development is excellent. The head teacher's annual analysis of the progress of all pupils is detailed, and the interpretation of this performance information informs priorities in the School Improvement Plan. Pupils' success in meeting the targets in their Individual Education Plans (IEPs) is closely analysed and new targets for groups of pupils are set annually. Each pupil's personal targets reflect their annual review, and these are reassessed once a term. In some cases these lacked the necessary detail to be monitored effectively, but the vast majority are carefully designed, realistic and show detail and fine levels of discrimination about individuals' learning and next steps.

52. Teachers and support staff show first rate knowledge of their pupils' abilities and needs. Where pupils have complex or rare impairments, valuable information from a range of sources including the Internet is available in profile summaries used daily by all who work with the class. Personal development is tracked closely across a wide range of areas that includes behaviour, mobility, communication, therapy and health, depending on individual need.

53. Records of performance in class are completed by teachers and support assistants, and a strong feature of many lessons is the review of group and individual learning at the end of each lesson. This is particularly effective with older pupils. For those aged 11 to 16, the skills needed are covered by "Star Targets". These improve their learning and personal skills, and relationships. At the end of lessons, discussions with the more able pupils about their performance include their own assessment, and the views of the teacher and other pupils. Pupils with complex needs also participate effectively in these feedback sessions.

54. Assessment in the subjects of the curriculum shows a consistent approach across the school. Subject co-ordinators review teachers' samples of assessed work for accuracy and the profiles manager, the curriculum deputy, and subject co-ordinators monitor the effectiveness of assessment methods for pupils by age and ability. All the key approaches being developed nationally for pupils with special educational needs are in use at the school, and further review and development is planned, particularly for the youngest pupils and those with complex additional needs. Detailed target files for each pupil will demonstrate this progress over time. Parents at the school greatly value the information they receive about learning and progress.

55. The senior management team has identified the next stage of developments for monitoring achievement. In the coming year, the school will develop ways to use its existing data on ethnicity, gender and social disadvantage to monitor the performance of

specific groups of pupils. This will refine and improve understanding of the performance of all its pupils and planning to raise standards further.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

56. The school works hard to develop partnership with parents and the very good links, which now exist, contribute positively to pupils' learning and development. Despite the school having a very large catchment area, a close and interactive relationship exists with the vast majority of parents. New initiatives to enhance and develop further the relationship with, and involvement of, parents are constantly being tried. Responses to the questionnaire and feedback at the consultation meeting confirm that parents hold very positive views of the school and its work. Parents overwhelmingly agree that their children like school, that they are making good progress, and that the teaching is good. They think that behaviour is good, that they are kept well informed on progress, and that expectations are high. They feel welcome approaching the school and they think that the school is well managed and that the school is helping their children to become more responsible. A few parents raised some concerns about the quantity of homework being set. Inspectors judge that the amount of work being set for completion at home is appropriate and that it is being used well to reinforce classroom learning. At the consultation meeting, some concerns about the therapeutic provision at the school were raised. Inspectors can confirm that all stated therapy needs are now and have always been met. In recent times there have been some staffing difficulties in the physiotherapy and speech and language therapy areas that have now been resolved. Whilst comprehensive systems are in place to ensure parents are informed about therapy programmes and pupils' targets for development, new initiatives to enhance information flow and involvement of parents in therapy provision are planned.

57. Communication with parents is very good. The school operates an open door policy, actively encourages dialogue and ensures that views and opinions are taken into account. Parents are well informed about personal and academic progress at parents' forums, formal parents' evenings, at annual reviews and at any time should there be any cause for concern. More than eight out of ten parents attend annual reviews and are fully involved in agreeing appropriate development targets. The school for parents is a particularly successful initiative for parents of physically disabled children. This explains the conductive education approach and enables parents to support development programmes at home. A new series of parent workshops is about to start and this will provide helpful information on aspects of the work of the school and the role of the support services. Internal specialists will be available to help parents with signing and mobility development whilst external speakers will provide valuable information regarding benefit support and welfare services. The day to day life of the school community is effectively shared with parents through the fortnightly bulletin, at school functions and presentation sessions and at well attended social occasions organised by the active Friends Association. The good links between the school and parents ensure that parents' views have an impact on the work of the school and that the vast majority of parents is working closely with the school to further their children's learning and development.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

58. The head teacher provides excellent leadership. He has worked tirelessly since his appointment as the inaugural head teacher of the school to communicate his vision of what the school should be and the educational standards to which it should aspire. He has sought the best advice he could find and has undertaken high quality professional development so as to be thoroughly equipped to lead and improve the school. He is

exceptionally well supported by the deputy head teachers and other senior staff who carry out essential leadership and management tasks in this large and complex school. They clearly share the head teacher's view about the direction that the school must take.

59. There is a very well thought out plan to take the school forward and all developments are related to aims that strongly emphasise the importance of children's learning. This plan enables the school to focus in turn on the review, evaluation and improvement of what is offered in each subject of the curriculum.

60. National priorities and new legislative requirements beyond the curriculum are also planned for, and for each key stage, specific targets to improve performance are set. The plan puts in order of priority those matters that must be addressed.

61. For each improvement, the names of those responsible for bringing about the planned change, the date by which this is to be done, and the costs that will be incurred are made clear. There is also a process and allocated responsibility for keeping each plan under review. This planning process has proved effective in developing and improving organisation, raising expectations of what pupils can do, and driving up pupils' levels of achievement. Because it is a Beacon School in an Education Action Zone, Milestone bids for and receives grants to develop and share its good practice with other schools. It uses these grants very well.

62. A great strength of the leadership is the widespread delegation of responsibilities. The areas for which responsibility is delegated to senior staff include obvious tasks such as management of the curriculum, which a deputy head teacher carries out extremely well, and less obviously, important matters such as communications and attendance. Because of the complexity of funding and staffing arrangements, the school has a business manager who is a member of the senior management, to take overall charge of these issues.

63. The senior managers and all those who have particular responsibilities are very clear about what these entail, and the quality and effectiveness of their work is regularly reviewed by their peers or their line managers. At regular scheduled managers' meetings, they report on matters of immediate concern. Systems for giving and receiving information in the school are very effective.

64. There is very good monitoring and oversight of the performance of the school. Pupils' performance is monitored and the information gathered is shared so that what needs to be improved can be identified. There is a strong commitment to ensuring equal opportunity. The school is developing the analysis it makes of the data it gathers about pupils' performance to ensure that all minority groups are making the progress they should. The school is strongly committed to improvement and continued success.

