

INSPECTION REPORT

SPRING COMMON SCHOOL

Huntingdon

LEA area: Cambridgeshire

Unique reference number: 110946

Headteacher: Mr C Owen

Reporting inspector: Mr T Richardson
16500

Dates of inspection: 7 – 9 May 2002

Inspection number: 243176

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special: moderate/severe learning difficulties
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 - 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	American Lane Huntingdon Cambridgeshire
Postcode:	PE29 1TQ
Telephone number:	01480 377403
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs E Bartlett
Date of previous inspection:	February 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Spring Common is a large community special school for boys and girls aged three to nineteen. There are 164 pupils on roll with 114 boys and 50 girls. All the pupils and students have Statements of Special Educational Needs. The main special needs of the pupils and students are moderate learning difficulties; severe learning difficulties; autism; and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). The school has more pupils in Years 7 to 13 than in reception to Year 6. The majority of pupils are of white European origin with a minority of pupils of Black and Asian origin. Sixteen pupils have English as an additional language and eight of these are identified as in the early stages of language acquisition. Almost a quarter of the pupils are eligible for free school meals and the pupil to teacher ratio of seven to one is broadly average for this type of school. The school serves a large area of Cambridgeshire and some pupils travel significant distances to attend. Pupils come from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds and the school is popular in the community and with parents. The school has achieved success as an Investor in People; The International Award; a health promoting school; and has been awarded the Sportsmark Award. Recently, the school has included a large number of pupils with autism, following the closure of a nearby special school, and has undertaken a major building programme to improve the facilities for the pupils. At the time of the inspection, the building work was incomplete and the school's new headteacher had been in post for three weeks.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Spring Common is a very effective and successful school. High expectations are set for the pupils and they are very well taught. As a result, pupils learn very well and show very good achievement in their academic development and outstanding achievement in their personal and social development. The quality of leadership and management is very good and this leads to teachers and assistants giving of their best. The school is exceptionally good at preparing pupils for life after school and provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils show very good achievement in their academic development and outstanding achievement in their personal and social development over their time in school.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good, and teachers are supported by highly skilled and very effective learning support assistants.
- The school has very good leadership and management that sets a culture of high expectations and challenge so that staff, as well as pupils, are confident, motivated and happy at school.
- The school makes outstanding provision in a number of subjects, with particular excellence in music, physical education and sports, and the specialist teaching of science.

What could be improved

- There are still some inconsistencies in the provision for pupils with PMLD. The high expectations of most staff for these pupils are not demonstrated in all activities and this leads to some occasions when these pupils could achieve more.

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

The school was last inspected in February 1998. Since then, it has made very good improvement and done much more than expected. The provision for pupils with PMLD is better than it was and the major building programme is ensuring pupils have appropriate access to all departments of the school. Strategic financial planning is now excellent and morale continues to be high. Pupils' achievements have risen to even higher levels despite: an increase in the school's size; the increasing complexity of the pupils' special needs; major re-building; and changes in leadership. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum has continued to be developed to

the benefit of the pupils. There is a very strong capacity for sustained improvement and the school is now fully confident in determining its own future.

STANDARDS

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

Progress in:	by Year 6	by Year 11	by Year 13	Key
speaking and listening	A	A	A	very good A
reading	A	A	A	good B
writing	A	A	A	satisfactory C
mathematics	A	A	A	unsatisfactory D
personal, social and health education	A	A	A	poor E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	A	A	A	

