

INSPECTION REPORT

ST. JOHN'S RC SPECIAL SCHOOL

Woodford Green

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115466

Headteacher: Brian Sainsbury

Reporting inspector: Michael McDowell
1405

Dates of inspection: 10th – 13th December 2001

Inspection number: 243529

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:	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils:	5 to 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed

School address:	Turpins Lane Woodford Bridge Essex
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Father Bob Hamill

Date of previous inspection:	1 st December 1997
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INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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1405	Michael McDowell	Registered inspector	Special educational needs English as an additional language	What sort of school is it? How high are standards? How well are the pupils and students taught? How well is the school led and managed?
9499	Phiroze Daruwala	Lay inspector		How well does the school care for its pupils and students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
1358	Glyn Essex	Team inspector	Equal opportunities English Art Modern foreign language	Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development, Attendance
8798	Denis Maxwell	Team inspector	Mathematics Information and communication technology Design and technology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils and students?
22391	Nicholas smith	Team inspector	Science Geography	
3055	Clive Tombs	Team inspector	History Music Physical education	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St. John's is a Catholic non-maintained special school that provides for 99 day pupils aged between 7 and 19. Pupils have special educational needs because of learning difficulties. About a third of pupils have moderate and the remainder severe learning difficulties. A minority has emotional and behavioural difficulties or autistic spectrum disorder. Attainment on entry is well below average. Pupils are drawn from Essex and outer London boroughs. All have Statements of Special Educational Needs. About a third are black or Asian and 14 pupils are from families where English is not the first language. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals, 28 per cent, is about average for a school of this sort. The school aims to offer its pupils a Catholic education that will enable them to make the most of their unique qualities and gifts and give them a sense of belonging to a community founded on love and forgiveness.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St John's is an effective school. Through good teaching supported by therapeutic input of high quality, it enables its pupils, who have a wide range of special educational needs, to achieve well. There is good new leadership and the school is soundly managed. It gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching is of good quality and leads to pupils learning well in their lessons.
- Language and communication skills are strongly enhanced by very good provision of speech and language therapy.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual development is excellent and that for moral, social and cultural development is very good.
- Pupils achieve well. They make good progress in English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology, history, music and physical education. Students post-16 make good progress and develop well their skills for living.
- The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are very good. They have very positive relationships with one another and excellent relationships with the adults who teach and support them.

What could improved

- Curriculum planning is underdeveloped and does not always ensure that the best balance of appropriate well-planned learning experiences is offered to each age group in each subject.
- Assessment is inconsistent in quality and is not always effectively used to inform planning

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 December 1997. Since then, it has made satisfactory improvement. The issues identified by the last inspection have been dealt with and in most cases fully resolved. Pupils are now offered a balance of learning opportunities that meets their needs and the requirements of the national curriculum. The total time given to teaching and learning each week has been increased so that it is in line with national guidelines. Good practice in assessing what pupils know, understand and can do has been established in a number of subjects and areas of the school's work but, not yet, in all. Co-ordinators have been appointed in each subject and in most cases, they have clear job descriptions. A start has been made on monitoring the quality of teaching and learning across the school. There has been substantial improvement in resources for English, science, design, technology, and French. More generally, teaching and learning are now more consistently of higher quality. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of pupils and students who have had their work accredited by national awarding bodies.