65. Governors carry out their duties very well. They have a sound committee structure and use this arrangement to maintain oversight of the working of the school. They are well aware of what the school does well and where there is need for improvement. They have put in place a policy to monitor and improve the performance of the school and they implement this rigorously. They carry out all their statutory duties and are fully involved in planning and budget making.

66. A range of suitable targets for pupil performance have been set and these form a benchmark against which school improvement may be judged.

67. The success of the head teacher and those in management roles in bringing together the staff and pupils of the three schools that combined to form The Milestone has been remarkable. There were initial difficulties as well established professionals were required to modify their practice or to take on new roles, but now it is clear that almost all who work there have come to share the vision for the school that the head teacher, senior managers and governors have put forward.

68. Financial planning at the school is very good. The governors and senior management team take full account of the financial implications when agreeing the priorities for school development. The transitional budget arrangements following the period of school amalgamation have been very well managed. Each curriculum area in turn has carried out a detailed review and been provided with funds to ensure good quality resources to deliver the planned work programmes. The school now needs to review the procedures for budget allocation to subject areas to ensure that each annual allocation reflects the agreed short-term development priorities. Very good systems are in place to check that spending decisions are reviewed against measurable targets for improvement and the school is well advanced in ensuring that best value principles are embedded in everyday practice. The substantial grant funds received from the Standards Fund, from the Education Action Zone Fund and for being a Beacon School are used for the designated purposes and effectively enhance the overall quality of education provided. Excellent systems monitor grant spending and assess the impact on standards. The school effectively seeks to make sure that it is giving good value for money to its pupils whilst ensuring that it gets good value for money in what it purchases.

69. There are sufficient well-qualified teachers to meet the needs of pupils. The school has not experienced any recruitment difficulties. The teachers are very well supported by the significant contributions made by learning support assistants and the range of therapists who work in the school. The school's continuing ability to provide such very good learning experiences that meet the pupils' academic, therapeutic, social and communication needs is strongly supported by its induction programme and in-service training procedures. An effectively planned induction programme enables all new school staff to become familiar with the aims of the school quickly so that they are able to promote the school's values through their day-to-day work. Staff who work in the school but are not employed by it, such as therapists and lunchtime assistants, are also offered the opportunity to benefit from this programme. Newly qualified teachers are also very well supported by the school's mentoring programme.

70. The school provides a very good range of professional development and training opportunities that are available to all staff as well as supporting staff following external courses. There is a good mix of training as some is linked specifically to the priorities identified in the school improvement plan whilst there is also an ongoing rolling programme of specialist training in areas such as TEACCH and PECS. Very strong performance management and appraisal mechanisms apply to all staff and these underpin the improvement strategies of the school.

71. Accommodation is excellent and meets the needs of all pupils. There is a range of specialist teaching accommodation for subjects such as science, art and music, but the lack of dedicated accommodation for design and technology reduces the effective delivery of the subject. However, to compensate for this, workshops in another school are used. In addition to specialist teaching areas, the school also has very high quality accommodation for therapeutic work, such as physiotherapy. There is a hydrotherapy pool, and outside areas, such as the well-designed sensory garden, provide attractive and safe play and teaching areas.

72. Pupils' learning is supported very well by the range, quality and management of resources in the school. A central resource area for texts and other materials and artefacts has a dedicated part-time administrator who ensures the efficient management of these resources. Effective auditing, storage and signing out systems ensure that resources can be tracked and these processes are becoming increasingly efficient as resource information is being transferred to electronic systems.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

73. The school has no weaknesses of such seriousness that they should be immediately addressed as key issues within the action plan. However, the following minor issues, which are identified in the body of the report, should be taken into consideration by the governors when they are drawing up their action plan in response to it.

The school and the governors should:

- develop data analysis to give clear indication of the comparative achievement of identifiable groups of pupils. (Paragraph numbers 54 and 63).
- improve provision for design and technology by developing suitable accommodation within the school for work with resistant materials. (Paragraph numbers 10, 27, 113, 115).
- ensure that teachers of design and technology in Years 7 to 11 fully understand the importance of problem solving and the development of making skills, and that this is reflected in their planning. (Paragraph number 114).
- improve target setting for some individuals in mathematics so that learning remains purposeful. (Paragraph number 100).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	119
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	49

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	15	33	52	19	0	0	0
Percentage	12.6	27.7	43.6	16.0	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. [When the total number is substantially less than 100, add] Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than one [two, three, etc] percentage point[s]. [Where the total is close to or greater than 100, use only the first sentence.]

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	267
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	82

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	7
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	9

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.6

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.3

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	6
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	255
Any other minority ethnic group	5

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	1	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	8	2
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YN – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	35
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	7.6
Average class size	9

Education support staff: YN – Y11

Total number of education support staff	62
Total aggregate hours worked per week	1,703

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
	£
Total income	2,364,474
Total expenditure	2,309,051
Expenditure per pupil	8,649
Balance brought forward from previous year	70,000
Balance carried forward to next year	125,423

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	5
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	267
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.	90	7	3	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	66	25	5	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	49	44	2	0	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	31	14	0	24
The teaching is good.	85	15	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	64	27	5	3	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	75	22	2	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	36	0	2	3
The school works closely with parents.	61	31	7	2	0
The school is well led and managed.	61	32	3	2	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	58	31	2	2	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	51	17	3	5	24

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

Early learning goals

74. Standards of achievement in the foundation stage are very good overall. Pupils enter the nursery classes with low levels of attainment, and, given their special educational needs are unlikely to reach the early learning goals by the time they reach the end of the reception year. However, because of the very good teaching and the wide range of stimulating activities, the children make very good progress towards the targets in their individual education plans.

Personal social and emotional development

75. Pupils make very good progress in this area. Classrooms are very attractive, and provide a stimulating and safe environment for the pupils, who respond well to their surroundings and grow in confidence. They begin to develop an understanding of the structure of the school day, which is often reinforced at the beginnings of sessions as activities are named and symbols are put on a board. Where possible, children make comments and observations, and sometimes ask or answer questions. Pupils are learning to settle well, and to be involved in individual and group activities. At the time of the inspection, the part time nursery pupils had attended school for only a few sessions, but several were already able to take part in group activities such as singing and language sessions. As they move into reception classes, pupils are developing concentration and some are able to stay on task to complete activities which they are set. Teachers provide pupils with choices, for example, at snack and free play times, and encourage children to do as much for themselves as possible, for example, in changing for physical development sessions. Teachers have very good strategies for helping pupils become more independent, providing them with help where needed, but allowing opportunities for them to do things for themselves. They are encouraged to help others, for example, by getting out and putting away equipment. Teachers provide a variety of opportunities for personal development which are appropriate to the needs of the pupils, for example, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties are helped to make choices by eye pointing or gesture, such as when they select a picture or a sound. Pupils are beginning to form very good relationships with adults and are learning to take turns when playing with other children. They learn, for example, to recognise happy and sad faces, and that these give information about how others are feeling. Teachers and learning support assistants explain clearly the difference between right and wrong and, therefore, behaviour is usually very good. Where pupils have difficulty in managing their behaviour, as in the case of pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, teachers have good strategies for helping pupils to settle, for example, by providing secluded working areas and tray activities. All adults are good role models, staff praise and encourage children, and positive attitudes are consistently reinforced.