*Individual Education Plans

The school helps its pupils to achieve very well and standards have risen, even though the nature of the pupils' special needs is becoming increasingly severe and complex. All pupils do very well in developing their communication, reading, literacy and numeracy skills to the full. The 2001 results in the Certificate of Educational Achievement awards taken at the end of Year 11 show that a significant number of pupils successfully gained merit or distinction awards in science, design and technology, information technology, mathematics and physical education. Most students in Year 11 and almost every student in Year 13 gained the ASDAN achievement award at bronze/silver level, and some students in Year 11 reached the higher silver award. The school sets itself challenging performance targets. Inspection shows they are addressed rigorously and that pupils are currently on course to reach these high expectations. There are also some occasions, such as swimming and physical education, when pupils and students do as well as their peers in mainstream schools. There is now a culture of success in the school and pupils take delight in doing well and gaining awards in recognition of their achievement. The outstanding provision for preparing pupils and students for adult life leads to confident, articulate and mature school leavers. Pupils state that their teachers expect them to work hard and this is helping them to make progress and feel confident about college and employment. The ASDAN course is very effective and students show high achievement in life skills, such as budgeting, preparing meals and looking after themselves. Before the inspection, parents stated how well the school is preparing their children for adult life and inspectors judge that the standards of personal development achieved are quite exceptional. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorder are included very effectively in all aspects of school life and achieve very well over time. There is a very good emphasis on using pictures, signs and symbols to support communication and this is also of benefit to pupils with English as an additional language who achieve as well as the other pupils. The pupils with PMLD generally do as well as expected over time, for their degree of special needs and medical conditions, despite some of the inconsistencies in provision.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils and students are highly motivated, exceptionally keen and eager, and show real pride in their work.
Behaviour, in and out of	Very good. Pupils are very well behaved in lessons and outside at play.

classrooms	They help one another and take turns so everyone is included.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Pupils develop into very confident, well-mannered and self-assured young people. They show high levels of mutual respect and value their strong friendships with each other and adults in the school.
Attendance	Very good. There are significantly fewer absences each year than in similar special schools.

Pupils and students are prepared exceptionally well for leaving school. They are in full control of their learning and are confident to ask others for the kind of support they may need. Students make valid choices about their college courses and employment interests, and clearly demonstrate that they are able to lead full and independent adult lives and look after themselves as much as possible.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 – 6	Years 7 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Very good	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.

Since the last inspection, there has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning and this is now judged to be very good. In particular, excellence was observed in the specialist teaching of music, English, mathematics, careers education, science and physical education. English is taught very well and all teachers promote the basic skills of reading, writing, spelling, speaking and listening very effectively in other subjects. Mathematics and the skills of numeracy are also taught very well and very good teaching is provided for pupils with autism. The consistent structure of lessons helps these pupils to know what they are expected to do and, as a result, they feel secure and are more receptive to learning. Pupils with PMLD are usually taught effectively. In most lessons, teachers have high expectations and provide challenging and interesting work. This leads to pupils being very well behaved and concentrating hard on their learning. Teachers plan their lessons with short activities that keep pupils interested and working hard for long periods of time. In particular, teachers are clear in their communication and support it very well with pictures, signs and symbols. These approaches lead the pupils to know what they are learning and enable lessons to proceed at a fast pace because pupils understand more. There are consistent, whole-school procedures for managing behaviour and these are applied very well so that pupils are very well behaved and lessons are uninterrupted. A key feature in the high quality of teaching and learning in the school is the contribution made by learning support assistants. The pupils benefit considerably from the skills, expertise and experience of assistants and there is very effective teamwork between assistants and teachers in all classes. As a result, lessons proceed very smoothly and assistants often anticipate correctly when to intervene and support pupils. All adults in the class work flexibly and use their initiative and professional judgement very well so that support is targeted continually where it is most needed.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. In addition to the National Curriculum, there is very good provision for school leavers. A small proportion of parents queried the activities the school provides outside of lessons. However, inspectors judge that the school provides an impressive range of clubs and other activities.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional	Good. All teachers use signs, symbols and vocabulary carefully to help pupils with communication difficulties. This approach is also successful

language	in helping pupils to acquire English.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. There is outstanding provision for social development. The school makes very good provision for pupils' moral development and good provision for their spiritual and cultural development. The school could do still more to highlight its celebration of the cultural diversity of life in Britain.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good provision is made for the care, safety and protection of the pupils. There is very good provision for assessing how well pupils do and the school council is very effective in making sure that pupils' views are considered.