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

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

The school has recently set a range of targets for the achievement of pupils and students in courses accredited by national awarding agencies. The school is on course to meet these. Pupils get off to a good start in developing their communication skills and are greatly helped by the high quality work of the school language support department. Achievement in speaking and listening is good across the age range as a consequence. Pupils achieve well in reading. Writing is satisfactory. While pupils in many cases write unaided they have too few opportunities to develop their ideas in written form. In mathematics, achievement is good by age 11 and by age 16. In science, pupils make good progress and achieve well by the age of 14. From age 14 to 16, their progress is very good. In art and in design and technology, where the strengths are in food technology, achievement is satisfactory. Achievement in history is good and in geography, it is satisfactory. Pupils make good progress in social development, and over time, their personal development flourishes. By age 18, many have clear ideas about what they will do after leaving school and how to go about attaining these goals. They show increasing independence in the way in which they manage to make sound choices or conduct themselves during work experience opportunities. They gain good understanding of the part played by diet, exercise and the use of leisure in promoting a healthy life. Time-tabled lessons in personal social and health education, which are too frequently insufficiently planned, play less part in bringing about these positive developments than the school's excellent ethos and positive expectations of its pupils. Pupils make good progress towards the targets set for them at annual reviews and in their individual education plans.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils have very good attitudes to school. In most lessons, they enjoy their work and try hard to do their best.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils and students behave very well; they respect one another and allow others to learn without interruption in lessons. Their behaviour, out of school, and especially when mixing with pupils from other schools is very good.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Their relationships with one another are very good and they enjoy excellent relationships with those who teach and care for them. Their personal development by the time they leave school is very good.

Aspect	Comment
Attendance	Satisfactory. Most pupils attend regularly but a number visit family homes in other lands or are Travellers and so authorised absence is relatively high.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 1 – 6	Years 7 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Good

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

Teaching is of good quality and is effective in enabling pupils to learn at a rate that is better than might be expected given their significant learning difficulties. In particular, English and mathematics are well taught and teaching in science is very good. The majority of lessons in almost all subjects are at least good and a high proportion of these is very good or excellent. However, in PSHE lessons, what is to be taught is not fully guided by a scheme of work and is unclear. On occasions, time is not used as well as it should be and teaching is satisfactory. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Teachers understand the learning needs of their pupils well and classroom teams play their part in ensuring that what is being taught is accessible to individual pupils. The part played by speech and language therapists in this is a crucial element in the success of lessons. Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects and in some cases make use of innovative and extremely effective strategies to ensure that even those with the most profound difficulties get the crucial point of the lesson. Because of the quality of teaching, pupils learn well, consolidate their knowledge and make good gains in skills and understanding during lessons. They try hard and approach their work with apparent enjoyment. They show pride in what they achieve.

Teachers have very good relationships with their pupils. In this, they strongly reflect the aims and values of the school. They create a positive climate for learning within their classrooms and this enables effective teaching and learning to take place. In most cases, lessons are well planned and pupils are effectively managed. Teachers employ good motivational strategies that enhance learning and encourage pupils to try hard and do their best. They have high expectations of their pupils. They make full use of the time allowed for lessons in most instances.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. Pupils aged 7 to 16 are offered a broad range of learning experiences that includes all the subjects of the national curriculum that are appropriate to their age. Students in the sixth form have learning experiences that suit their needs well. Support for the development of communication skills is very good. There is a brief curriculum statement but the school has not given sufficient expression to the principles for constructing a balanced range of learning experiences to take pupils' learning forward throughout their time in the school. Planning within some subjects gives insufficient indication of what should be taught within each year and across the key stages.

Aspect	Comment
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. The school makes good provision for child protection and for ensuring pupils' welfare. Procedures for monitoring personal development are informal although milestones in development are summarised well in Annual Review reports. Assessment of pupils' academic progress is an underdeveloped area. Procedures for promoting and monitoring good behaviour and noting and eliminating bullying and oppressive behaviour are very good.

The school works very well in partnership with parents who have a very positive view of it. Because parents are spread over the school's wide catchment area they have reduced opportunities to make a direct contribution to learning within the school though from time to time some do so. Parents have been helped to set up support groups that have enabled them to manage their own children more effectively. The school keeps parents well informed about their children's progress.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Satisfactory. The head and the deputy are newly appointed to their posts and have had insufficient time to make a significant impact. They have made a good start and are clear about the educational direction the school must take. Staff share the aims of the school. There are areas such as the overall management of the curriculum and the best use of meetings that need to be improved.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Good. The governors are aware of their responsibilities and carry them out conscientiously. The school improvement plan is unwieldy and its structure needs to be revised to make it useful.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. Targets have been set by which aspects of the school performance might be evaluated but this area is in need of further development.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The school makes effective use of its resources to support pupils' progress and learning. Accommodation, staffing and learning resources are good overall. The school seeks to achieve "best value" in all its spending decisions and plans for improvement.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupils enjoy going to school. The school is well led and managed. Behaviour in the school is good. Expectations are high. Parents feel comfortable approaching the school. Teaching is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few parents feel that their child does not get the right amount of homework. A few parents feel that the school does not work closely with parents.