Communication, language and literacy

76. Children make very good progress in developing language and communication skills, being given good opportunities to develop these through most of the activities that take place in the early years classes. Children are beginning to listen well to adults and to respond by word or gesture. Throughout all activities, language and communication are reinforced, for example, in developing a vocabulary of everyday routines and objects. At

snack time, they are encouraged to say or sign “please”, and to choose a drink or a biscuit by speaking or pointing to a symbol. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties are encouraged to gesture, sign, point or vocalise whenever possible. Teachers provide good role models for the development of language, and support pupils’ learning by means of Makaton signing, or the use of symbols, where these are needed. Listening skills are being well developed, and children are learning to follow instructions of increasing length. Some pupils are beginning to learn letters; for example, one pupil was able to recognise her name and those of some of her classmates. Some are beginning to make marks on paper as a pre writing skill. The environment is well used to support the development of literacy with displays labelled with key words, and with pupils’ names displayed by their photographs. Pupils enjoy listening to stories and looking at books with an adult. Teaching of communication, language and literacy is of a high quality, with well-planned experiences across the curriculum, which have a positive impact on the progress the children are making.

Mathematical development

77. Children are making very good progress in acquiring pre maths skills. Teaching is very good and lessons are well planned to give many different activities to reinforce concepts such as number, colour and shape. There are many mathematical activities throughout the day, for example, sequencing the day’s activities, and teachers are very effective in helping to extend children’s’ mathematical vocabulary. Activities such as a “Teddy Bears’ Picnic” are well used to help pupils learn about colour matching as they select crockery and cutlery to match the ribbon on their bear. They learn about different shapes, as they post shapes into the appropriate slots on boxes, or match 3D shapes. Children that are more able count to ten as they count the number of pupils in the class or the number of bees that have been placed round the room. Some are beginning to recognise and write numbers to ten. Good multisensory activities reinforce learning, as when pupils make numbers out of playdough. Learning in maths is well supported by the use of counting rhymes and songs, which help pupils to remember the numbers and make the learning an enjoyable experience. For example, one group of pupils was focusing on learning the number two, and all took turns with finger puppets in the rhyme “Two Little Dicky Birds”.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

78. These are developed through a variety of practical experiences, for example, to find their way around the school building, initially from their classrooms to other rooms in the early years area, and then to farther parts of the building. They make very good progress. The children are encouraged to observe their environment, for example, by looking at the weather. They have talked about houses and are learning about the different rooms in a house. They learn about different parts of the body as they engage in singing songs such as “Head, shoulders, knees and toes”. They know about different clothes and many can recognise what to wear when it is hot or cold weather. Pupils in the conductive education class learn about the senses, developing vocabulary appropriate to touch, such as rough, smooth, soft and silky, as they are involved in creating a display. Teaching in this area is very good, with plans linked to other aspects of the curriculum, and learning supported by exploration of the environment.

Creative development

79. Children make good use of a wide range of opportunities to work creatively in different media. They use paint, pencil, crayon and different types of modelling material. They experiment with texture, shape and space. Lessons observed and work displayed

show a good variety of experiences, for example, pupils in a nursery class had made "happy faces" from paper plates and a variety of materials. Pupils in several classes had been involved in painting activities using hand and foot prints; for example, a display entitled "The Harvest Field" contained pictures of insects painted in boot prints. Children join enthusiastically in music and begin to listen to music and to learn about slow and fast. Singing is used on a number of occasions throughout the day, for example, at the start and finish of the sessions when pupils sing the good morning and goodbye songs. Music is often used successfully to attract and maintaining pupils' attention. They are beginning to play a variety of percussion instruments, and are learning to identify them by their sounds, for example, to identify bells or triangles when these were played behind a screen. They play along with taped music, and older pupils are beginning to develop a good sense of rhythm. In the conductive education class, the integral use of singing helps pupils to participate in movement, as they follow rhythm and melody. Teaching is good, with clear learning objectives that focus on the development of skills. Work is valued by staff and care taken with its presentation and display.

Physical development

80. Children are making good progress in this area of learning and they benefit from well-equipped areas for outdoor and indoor play, the use of a hall, a soft play area and a sensory room. They are developing gross and fine motor skills at levels appropriate to their abilities. Some children are tracking lights and objects in the multi sensory room; others reach out to hold a ball or press a switch. In the soft play area, they experiment with a range of movements, rolling, jumping, sliding, and throwing. Children in reception classes are able to follow routines, knowing about warming up activities and being able to move in different ways and at different speeds. They balance on benches and bridges. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties are given good opportunities for play with activity toys, and some reach out to touch or move these. Fine motor skills are developed through activities such as cutting and sticking and playing with construction toys. Awareness of space is developed as pupils complete jigsaw puzzles of increasing complexity. They learn to put pegs in peg boards and post shapes into matching slots in a box. They thread beads and cotton reels, with growing independence.

Teaching and learning

81. Teaching of pupils in the early years ranges from excellent to satisfactory and is, overall, very good, ensuring that children receive a good start to their education. The quality of teaching has a very positive impact on children's learning. The early years teachers have a good knowledge both of the needs of young children and of the different special educational needs. They plan very carefully and effectively to ensure that all areas of learning are covered. Teachers work closely with the learning support assistants to provide a good range of opportunities for learning. Teachers and learning support assistants provide a relaxed atmosphere in which children feel confident to try activities and to respond to challenges. This was particularly noticeable in the conductive education class, where pupils were developing their mobility skills as well as moving towards the early learning goals. Children generally enjoy their lessons, and are enthusiastic participants in many of the activities. Effective assessment procedures are in place, starting from initial assessment when children enter the nursery classes, together with the information received from the portage workers and other pre school experiences. Children's development is closely monitored. All have IEPs with very specific targets, which are regularly reviewed. Observation sheets are regularly completed as pupils make significant gains, and the information is used to set and review targets on IEPs. Staff work hard to develop good

relationships with parents and carers, starting with initial visits before pupils start school. This partnership further enhances learning opportunities for children.