The school has a good partnership with its parents and provides them with a good quality and range of information about the school, and about how well their children are doing. The provision for pupils with PMLD varies in quality between classes and there are inconsistent expectations among staff about what these pupils can do.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The school has very secure management structures in place and very clear allocation of responsibilities among all staff. These have kept the momentum going for school improvement, even during major building work and changes in headteacher.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Very good. Governors are very thorough in their work and carry out their responsibilities efficiently. They have a very clear knowledge of how good the school is and what it is working on to improve.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. There is a very successful culture of all staff evaluating their work and using this to promote improvement. The school uses evaluation very well to determine its own future.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. Finances, including additional awards and government grants, are now used most effectively to bring about lasting improvements for the pupils. The governors apply the principles of best value very well in all they do.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What some parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school has a friendly atmosphere, cares about individuals and is approachable children are taught by good quality teachers and assistants and make good progress behaviour is good and children have pride in their school and their achievements the school prepares pupils very well for adult life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> some aspects of communication between the school and parents the provision and progress for pupils with PMLD

Inspectors fully endorse all the positive views expressed by parents. Inspectors also judge that communication with parents is generally good, although more could be done to ensure effective communication with parents with specific needs: for example, those parents who have English as an

additional language. Inspectors also find that there are some inconsistencies in the provision for pupils with PMLD and their targets could be more measurable so that parents can see more clearly the progress their children make.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils show very good achievement in their academic development and outstanding achievement in their personal and social development over their time in school

1. Performance data for 2001 shows that the school continues to help its pupils to achieve very well, even though the nature of the pupils' special needs is becoming increasingly severe and complex. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 2 show that most pupils are still working towards the first level of the National Curriculum in all subjects. However, by the end of Year 6, a significant proportion of pupils attain Levels 1 and 2 in English, mathematics and science. At the end of Year 9, a number of pupils are attaining Level 3 in these subjects. The school uses nationally recognised smaller steps of progress (P Levels) to measure the achievement of pupils with the most severe and complex needs. Analysis of this data is used to set challenging targets for the school that are usually met each year. Currently, for example, all the pupils in Years 3 to 6 are expected to move forward in their ability in English by two P Levels by 2003, and 85 per cent of pupils in Year 9 are expected to advance their attainment by one Level by 2003. Inspection shows that these targets are addressed rigorously in lessons and that the school is on course for pupils to reach these high expectations.
2. The achievement of pupils is also seen in the 2001 results in the Certificate of Educational Achievement awards taken by pupils at the end of Year 11. These courses can lead up to GCSE qualifications and the success of the pupils shows very good achievement over time for their degree of special educational needs. A significant number of pupils successfully gained these awards in subjects such as science, design and technology, information technology, mathematics and physical education. In addition, the majority of awards were at either of the higher pass grades of merit or distinction. At the end of Year 11, higher attaining pupils usually transfer to a local college of further education, and students with more severe and complex needs remain at school for a specific post 16 programme that aims to prepare them for transfer to college by the end of Year 13. This programme is very successful indeed and almost every student gains the ASDAN achievement award at bronze/silver level, with some students gaining the higher silver award.
3. When the school's results are compared each year against those of similar special schools for severe and moderate learning difficulties, Spring Common's results are always at least above average. During the inspection, there were occasions when pupils and students were seen to be doing as well as pupils in mainstream schools. In one example, pupils in Year 9 demonstrated ability in swimming that was better than expected of mainstream pupils. Pupils in Years 5 and 7 in music showed an ability to listen, analyse and reflect upon their emotional response to the music played at a level that matched the national average. In physical education, a number of pupils demonstrated skills equivalent to their peers in mainstream schools. Also, in a science lesson observed, the Year 10 pupils demonstrated an understanding in their experiments to study insulation against noise that matched the national expectation for their age.
4. The school provides a wide range of activities outside of lessons. These are very popular with the pupils and students who often gain appropriate awards in recognition of their achievements in these areas. For example, pupils gain cycling proficiency certificates, safety certificates for the use of equipment in design and technology, public speaking awards and so on. This is in addition to a very wide range of school certificates for achievement in areas such as being thoughtful and behaving well. Some individual pupils attain very highly indeed and, recently, one pupil gained three gold medals for swimming in the Special Olympics.
5. The school now has a culture of success and pupils take delight in doing well and gaining awards in recognition of their achievement. However, pupils achieve much more than academic success. The school makes outstanding provision for preparing pupils and students for adult life and the outcome of this is seen in the excellent personal development of the pupils that leads to confident, articulate and mature school leavers. Inspectors met with the school council of pupils