Inspectors support parents' generally very positive views. They find that the school implements its policy for homework well. The effectiveness of school's links with parents is very good. The school also makes very effective use of speech therapists. Fifty-eight completed questionnaires were returned and the parents' meeting was attended by 18 parents. There are 99 pupils in the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Achievement is good and has substantially improved since the last inspection. There has been a significant increase in the number of pupils achieving accreditation for their work by national awarding agencies and a broadening of the range of subjects where outcomes are accredited. The school sets targets for the achievement of pupils and students within such courses and is on course to achieve these.
2. In English, pupils achieve well, especially in speaking and listening. Overall achievement in English has improved steadily since the last inspection. On entry to the school, most of the younger pupils have significant speech and language difficulties. They make rapid progress because of the close and beneficial co-operation of teachers and speech and language therapists. Precise targets are set for pupils' improvement that enable all staff, including classroom assistants, to focus on individual needs. By the age of 11, pupils show their progress by their comfortable, confident talking and their good, active listening. The use of symbols and sign to reinforce speech is notable. However, signing is not always used where it would clearly be of benefit. Good progress in speaking and listening continues across the age range and beyond 16.
3. Reading develops well. Pupils speak enthusiastically about their reading books and stories they have read. By the age of 11, higher-attaining pupils know the sounds of letters and use this to sound and pronounce new words. By the age of 14, they extend their vocabulary by reading. Progress continues to be good as pupils move up the school. They make profitable use of a wide range of books to help with their work in other subjects. The library is used well. Pupils with higher-attainment read for information. For pupils aged 15 and 16, the rate of progress slows partly because the range of reading material offered includes too little fiction, drama and poetry.
4. By the age of 16, lower-attaining pupils have made progress that is good for them but they do not break away from schemes designed for much younger pupils.
5. In writing, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Progress is steady as pupils complete simple writing tasks. These include writing their names or words encountered in their reading. This reading helps their writing, particularly in the case of younger pupils where it acts as a stimulus for them to write. As they move through the school, higher-attainers write their "news", while others begin to master the "writing with symbols" program on the computer. Over time, punctuation, letter formation and spelling improve. There is, however, a limited range of writing attempted. By the age of 16, pupils are on course to reach the required standard for external accreditation.
6. In mathematics, achievement is good by the ages of 11, 14 and 16. Improvement since the last inspection is marked. From very low levels of understanding on entry, pupils make good gains. They come to know, recognise and write numerals between 1 and 9 and perform simple addition and subtraction. By the age of 11, they count to 20 or 25 and order numbers correctly in this range. Some pupils aged 11 to 14 who have learning difficulties do not have a secure grasp of number, but others succeed well in building on the good foundation provided in their junior classes. They add numbers up to 100 and in many cases remember the numbers that add together to make 10, or in some cases, 20. They have become familiar with the names of a range

of common two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes.

7. Learning progresses at a good rate for pupils aged 14 to 16. More abstract ideas, such as probability, are investigated and number skills develop. Pupils learn to use calculators.
8. Achievement in science is very good by the age of 16, a very substantial improvement since the last inspection. The youngest pupils use their senses effectively to gather information about materials. They describe the properties of materials clearly and, for example, predict whether these will float or sink. By the age of 11, they try out their ideas in practical investigations and have a knowledge of light and its sources. By the age of 16, pupils have good understanding of the human body and its organs and their functions. They are on course to gain accreditation in external courses at a level that is very good in relation to their attainment.
9. Since the previous inspection, standards achieved in all other subjects have been either maintained or improved. In art, achievement is now satisfactory, where formerly it was weak. Pupils develop their skills and knowledge of basic processes well but still have insufficient opportunities to reach their full potential. In design and technology, achievement overall is good and there has been general improvement. Work in food technology is particularly strong.
10. Good improvements have taken place in history and music, where achievement is now good. In French, good improvement has led to pupils' making satisfactory progress. In information and communication technology and in physical education, the high standards previously achieved have been maintained. Achievement in geography remains as previously reported, satisfactory.
11. Students aged 16 to 19 continue to develop their communication, mathematical, and information and communication technology skills well. They make good use of vocational courses and the opportunities for personal development that the sixth form offers. Their achievement is good.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