ENGLISH

82. Pupils of all abilities achieve very well throughout the school because of skilled, enthusiastic and imaginative teaching, informed by excellent assessment, and monitoring of progress. The principles of the National Strategy for Literacy and the Key Stage 3 Strategy, have been incorporated very well into the teaching of English, and in lessons across the curriculum. Teaching is tailored to meet the needs of all pupils, including the use of strategies from TEACCH, PECS, and Conductive Education. This ensures access to the curriculum and very good progress for pupils with a wide range of needs, including those with profound and multiple needs and those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

83. By the time they are seven years old, pupils have learned to communicate needs and choices, using the most appropriate communication system for them, including speech, sign or symbol. Highest attainers can tell their news, and retell stories. They listen carefully in lessons, have learned to take turns, and work hard to respond, confident that their contribution will be valued.

84. By the age of eleven pupils have made very good progress because of the well-planned promotion of speaking and listening. Higher attaining pupils talk about what they did at the weekend, retell stories, anticipate events, and predict what will happen next. They talk happily to visitors, introduce themselves and others, use good social language, ask and answer questions well. In a design and technology lesson in year 5, pupils could describe smells and textures, and explain health and safety rules. Pupils with little or no speech make good use of symbols and signing to communicate efficiently: a Year 3 boy signed three word sentences in a Literacy Hour. Symbol timetables and schedules are understood, and provide pupils with opportunities to "talk" about the pattern of the day.

85. Pupils aged fourteen talk about the characters in the texts they read, which include plays by Shakespeare, and they show understanding of motives and feelings of characters in what has been read. They express their ideas through speech, sign, symbol or drama.

86. Older pupils are well prepared for life after school, being confident communicators, by whichever system answers their particular special needs.

87. Throughout the school, levels of attainment in reading mirror the wide range of special educational needs. Pupils learn through shared reading, individual guided reading, and the teaching of phonics. Individual progress is carefully assessed, and recorded. Overall progress is monitored and there is clear evidence that pupils achieve at least as well as can be expected and frequently surpass expectations. Pupils take reading books home, and pupils using symbol support, work with parents to learn new symbols.

88. National Curriculum guidelines are followed and pupils experience, at their own level, the full range of literary styles and genre. Teachers are very imaginative and creative in their endeavours to ensure that pupils develop a love of literature.

89. Younger pupils read simple stories and rhymes, supported by symbols. Oxford Reading Tree and Ginn reading schemes are used at primary level for individual guided reading. By the age of eleven, pupils are using context and phonetic strategies, and have an understanding of book language, such as cover, author, illustrator, contents and index.

90. By the age of fourteen, pupils are reading stories such as Treasure Island, and experiencing Shakespeare." Wellington Square", a graded reading scheme is used for guided reading at this stage.

91. By the time pupils are sixteen, they have learned to understand nuances in what they read. They can interpret feelings and motives of characters in plays. They refer to the text for evidence. Pupils with complex learning difficulties can “read” social signs.

92. Pupils achieve well in line with their special needs, and make very good progress in writing, although, quite naturally, the speed with which they acquire these skills is less marked than the rapidity with which they develop oral or signed communication. Shared writing is good throughout school and oral rehearsal of written work is very well used.

93. By the age of seven, some pupils are able to make marks on paper, while others “dictate” to an adult using words or symbols. By eleven, higher attaining pupils can write sentences independently, others copy, or write over, and show progress in the formation of letters.

94. Higher attaining pupils in Year 9 write independently about characters in the books they read. By the age of sixteen, pupils preparing for Entry Level, demonstrate good sentence construction, use of capital letters, full stops, and good spelling. They show that they have made very good progress over time.

95. The quality of teaching is very good, and sometimes exceptional, with detailed planning to meet the wide range of needs in every class. Basic skills, including phonics are taught well. Teachers use very good strategies including TEACCH and Conductive techniques, and structured teaching. Pupils behave very well because lessons are well organised, and frequently imaginative and exciting. Pupils in Year 3 respond with enthusiasm to a book character, Preston, who writes to them, and sets them tasks. In Year 8 pupils benefit from Big Book techniques, in an age appropriate way, with the use of the overhead projector, enabling shared study of the text of Treasure Island. Year 9 pupils, with complex learning difficulties, are moved by Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, because of the enthusiasm of staff and the use of video, music, drama and dance to create atmosphere. Individual pupil responses were remarkable, especially the prolonged eye contact from a pupil who usually avoids all eye contact. In a very exciting Year 9 lesson on Macbeth, excellent use of voice, and good subject knowledge, enabled pupils to appreciate the sound and rhythm of Shakespeare's language, follow the plot, and understand the characters. They discussed the ambition of Lady Macbeth and the guilt and remorse of Macbeth.

96. Staff and resources are deployed efficiently, and support staff make a significant contribution to pupils' learning. Speech therapists, and therapy assistants advise staff as well as working with individual pupils to improve communication skills.

97. The subject is very effectively co-ordinated by two well-qualified and experienced teachers, who are committed to development and improvement. The curriculum provides for good continuity of learning within and between Key Stages. Because of their learning experiences in English, pupils enhance their social skills, gain an appreciation of cultural traditions, and have opportunities through reflection on poems and stories, for good spiritual development. Individual pupils and pupils of all ages and across the ability range, are tracked, to monitor progress. The co-ordinators provide good role models for teaching, monitor planning, offer in-service training, including training in the teaching of phonics, and hold a weekly advice clinic for staff. Literacy hours have been observed, and good practice shared. Provision of resources is good, including Writing with Symbols 2000, and Wellington Square for computers. More use of information technology in lessons would be encouraged with the acquisition of a wider range of computer software. The library is very

attractive and well stocked and includes a good range of books to support spiritual and cultural development.

MATHEMATICS

98. Pupils do well in mathematics. Therefore, by the time they left last year, four of the most able pupils achieved GCSE passes. In addition to very successfully implementing the National Numeracy Strategy, teachers successfully encourage pupils to develop a good vocabulary to help them express themselves. At the simplest level, this amounts to comparisons such as big and bigger. It develops from this to language that is more complex and helps pupils to read their texts. This helps them to learn faster and contributes strongly to their improving literacy.

99. Achievement relates more closely to complexity of learning difficulty than to age, but individual targets are set each year and a good proportion are met. Pupils with the most severe difficulties make increased use of switches or mannerisms to communicate recognition of different shapes and colours. Other pupils build well upon the start they have made in the foundation stage. The highest attaining ones learn how to add and subtract numbers up to 100. Many pupils are able to add up single numbers in their heads, or with the help of their fingers, number lines or counters. Up to the age of 11 progress is shown by pupils completing more complicated sums, with less help, and by their ability to record their achievements using better formed numbers. Pupils also begin to learn their times tables. Older pupils use their existing knowledge well, using it to solve problems involving money and metric units of length, capacity and mass.