elected by their classmates. These pupils emphasised how their teachers expect them to work hard and how this is helping them to achieve a lot. They were very clear indeed about the progress they make and stated confidently how they will continue to work hard in college and in employment. In a meeting with Years 11 to 13, students told inspectors how confident they are to go to college and how well the school has taught them to lead an independent life. They were very clear that their ASDAN course has been exceptionally helpful and has successfully shown them the importance of learning life skills, such as budgeting, preparing meals and keeping a house and clothes clean. Students in Year 13 demonstrated in a lesson that they know how to take part in an interview and answer questions with confidence, good eye contact and appropriate body language. Before the inspection, parents stated how well the school is preparing their children for adult life and inspectors judge that the standards of personal development achieved are quite exceptional. In the meetings held between inspectors, pupils and students, quotes from the young people involved such as 'my school is well-wicked!' show how much they like school. In addition, the opinion of students about their school is that 'everyone achieves' and when asked about leaving school and going to college, they stated with honesty, 'I'm as confident as I'll ever be'.

6. A significant proportion of the pupils have autistic spectrum disorder and are included very effectively in all aspects of school life such as the school council and lunch time clubs. These pupils are also achieving very well over their time in school. In lessons, the routines provided by teachers are having a very good effect and pupils are secure about their day and know what is expected of them. An example of this is evident in the way these pupils have responded to major building work and having to change classrooms. This has taken place with no significant disruption to the pupils and they have continued with their learning and accepted new surroundings very well. Inspectors noted that the youngest pupils are helped very well with their communication through the use of pictures, symbols and signs to support speech. It was also noted that, over time, a significant proportion of these pupils are less reliant on visual cues and are able to access much more of school life through effective oral communication, with less reference to visual prompts. This emphasis on communication in the school is also of benefit to pupils with English as an additional language and this helps them to quickly acquire sufficient skills to achieve in school as well as the other pupils. The pupils with PMLD generally do as well as expected for their degree of special needs and medical conditions, but there is still some room for improvement in promoting their achievement.

The quality of teaching and learning is very good, and teachers are supported by highly skilled and very effective learning support assistants

7. Since the last inspection, there has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. This is due to school leaders monitoring and evaluating lessons and encouraging all adults to consider at all times how best to improve the quality of their work. In the lessons seen during the inspection a very high proportion (two thirds) were judged to have teaching and learning that was at least very good. Almost half of these lessons were judged by inspectors to be excellent. A total of nine tenths of all lessons seen contained at least good quality teaching and learning. Only one lesson was unsatisfactory and this was where pupils with PMLD waited too long for attention. This high level of very good teaching was observed for pupils of all ages and in a wide spread of subjects. The excellent lessons observed were in the specialist teaching of English, mathematics, science and careers education and guidance for pupils and students in Years 10 to 13. A significant number of lessons in physical education were taught to an outstanding level of quality by a number of teachers and the specialist teaching of music was never at a quality less than excellent. English is taught very well and all teachers promote the basic skills of reading, writing, spelling, speaking and listening very well in other subjects too. For example, this was observed in a physical education lesson where the teacher made sure that Year 8 pupils understood the meanings of the words to be used (catch, stop, throw etc) before beginning the activity. Mathematics and the skills of numeracy are also taught very well and pupils are challenged to extend their knowledge through a very good mixture of methods such as regular counting routines, singing their times tables and practical experiences with shapes and weight.