100. Using everyday objects, such as a coat hanger, Year 2 pupils were seen to be beginning to grasp an understanding of 'side'. They learned that shapes can be sorted by the number of sides they have, with each set having its own name, such as square and triangle. They also gather data into groups that they then present visually in simple charts. Older pupils make good progress and by the time they leave the highest achieving pupils recognise the properties of shapes such as scalene, isosceles and equilateral triangles. They use computers to process data they have gathered and produce a good range of graphs, pictograms and charts, chosen to represent data in the most appropriate and accessible way.

101. Teachers blend the pursuit of academic achievement and personal development very well. Nearly all lessons are well taught, with teachers demonstrating a very good understanding of how to teach the subject to groups of pupils with widely differing needs. Strong planning results in pupils being able to use what they already know to help them achieve more. Teachers being particularly adept at telling pupils how well they have done in previous lessons and explaining exactly what is expected of them in the current lesson. When this happened at the start of the main task in a Year 5 lesson it was immediately evident that pupils were listening intently, felt encouraged and set off on their new tasks with enthusiasm and a strong chance of success. What weakens a small amount of the teaching is that learning objectives are occasionally too vaguely stated. For instance, stating that a Year 10 outcome was to 'use mental strategies to solve mathematics problems' is not much help to the teacher when it comes to evaluating the success of the lesson.

102. Management and co-ordination of the subject is of the highest quality. An excellent scheme of work ensures that study is systematic and efficient, with no unnecessary duplication of work, yet allowing for plenty of reinforcement for pupils who need it. Very careful consideration is given to the importance of appropriate external accreditation to ensure that as many pupils as possible can be motivated by the prospect of gaining

qualifications at the end of their final year. There has been extensive training for all teachers, most recently to help the implementation of the Key Stage 3 Numeracy Strategy. Good resources are carefully managed and computers are increasingly being used, a good example being to help a blind child identify and name numbers through a touch pad and the 'IntelliTalk' software programme.

SCIENCE

103. Overall, pupils achieve well in science and those aged 11 to 14 achieve very well. They follow a broad and balanced subject curriculum and as a result they make good progress in developing their knowledge of the living and physical worlds and their understanding of scientific investigations and the skills required to carry them out. Therefore, pupils are able to take accredited examinations when they are 16, and a number were successful in both Entry Level Certificates and GCSE (single award) examinations in 2001.

104. Between the ages of 5 and 11, pupils begin to develop a growing understanding of themselves and the world around them. They begin to record what they have seen and done, such as drawing plants grown from seeds they have planted, and activities such as this help them to appreciate the differences between living and non-living things. They also examine physical processes of sound, forces and electricity. By the age of seven, pupils know about push/pull forces. They have experimented with cans being pulled off flat surfaces, and pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties use switches to operate powered toys, thus showing their understanding of cause and effect through eye contact and eye pointing. Eleven year olds know about healthy diets and dental hygiene and have extended their understanding of materials and physical processes so that they sort objects into magnetic and non-magnetic items.

105. For pupils aged 11 to 14, the science curriculum places an increasing emphasis on investigations and experiments. At the age of fourteen pupils predict outcomes, for example when investigating the reflection of light rays, and apply scientific principles to everyday situations such as the usefulness of friction and the problems caused by it. Pupils aged 15 to 16, have developed and refined their investigative skills. They have a clearer understanding of the concept of a 'fair test' and can apply this in experiments such as examining the factors that affect the strength of an electromagnet. They complete investigative course work for their examinations.

106. Science teaching overall is of high quality and has many strengths. Much of the teaching is very good and the only significant weakness is that occasionally teachers give too much direction, so that pupils do not have the opportunity to explore for themselves. This arises when teachers' knowledge of the purpose of science is less secure. A variety of carefully chosen activities and skilful classroom practice that balances direct teaching with carefully targeted questions enable very good resources to be used well to promote effective learning for all pupils. Pupils achieve well because teachers' classroom management skills and effective support from classroom assistants allow them to provide learning experiences that build on pupils' existing knowledge by extending and reinforcing ideas. When teaching is really effective, pupils make significant progress in their learning as they are challenged very well because of very high teacher expectations. Very high quality teaching with many excellent features enabled a group of fourteen-year-olds to make big strides in their understanding of the effects of the environment and genes on the development of living things. An introductory session that consisted of quick fire questions focused pupils' attention and they responded very well by answering questions and making suggestions confidently. The good pace was maintained as pupils worked in carefully

selected groups to consider variation. Lower attaining pupils extended their understanding of simple variation very well by working with the learning support assistant in examining and tallying the body weights of pupils and then entering the data into a spreadsheet. The more able pupils made excellent progress in appreciating the impact of different factors on animal and plant development through discussions associated with a worksheet. By the end of the lesson, one pupil was able to demonstrate clearly his increased knowledge with the comment “the genes and the environment work together like a team.”

107. Science is well led and managed as the subject co-ordinators have a good understanding of the subject’s strengths and areas for development, most noticeably in refining assessment and recording procedures. Both the local and wider community are used well to enrich pupils’ learning experiences through visits to places such as the Jenner Museum, and to Cardiff University to attend a festival of chemistry. The school’s own resources are very good and are used in a purpose built laboratory, although this is rather small. The well designed sensory garden is an excellent facility that offers pupils a number of sensory experiences through the variety of plants that have been carefully chosen to contain specimens that display particular characteristics such as scent or leaf texture. In providing opportunities for calm reflection, this makes a strong contribution to pupils’ spiritual development.

ART AND DESIGN

108. Achievement in art and design is good overall and very good for pupils aged 14 to 16. Pupils aged 5 to 7 make satisfactory progress and progress accelerates for them with much of their work being linked to other subjects. For example, work on shape and colour is reinforced when they use a variety of stencils to print houses. Pupils who benefit most from multi sensory teaching are encouraged to look carefully at spiders’ webs in the school grounds before being guided to complete large cardboard and string webs. Achievement in design has been much enhanced by very good links with the community. As part of the site development, pupils have explored shape and movement, helping to plan the layout and features of the school grounds including seating and shelters. Employees from a local firm followed the designs of pupils to create stimulating and attractive markings on the playground.

109. Pupils gradually extend their experience of modelling and working with a ceramicist to create mosaic panels. Secondary age pupils benefit from specialist teaching. They take their work seriously and discuss it maturely, helped by an increasing technical vocabulary. Pupils in Key Stage 3 move between media confidently. They show good pencil control as they indicate light and shade then trace, cut and stick tissue paper of appropriate colours to achieve their desired effect. By the time pupils are 15 or 16, many are achieving work comparable with that seen in mainstream schools and it is highly commendable that all pupils with moderate learning difficulties are entered for GCSE accreditation. They evaluate their own work maturely and show preference for the work of well-known artists. They work with quiet pride on self-portraits, studying their own digital photographs carefully. Good use of ICT allows them to create special effects and use of the Internet increases their knowledge of art and artists.

110. A feature of all art lessons is the positive attitudes pupils bring to the subject. Their very good behaviour, their obvious interest and desire to do better and their co-operative working all contribute significantly to the good progress made. All teaching is at least satisfactory, with the majority being good or even excellent on occasion. Planning to meet individual needs is very good and teaching is well supported by highly effective learning support workers. Pupils learn well because they are not allowed to fail. Constant feedback

and encouragement help to keep them on task. Well-chosen materials and activities stimulate pupils of all abilities. Teaching is particularly good for secondary age pupils. They respond very positively to being treated as serious artists. High expectations are well rewarded and lessons are characterised by rigour and purpose. Where teaching is excellent, the teacher leads by example, demonstrating techniques confidently and providing the pupils with the technical vocabulary they need.

111. Art plays a significant part in pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development. Work is treated with the utmost respect and its careful, colourful display raises the spirits. Initiatives such as the dance and art project bring pupils into contact with mainstream peers. The global awareness week not only taught pupils about the cultures and faiths of peoples from around the world but also provided the stimulus for work of high quality in a wide range of media. Accommodation is good with a specialist art room for older pupils. Resources are sufficient and the present concerns about funding are likely to be resolved when art and design becomes the focus for school improvement.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

112. Achievement in design and technology is satisfactory overall. Food technology is stronger than work with resistant materials, especially for pupils of secondary age. Achievement is limited by the lack of specialist teaching at secondary level where teachers often tend to treat the subject as an extension of art and craft, rather than focussing clearly upon the design and evaluation of projects. There is also no specialised room in the school for practical work with resistant materials.

113. Up to the age of 11, pupils complete projects involving card and paper. They develop good cutting skills, learning, for example how to hold scissors the right way up to improve accuracy. Pupils learn that paper and card can be joined by gluing and stapling. When making simple figures they discover that by using paper fasteners joints can be made flexible. In a particularly good project, pupils in Years 3,4,5 and 6 have successfully designed and printed panels which they have then sewn together to make a high quality quilt. This project was part of a 'Global Awareness' project on America and made a strong contribution to pupils' awareness of traditional North American crafts. A further contribution to pupils' cultural awareness and their technology skills has been the making of dough and cakes, where pupils have measured and mixed ingredients to make, for instance, honey cakes to a traditional Jewish recipe.

114. Achievement is more limited for pupils aged 11 to 16 because the school has no specialist area in which pupils can work with wood, plastic and metal. In an attempt to compensate for this, good use is made of a link with a school in the same Education Action Zone. Here pupils have made good use of computers to design and then make key fobs from plastic then attaching metal rings. They are currently embarking on a project to design and make a desk-tidy from wood. Access to a workshop in a local college also allows pupils to make boot scrapers, nesting boxes and plant containers. Here, pupils are using small hand tools with increasing precision and dexterity. In their work with food, the highest achieving pupils prepare snacks and buffets to entertain guests as part of Certificate of Achievement accreditation in which they achieve success.

115. Teaching is good for pupils in Years 1 to 6, but limitations are apparent in Years 7 to 11, where specialist subject knowledge is more important. This is most clearly seen in expectations, which are too low, and in teachers' weakness in picking out the specific skills that pupils need to learn. This results in weak assessment procedures and unnecessary repetition of work.

116. Although statutory requirements are being met, the curriculum for secondary aged pupils has shortcomings because the lack of suitable accommodation is resulting in limited opportunities for pupils to consolidate the skills they are learning off site. There are current plans to provide workshop space but the food technology room remains unfinished, a result of factors outside the control of the school. Although good arrangements have been made to compensate for this there remains a big difference between the work being done in specialist workshops and in the classroom. For instance, a Year 7 class were observed cutting shapes from paper and joining them using a glue stick, skills they had already developed when they were younger. Meanwhile, those with access to specialist facilities were learning computer-aided design and manufacture. These weaknesses in provision are acknowledged by the school and the subject is designated as the focus area for next year, meaning that it will attract more time and funding for much needed training and resourcing.

GEOGRAPHY

117. Achievement in Geography is very good across the school, and for pupils of all abilities. For pupils aged 15 to 16, learning is accredited using a range of awards, the most able pupils gaining the Certificate of Achievement, with Distinction. The subject is taught imaginatively and pupils' work and activities show both challenge and enjoyment.

118. The youngest children begin their journey in the subject with activities related to home and school, developing a sense of place. By age 7, they explore a map of Gloucester, placing their homes and school within it. Pupils with greater learning difficulties get to know their addresses. Pupils that are more able become familiar with simple maps of journeys. Younger pupils aged 7 to 11, learn about different people, roles and environments within the school, recognise symbols relating to these, and begin to make maps of the school in its community. Older pupils with more complex needs, including autism, who have studied environmental change, explore how to improve the immediate environment and learn about the impact of the seasons. They compose a letter for the head teacher with suggestions for improvements accompanied by a collage to support their case, an activity that strongly helps in developing social awareness.

119. Good progress in the subject is maintained for all pupils aged 11 to 16. At the age of 13 or 14, more able pupils studying land use in India explored fair trade issues linked to tea production experiencing first hand allocation of wages for different roles and took part in an excellent, challenging debate about the issues in play when deciding to purchase 'fair trade' products. Within the same lesson less able pupils made and tasted tea, as tea pickers would prepare it. Year 11 able pupils exploring retail development use map skills confidently, identify and present factors in support of different locations.

120. Teaching in all the lessons observed was at least good, and at times excellent. In every case, the activities planned fully met the range of pupils' learning and support needs, were supported with well chosen resources and delivered with pace and energy. The management of pupils whose behaviour is sometimes erratic, was excellent, and support staff make a major contribution to pupils' achievements and progress. Leadership of the subject is excellent, assessment is good and the monitoring of teaching and learning is effective. ICT is well used. Building on the well-founded curriculum, the school intends to develop fieldwork activity further. The excellent work across the school on Global Awareness enriches pupils' understanding of other continents, strongly promotes their cultural awareness and fosters real concern about environmental issues.