8. Very good teaching was observed for pupils with autism. Teachers follow a consistent structure in their lessons and use individual work stations and symbol cards very well so that pupils know what they are expected to do. This helps the pupils to feel secure and results in sustained concentration and very good behaviour so that the pupils are more receptive to new learning. Teachers also manage pupils' behaviour in a calm and courteous manner that demonstrates to all pupils how they are valued and respected as individuals. Also, pupils follow very carefully designed individual programmes that not only keep up a momentum for academic development but are successful in gradually enabling pupils to become more sociable and be included in group activities. Teachers usually include pupils with PMLD effectively in their lessons. This is often achieved by flexible teamwork between teacher and assistants so that, for example, a pupil has one to one attention to share a book with an adult and is enabled to use a pre-recorded message with a switch to 'join in' with the repetitive lines of the story.
9. In the excellent and very good lessons observed the following points were noted as contributory factors to the success of the pupils.
- Teachers have high expectations and provide challenging and interesting work for the pupils. This leads to pupils being very well behaved and concentrating hard on their learning. For example, in a lesson where pupils with autism were making toasted sandwiches they were expected to remember the specific vocabulary for kitchen equipment and to know where it was kept. They were also expected to do things for themselves and this led to an impressive level of eye contact and active participation. In a careers lesson for students in Year 13, the teacher expected that the students would be aware of what they have learnt, how well they have done, what they are good at, and the kind of support they need to help them to learn. As a result, students were able to answer questions in an interview with full and detailed responses and had the confidence to inform adults of the level of support they may need. For example, one student was able to say that he would need symbols together with text to help him understand what he was reading.
 - Teachers plan their lessons with short activities that keep pupils interested and working hard for long periods of time. A number of lessons observed for pupils with autism were organised so that pupils experienced a mixture of literacy and numeracy activities in their work stations and these frequent changes motivated the pupils to give maximum effort to their learning throughout the lesson. In a mathematics lesson for pupils in Year 4 the teacher made very good use of the time at the end of the lesson to keep the pupils focused on applying their knowledge of shapes in new situations and this led them to a deeper understanding of the properties of each shape.
 - Teachers use a wide range of methods, resources and communication styles that successfully include all pupils in learning. For example, in a mathematics lesson for pupils in Year 5, the teacher sang the times tables and allowed pupils to choose the number cards for the rest of the class to solve. This was done in a lively manner that made the pupils happy to respond and eager to show what they knew. In an English lesson for pupils in Year 10, the teacher had previously shown pupils a film, discussed the play they had seen (Romeo and Juliet) and engaged in role play in class. During the lesson, the teacher used clear language and avoided ambiguous questions so that the pupils were able to contribute well to discussion and showed a high level of enthusiasm for improving their performance. In a number of lessons, teachers were observed providing pupils with practical activities, allowing them to handle resources, and providing clarity of communication supported very well with pictures, signs and symbols. These approaches lead the pupils to know more clearly what they are learning and enable lessons to proceed at a fast pace because pupils understand the communication taking place.
 - There are consistent, whole-school procedures for managing behaviour and these are applied very well in all classes. As a result, the pupils are very well behaved. Those pupils with behaviour difficulties work really hard at trying to improve and to control their actions and are delighted at being successful and gaining their merit awards. This approach means that lessons are uninterrupted by pupils' behaviour and everyone can focus on their learning.

10. A key feature in the high quality of teaching and learning in the school is the contribution made by learning support assistants (LSAs). The school benefits considerably from the skills, expertise and experience of assistants and there is very effective teamwork between assistants and teachers in all classes. Teachers and assistants plan together the activities that will take place in lessons and meet each morning to clarify who will do what throughout the day. As a result, lessons proceed very smoothly and assistants often anticipate correctly when to intervene and support pupils. All adults in the class work flexibly and use their initiative and professional judgement very well so that support is targeted continually where it is most needed. Through the school's very good arrangements for appraisal and performance management, LSAs are enabled to extend their professional development and gain sufficient skills to provide short term cover for teachers should they be absent. This means that teachers can deploy LSAs to work with groups of pupils safe in the knowledge that the pupils will receive a very good quality of experience.

The school has very good leadership and management that sets a culture of high expectations and challenge so that staff, as well as pupils, are confident, motivated and happy at school

11. A key factor in the school's very good leadership is the way in which roles and responsibilities are allocated to staff, and there are very clear whole school procedures for items such as assessment, behaviour management, individual education plans and reviewing the progress of pupils. These structures and procedures involve a lot of consultation among staff and result in everyone having a share in the direction of the school and following a consistent vision for its development. The outcome of this is that the school has continued to improve despite the major upheavals of building work and the changes in school leadership.
12. The school is particularly good at evaluating what it does well and what it should work on next to improve. As a result, the school exudes a confidence about its work and is in full control of its forward development. This confidence is demonstrated by staff who are similarly clear about what they do well in their jobs and what they are working on to develop. In addition, the school has an ethos of high expectations and challenge for the pupils and this is also evident in the expectations that school leaders and all personnel with positions of responsibility set for other members of staff. The procedures for appraisal and performance management work very well and staff are given praise and appropriate reward and responsibilities for the quality of their work. As a result:
- The talents and skills of staff are known well by their line managers and are put to best use in the school for the maximum benefit of the pupils.
 - The quality of teaching and learning has improved and several teachers now display highly advanced skills and excellence in their subject.
 - Very good professional development is provided that enables teachers to develop skills needed by the school, for example in meeting the needs of pupils with autism, as well as extending their personal interests and qualifications.
 - Very good professional development is provided for learning support assistants so that they are improving their skills and qualifications to the level where many can act as unqualified teachers during short term absence. One LSA has recently qualified as a teacher and is now employed in this capacity by the school.
 - Teachers have very clear roles and responsibilities and benefit from sharing their expertise in effective teamwork.
 - LSAs have very clear roles in the school and are given appropriate responsibilities such as organising and managing the library and providing training for personnel on safe lifting and handling procedures.
 - All staff do more for the pupils than their basic job description suggests. For example, a number of LSAs run clubs at lunch times and teachers co-operate by providing supervision for the pupils in their stead.
 - Adults are happy in their work and enjoy being part of the school and sharing in its success.
 - Pupils and students are happy in their school, work hard and give of their best.