HISTORY

121. Pupils of all abilities achieve highly in history, the most able doing exceptionally well by the age of 16. Many gain the Certificate of Achievement with distinction. History is brought vividly to life by carefully planned activities to broaden understanding and enrich pupils' experiences. They work with enthusiasm, concentration and care, and are challenged to explore events through sensory experience, handling artefacts and considering different types and sources of evidence.

122. The youngest children, between the ages of five and seven, use photographs and parents' recollections of themselves as babies to understand chronology, change, past and present. Children with complex learning difficulties and some with autism make clear connections and communicate real recognition, sometimes for the first time. Older pupils aged between 7 and 11, engage energetically with Roman civilisation through a range of activities, including a Roman Feast, in which staff act convincingly as their slaves. By age eleven, they have undertaken a local study, and have compared life now with Victorians' experience, looking in detail at features of life in earlier times, such as canals and spas. They contrast the opportunities of people at different levels in society both in the Tudor period and since 1930. They host a party for another class and compare the experience of homemade entertainment with today's music, food and room decorations.

123. By the time they leave, students of all abilities show deepened understanding and insight. Work on the Renaissance for year 9 pupils with complex needs compares print media then and now, using artefacts. They respond well to directed, challenging questioning and all try hard to express their views. Pupils that are more able show good recall of differences between mediaeval and Renaissance architecture, supported by visiting Sixth Form students and one class re-enacted the Battle of Hastings with considerable energy.

124. Excellent lessons for pupils aged 14 to 16 that explored life on the Home Front were so well prepared and realistic, that students with complex needs' experience of an air raid warning and shelter was first rate. The most able students' study of rationing involved assessing documentary evidence, accurately weighing ingredients using period scales, creating a trifle, and using the Internet for research. The excellent relationships between students and teachers, support staff and their demanding, clear expectations ensured that all pupils achieved very highly. All of this helps to develop pupils' social and cultural awareness.

125. Teaching is consistently good across the age and ability range, and at times, it is excellent. It is informed by a high degree of knowledge of pupils' abilities and needs. Planning is good overall, well supported by imaginative use of resources, including museum collections and artefacts but the school has rightly identified the need to review further planning for pupils with complex needs aged 11 to 14. Displays including pupils' work reinforce classroom activity.

126. The school has been highly commended for the quality of examination work among its pupils aged 14 to 16. Very good leadership, monitoring and review of the curriculum, assessment of pupil progress and teaching quality has raised the profile of the subject, teachers' confidence and pupils' enjoyment and achievements in history.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

127. Provision for information and communication technology meets statutory requirements and is good overall. The use of modern technology to support learning in other subject areas is very good. Good teaching is reflected in the good levels of achievement made by all pupils. Pupils aged 16 now have the opportunity to gain national accreditation in the subject through Certificate of Achievement award.

128. In all years, information and communication is taught as a discrete subject. Well-prepared and balanced lessons cater for a wide range of individual needs. Teachers set high but realistic levels of challenge, to which the pupils respond with positive enthusiasm and concentrated efforts. Sensitive teaching ensures that, by the age of seven, most pupils have acquired basic keyboard skills and can manipulate switch toys and devices. By the age of eleven, pupils co-operate in shared exercises, for example one student on the Autistic Spectrum related a story which a classmate reproduced in symbolised word processed format, producing a printout with which both pupils were delighted. This was excellent in reinforcing literacy and computer skills, and significantly addressed their autistic needs. With older pupils, some teachers make excellent use of computerised overhead projections. For example, in Year 7 English lessons, reading is presented in a way which is appropriate to both age and ability levels. In the computer suite, similar techniques are used to explain and develop new concepts. By the age of 14 pupils use varying font styles and sizes, importing digitised images and clipart into their work. After a clear explanation of how to complete this process, one student's spontaneous response, 'Oh, cool!' summarised an attentive interest towards the subject. Pupils aged 15 and 16 confidently use the Internet and E-mail for topic research. Additionally they create simple databases and spreadsheets, receiving regular in-class support from local sixth form students, which strongly promotes mutual social development.

129. Documentation to support teaching and learning is very good, with extensive subject evaluation and pupil progress records complete with exemplars of pupils' work. Schemes of work, linked to National Curriculum programmes of study, are very good for primary aged pupils and good for secondary aged pupils. Further development of the latter is ongoing, but opportunities for pupils to improve their understanding of control techniques are limited. Staff are secure in their knowledge and teachers in all subject areas have received extra training in the use of computers within their subjects. Accommodation is excellent and the quality and location of resources throughout the school is very good, with a 4:1 ratio of pupils to computers. Specialist equipment or laptop computers are available for pupils with specific needs. A lunchtime computer club provides additional opportunities for learning.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

130. Provision for modern languages for 11 to 16 year-olds is good overall. The very good and sometimes excellent quality of teaching across the age range ensures that all pupils make very good progress. Pupils with complex needs make excellent progress.

131. French is taught to all 11-14 year olds and it is taught as a module to 15 and 16 year olds. Very well planned lessons and imaginative teaching retains the pupils' interest, and the teacher's consistent use of French motivates them to develop their listening, understanding and speaking skills. Learning is constantly reinforced by key word vocabulary, which is written on the board. By the age of 14, they spontaneously respond to everyday phrases such as '*bonjour*' and '*comment ca va?*' Targeted question and answer sessions allow teachers to assess their pupils' achievements while promoting pupils'

awareness of their learning. Pupils aged 16 and with complex needs extend their earlier learning in practical simulations. The teachers' excellent organisation permits them to experience a combination of challenging comprehension tasks and physical exertion, and the pupils' excellent response results in their smiles of pleasure and sense of achievement. Older pupils' work gains national accreditation through Certificate of Achievement awards. The use of the French language and images from life in France increase pupils' awareness of cultures other than their own.

132. Staff have a secure knowledge of French and the required curriculum and departmental documentation to support what is taught is very good. The implementation and use of assessment and recording procedures are good. Resources are adequate but there is insufficient computer software to support French. The accommodation is excellent.

MUSIC

133. Music is integral to many areas of the curriculum and this is one of the reasons why pupils' achievement in the subject is good. Singing and listening to music accompany many activities especially for pupils with complex special needs. Primary aged pupils (up to the age of 11) join in a wide range of action songs. They investigate a variety of percussion instruments and compose simple tunes. They listen actively, distinguishing between high and low, loud and soft sounds and invent symbols to represent simple notation. Secondary age pupils who need much sensory stimulation achieve well with the help of committed pupils from a local mainstream school who help pupils to play percussion instruments and copy actions as they distinguish between sad and happy melodies. Pupils that are more able have the opportunity to make music together in small groups as they play recorders or keyboards.