The school makes outstanding provision in a number of subjects, with particular excellence in music, physical education and sports, and the specialist teaching of science

13. It was agreed between the school, governors and inspectors that a particular focus for the inspection should be the school's provision for music and physical education. During the inspection, the provision in these subjects was judged to be excellent and observations of other lessons confirmed that the specialist provision for science is also outstanding. Owing to the nature of the inspection, other subjects were not inspected in sufficient depth to make firm judgements about the quality of provision, but excellent lessons were also observed in English, mathematics and careers education and guidance.

Music

14. Since the last inspection, the quality of provision for music has improved and is now at an exceedingly high level. The subject is taught by a gifted and talented teacher who is able to provide amazingly high levels of challenge equally well for pupils with autism and pupils with PMLD as well as for all other pupils in the school. Each lesson is an inspirational performance that motivates pupils highly so that they participate to the full at a level that exceeds all expectations. Lessons contain very high levels of spirituality and pupils learn, in addition to musical skills, how to communicate, socialise and be confident in their ability. In addition, pupils develop high levels of skill in listening, recognising patterns of sound, recalling sequences and extending their memory of lyrics and experiences. These skills are fundamental to improving their learning in all subjects and contribute to the very good achievement of pupils in the school.
15. In one lesson observed, for pupils in Year 9, the teacher played a medley of the 'signature tunes' for each pupil. The pupils glowed with pride as they recognised their tune and as others sang it to them. In particular, one pupil with PMLD gave a huge response (much more than seen in other lessons) as another pupil sang her lyrics, and was able to demonstrate recognition and happiness at being included. Other pupils were sufficiently confident to sing solo and to identify which of the melodies played were English music or from the Caribbean. In another lesson for pupils with autism in reception and Year 1, the teacher successfully enabled the pupils to sit together on a mat and then carefully controlled the lighting in the room so that 'darkness fell'. This produced an atmosphere of enthralled wonderment that led to pupils enjoying the song that followed and welcoming the involvement of an LSA with each in turn. This in turn led the pupils, without realising it, into much more social acceptance and tolerance of one another than they usually exhibit as well as producing a significant increase in their vocalisations. In a lesson for pupils in Year 7, the teacher again used lighting to help portray the emotion of the music and inspired pupils to learn the National Anthem so that they can be included in forthcoming celebrations. In addition, the lesson moved to a higher level of communication, beyond words, that directly reached every pupil, regardless of their special needs. Inspectors judge that teaching and learning of this quality are very rare indeed and serve as an exemplar of the very best practice.

Physical education

16. The quality of the school's provision for physical education and sports has already been recognised with the Sportsmark Award. There is an exceptional range of opportunities available for the pupils including lunch-time clubs, competitions with other schools and adventurous activities on residential weeks away. These include the use of the new sports hall as well as other leisure and sports activities in and around Huntingdon. The subject has outstanding leadership with a clarity of vision and very strong sense of purpose. There is a very strong emphasis on pupils learning not only about the sport concerned but also about health and safety, body awareness and striving to improve the quality of performance. Teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can do and this leads to the pupils working very hard both physically and intellectually to gain knowledge and skills. Pupils evaluate their work very well indeed and are enthusiastic about improving their performance. As a result, standards are high and many pupils do equally as well as their peers in mainstream schools. In swimming, a

number of pupils do better than expected and show high levels of skill. In addition, pupils develop confidence and gain full awareness of leisure activities they may pursue in adult life. The physical success and well being of the pupils also contribute to their performance in class and this is a contributory factor to their very good achievement.