134. Pupils clearly enjoy their music lessons. They listen quietly to the music playing and respond to the rhythm and beat. They behave well, taking turns, watching and listening to each other and following instructions carefully. They show appreciation of live performances and smiled with pleasure when the learning support worker played her flute in class.

135. Teaching is good overall and very good when taught by a specialist teacher. Although some teachers lack confidence they have listened to the ready advice of the co-ordinators, they plan carefully to meet the needs of individuals and use resources, including tapes, well. There is sometimes insufficient attention to refining performance to make it the best possible. Teachers are conscious of the contribution music makes to communication and to the meeting of targets on individual education plans. In one lesson concentration spans were increased and turn taking encouraged as pupils matched sounds and symbols. In a very good lesson, pupils made good progress because the teacher was confident and very well prepared. Photographs and symbols showing town and country helped pupils compare the dynamics in well-chosen extracts from tapes.

136. Music makes a substantial contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils come together to enjoy everything from the latest hits at break times to classical music during lessons or activities week. A very successful live music week gave pupils the opportunity to choose from a wide range of orchestral and choral events featuring musicians from the community and neighbouring schools. Music and musicians from around the world feature highly during global awareness week broadening the already rich curriculum. Music therapy is available to pupils on the autistic spectrum. Planning for

the future development of the subject rightly includes focus on assessment and more training for non-specialist staff.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

137. Pupils achieve well in lessons and very well in swimming sessions. A striking feature of the physical education curriculum of the school is its integration with the mobility programme and this link helps pupils to achieve very well in mobility and hydrotherapy sessions and make very good progress.

138. Pupils aged from 5 to 11 have a range of experiences provided through a broad and relevant subject curriculum. Activities such as swimming, gymnastics, games and dance encourage them to explore movement, to increase awareness of themselves and others, and to develop a growing concept of space. By the age of seven, pupils take part in co-operative play, take turns and follow simple instructions so that they are able to participate in activities such as sports day. Pupils in Key Stage 2 show a wide range of achievements and generally, they have increased their mobility, control and co-ordination. In their gymnastics lessons, they use a variety of movements to find space and stop moving on request. They increase their co-ordination and control as they throw and catch a ball; they work with partners to perform movements such as jumping with two feet or standing on one leg.

139. Between the ages of 11 and 16, pupils continue to develop their skills through a variety of activities. By the age of fourteen they ride horses with increased confidence and co-ordination as their improving listening skills enable them to follow instructions. They swim confidently and competently and have increasing knowledge of water safety and pool rescue and they demonstrate these achievements by qualifying for externally accredited awards. By the age of sixteen, pupils have the social and personal skills to work with partners or in small groups and to follow simple rules and use a scoring system. Some pupils, by the time they are ready to leave school, have ball skills that match those of others of their age in mainstream schools, and they demonstrate these in competitive team games. Pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties also display growing co-ordination skills as they move through the secondary department. Their developing basic control of their own bodies is evident as they sit on a stool unaided and unsupported, or as they show increasing awareness of the environment through ball games. They use a ball containing a bell and hold out their hands in anticipation of receiving the ball and throw or pass the ball in the direction of an adult's voice.

140. All teaching is of high quality. Teachers manage pupils very well and lessons are characterised by activities that meet the needs of pupils very well, high quality communication and good relationships. Consequently, pupils develop a range of skills and extend their knowledge and understanding of a variety of physical activities ranging from canoeing to team games. Very high quality teaching in swimming, mobility and hydrotherapy sessions means that pupils learn very well. In these aspects in particular, teachers have a very good understanding of their subject and they are good at recognising and praising achievement. These sessions are delightful and pupils work hard and experience success. This was very well demonstrated in a hydrotherapy lesson for ten and eleven year old pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. The pupils were relaxed in a safe, warm and secure environment and each child had one-to-one adult support in the pool. The school is fortunate in having many volunteers who assist in these sessions and their input is invaluable. Adults worked with pupils on carefully targeted individual activities and the whole session was very well managed by the teacher so that

pupils improved their flexibility and muscle tone as well as their watching and listening skills.

141. The subject is well led and managed and the school's on-site resources and accommodation are excellent. The school has very good links with the local community, through activities such as horse riding and the recent dance workshops held in the school, and it provides other very good opportunities that encourage pupils' personal and social development. They compete against other schools in swimming galas and athletics tournaments, and, in addition, the school gives its pupils the very valuable experience of residential visits that enable them to pursue outdoor activities such as canoeing. This makes a strong contribution to pupils' social development.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

142. Achievement in religious education is very good. Across the age range, pupils of all levels of attainment do very well. They respond to teaching of high quality that introduces them to the practices and beliefs of the major religions of the world, and, where possible, helps them draw from these, important lessons for their own lives. Those pupils who are in their last two years of schooling who are able to do so, undertake units of work that lead to appropriate accreditation of their learning. By the age of 16, pupils know about several world faiths and what they teach.

143. Christianity is the focus of lessons for pupils aged 5 to 11. They enjoy stories from The Bible. In a class of 7-year-olds, the story of Joseph and his coat was remembered well. Skilful planning enables the teacher to weave important lessons about friendship into the tale. The happy, light-hearted atmosphere in the room reinforces the important messages that the lesson teaches.

144. Pupils aged 9 to 11, amongst whom are a number with severe difficulties in social communication, are well informed about the significance of special books in religions. They know that The Bible is special to Christians and are conversant with its structure. They reinforce their understanding of how important these special books are to believers as they learn the story of Mary Jones. They take in what they are told extremely well – a tribute to the great understanding of their needs as learners and the highly skilled management shown by their teacher and her classroom team.

145. Amongst the 14-year-olds, there is good recall of the important events in the life of Christ. They make every effort to understand difficult concepts, such as the Trinity, when they are explained.

146. Those in their final year, who have multiple learning difficulties, learn very well by experiencing the sights, sounds, smells and tastes associated with Sikhism. They respond to the feel of the silk that dresses the table on which the sacred book rests and they taste samples of holy food with enthusiasm.

147. Teaching is of very high quality for pupils of all ages and complexity of need, with excellent and very good lessons predominating. Lessons are carefully planned to enable all pupils, whatever the nature of their special needs, to gain from the experience and to take a full part. Knowledge of the subject is high and the teachers are extremely well supported by the co-ordinators. Consequently, pupils enjoy religious education. There is a happy atmosphere in lessons and pupils try hard to do their best. The sensitivity shown by the teachers and classroom staff to the particular needs of pupils and the great attention

paid to preparing suitable resources is exemplary. The subject makes a very strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.