17. The quality of teaching is generally excellent with persistent challenge and clear objectives for what the pupils should do. In a lesson seen for pupils in Year 2, pupils with PMLD warmed up through stretching and bending exercises with their LSAs while the ambulant pupils danced to music. During the lesson, the teacher provided stimulating and demanding activities for the ambulant pupils and the LSAs carried out physiotherapy related exercises with the pupils with PMLD. The outcome was that all pupils concentrated hard on developing their physical skills. During a lunch time hockey club, the pupils arrived very enthusiastically and responded very well to their teacher's guidance to improve their skills and extend their understanding of the rules. A particular feature was the very strong sense of fair play among the pupils and their willingness to include their friends regardless of gender, age or ability. In another lesson observed, for pupils in Year 8, the teacher provided an excellent range of questions so that the pupils would evaluate their work and think how to improve their ball skills. This led to the pupils giving exceedingly confident responses and enthusiastically working hard to improve the accuracy of their throwing. Also in this lesson the teacher made sure that pupils understood the specific vocabulary they needed to use and also developed their numeracy skills by keeping track of how many balls were used.

Science

18. The subject was not originally intended as a focus of the inspection. However, the lessons observed that were taught by the specialist science teacher were judged to be excellent, and the high level of quality of teaching and learning is having a direct impact on pupils' achievements. This is demonstrated by the school's 2001 Certificate of Educational Achievement results which show that most pupils attained passes with distinction in this subject. In a lesson observed for pupils in Years 3 to 5, the teacher's very high expectations led the pupils to behave really well and to try very hard to recall and use their existing scientific knowledge. The teacher provided very good practical tasks and demonstrations so that the pupils quickly came to understand the relationship between the colours of the spectrum. In addition, the teacher demanded high levels of prediction and testing and this led the pupils to demonstrate scientific method in their experiments at levels just below the national average for their age. In another lesson for pupils in Years 10 and 11, the teacher fully expected that all pupils would use the correct scientific terms throughout the lesson and the outcome of this regular routine was seen as the pupils were obviously used to providing quick and accurate answers. Also, the questions asked by the teacher encouraged the pupils to ask questions of themselves and use scientific thinking in determining their answers. In this way, the pupils demonstrated knowledge and awareness of materials, and their suitability as noise insulation, at a level close to that usually expected for their age. Another outcome from the high quality of science teaching was seen in a lesson for Year 9 pupils on sex education and personal relationships taken by a different teacher. The pupils demonstrated a very good level of knowledge and understanding about their own bodies and reproductive systems that they had learnt in their science lessons. Because this knowledge was so secure, the pupils were able to focus on the aims of the lesson and discuss adolescence, puberty and relationships with a good level of maturity and interest.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

There are still some inconsistencies in the provision for pupils with PMLD. The high expectations of most staff for these pupils are not demonstrated in all activities and there are some occasions when these pupils could achieve more

19. Since the last inspection, the school has re-organised how pupils are placed in classes and has provided appropriate training for teachers and learning support assistants in meeting the needs of pupils with PMLD. In most classes, this work is effective and appropriate provision is now made, with pupils being sufficiently challenged and stimulated in most lessons. However, not enough emphasis has been given to making sure that all staff know what is expected of them in dealing with these pupils. Also, the school's otherwise very effective monitoring and evaluation procedures have not been analysed with sufficient rigour to ensure that all staff are consistent in their expectations of the progress that pupils with PMLD should make. As a result, there are occasions when these pupils could be achieving more. For example, in one lesson observed, pupils with PMLD waited up to ten minutes before an adult intervened and included them in activities. Also, during a lunch-time observation, some staff were feeding the pupils without due regard to appropriate feeding programmes that would enable the pupils to have more independence in their eating. A common factor in these sessions was that the targets set for the pupils in their individual education plans were too general and this led to difficulty in measuring the very small steps of progress that these pupils make. For example, one pupil had a target concerned with using an on/off switch. Had this target been more specific, for example, being able to use the right hand seven times out of ten to use the switch, then staff and parents would have been more aware of any progress being made. Before the inspection, some parents commented that they did not know how well their children with PMLD were doing. Inspectors agree that the school could do more to demonstrate to parents the progress being made and what they can reasonably expect next of their children.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

20. To add to the school's considerable strengths and to continue its improvement; governors, school leaders and staff should now:

(1) Ensure high quality provision for pupils with PMLD is made throughout the school (paragraph 19) by:

- Making sure all staff share the same high expectations for these pupils
- Setting specific and measurable targets for the small steps that pupils should learn next in class, at play and at lunchtimes
- Making sure that all staff know these targets and address them effectively throughout the day
- Demonstrating more effectively to parents and staff the progress that pupils make

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	39
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	14

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	11	14	10	3	1	0	0
Percentage	28	36	26	8	3	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than two percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	164
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	38

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	13

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	3
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.4
National data for MSLD schools 2000	7.6

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National data for MSLD schools 2000	2.0

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

Attainment at the end of Year 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Total
	2001	6

Teachers' Assessments		Level W	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Numbers of pupils at each NC level	Reading	6				
	Writing	6				
	Mathematics	5	1			

Attainment at the end of Year 6

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Total
	2001	8

Teachers' Assessments		Level W	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Numbers of pupils at each NC level	English	3		5		
	Mathematics	3	3	2		
	Science	3	3	2		

Attainment at the end of Year 9

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Total
	2001	17

Teachers' Assessments		Level W	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Numbers of pupils at each NC level	English	7	4	4	2	
	Mathematics	7	3	4	3	
	Science	7	2	6	2	

Attainment at the end of Year 11

Certificate of Educational Achievement results		Pass	Merit	Distinction
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Design and technology; Graphic products	5	4	
	Design and technology; Textiles		7	2
	Information Technology		1	9
	Mathematics			1
	Science (first certificate)	3	8	10
	Science (second certificate)	2	3	5
	Physical education		6	8

Attainment of students in Years 11, 12 and 13

ASDAN ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS	NUMBER OF PUPILS GAINING THE AWARD
Transition Challenge Award	1
Bronze Award	4
Bronze/Silver Award	14
Silver Award	3
Work Experience Challenge	3

Other achievements of pupils

Pupils and students, of all ages, also have opportunities to gain the following school awards:

- Merit certificates for the points awarded in class
- Achievement certificates for behaviour, effort, being thoughtful, attendance
- Certificates, and special awards, through attendance at school clubs such as 'Interact, Scout Link', sports clubs and residential activities
- Prizes for progress in reading; and for achievement in French
- Cups and trophies for sports, swimming, progress, contribution to the school
- Certificates for: work experience; ASDAN modules; cycling proficiency; canoeing; swimming; use of equipment in design and technology; horse-riding; Trading Standards; Huntingdon in Bloom; college experiences; public speaking; reading; French; science; physical education; handwriting; and visits to the Europa Centre and Safety Centre

Individual pupils have also achieved the following awards out of school:

- Three Olympic gold medals (special) for swimming
- Nationally recognised awards for expertise in canoeing
- Certificate for outstanding social skills
- Inclusion in a local cricket team at senior level

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	6
Pakistani	6
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	0
White	148
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	23.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	7
Average class size	8.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: YR – Y13

Total number of education support staff	30
Total aggregate hours worked per week	975

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	1,120,008
Total expenditure	1,118,024
Expenditure per pupil	7,658
Balance brought forward from previous year	25,088
Balance carried forward to next year	27,072

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	6

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
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	164
Number of questionnaires returned	30

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	63	33	0	0	3
My child is making good progress in school.	63	30	0	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	53	43	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	43	7	0	13
The teaching is good.	63	33	0	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	57	30	3	3	7
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	70	23	3	3	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	67	20	7	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	57	30	10	0	3
The school is well led and managed.	60	23	3	3	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	63	27	3	3	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	50	27	3	7	0

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

More than 90 per cent of parents agree that: their children like school; are making good progress; behaviour is good; teaching is good; and they feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. Additional written comments were received from some parents stating: that praise is due for the school and the progress their children make; that some aspects of communication could be improved; that the needs of pupils with PMLD are not always met; and that some parents have concerns about the Health Authority's provision for speech and language therapy.