12. Attitudes are very good. Pupils enjoy school. Their enthusiasm is notable, both in lessons and in other activities during the school day. This is similar to the findings of the last inspection. Good teaching and the interest which pupils clearly find in classroom activities are major factors in the very positive attitudes, which they display to their learning. They persevere in spite of the difficulties that they experience. In their basic literacy and numeracy work, for example, pupils of all ages and levels of attainment are very keen to succeed. This is particularly noticeable in the way they motivate themselves to work on their own. They also work well together, in pairs or small groups. Pupils with difficulties on the autistic spectrum in particular benefit from the calm and co-operative atmosphere that generally prevails in the classroom.
13. The school behaviour policy aims for pupils to be "careful and kind, polite and friendly and helpful to each other" and numerous examples of these qualities were observed during the inspection week. Younger pupils have very good role models, among both the older pupils and the staff. Lunchtimes provide evidence of the very good development of social skills. In the playground, pupils show consideration for each other, particularly towards those who do not want to join in with the vigorous activities which take place there. In the classroom, this politeness shows in the way pupils listen to others. This makes a very positive contribution to the good development of

their speaking and listening skills. Pupils with difficulties on the autistic spectrum do sometimes become upset and act out their distress. Because of the tolerance of such outbursts shown by their classmates and the calm response of staff, the disruption caused is kept to a minimum. Formal sanctions as a result of unacceptable behaviour are very rarely needed. Only one pupil was excluded for a fixed period in the school year prior to the inspection.

14. As a result of this very good behaviour and the very successful implementation by the school of its equal opportunities policy, pupils feel very secure in the school. There is no evidence of bullying, either verbal or physical, among pupils and mutual respect is a key feature of the excellent relationships that exist in the school. Pupils' confidence is apparent in the way they talk to visitors, take part in activities outside the school, including work experience, and contribute to assemblies. In one assembly seen during the inspection week, for example, a Year 11 pupil sang on his own in front of the whole school.
15. Pupils of all ages are keen to help out in class, clearing away equipment and carrying out other housekeeping tasks on their own initiative. On a few occasions, for example in an art lesson for Year 9 and 10 pupils, too much help was provided for pupils in practical activities. In general, pupils organise themselves well, move between lessons with the minimum of fuss and manage their work with increasing independence as they get older.

Attendance

16. Levels of attendance are satisfactory. Just over 89 per cent attendance was achieved in the school year ending August 2001. Punctuality is satisfactory. Transportation provided by the local authorities ensures that pupils arrive at 9.00 am ready for a punctual start to the school day.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

17. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching since the school was last inspected when it was found to be satisfactory. It is now good and more than a quarter of lessons are very good or excellent. None are unsatisfactory.
18. Teachers are strongly committed to the ideals expressed in the mission statement of the school. They establish excellent relationships with their pupils. In the classroom, they create a very positive climate that effectively encourages learning. Pupils grow in confidence as they respond to the respectful way in which they are treated by adults who teach and support them. Teachers are conscientious and hardworking and plan their lessons thoroughly in most cases.
19. Where they are the only people teaching a subject which is their specialism, they provide pupils with sequences of lessons that take their learning forward at a very good rate. However, where teachers are not specialists and make use of the guidance provided by subject co-ordinators, there is some variation in the effectiveness of their plans. Improvement could be made and a more uniform quality of lessons provided if work was planned jointly by teachers within each age range, under the guidance of the co-ordinator.
20. There were many instances observed that pointed to the high degree of knowledge and understanding of pupils' individual learning needs and how, acknowledging these, essential learning might be best promoted. In an excellent geography lesson for pupils

with autistic spectrum disorder, the teacher carefully prepared the ground to introduce the difficult notion of how plans and diagrams that are two-dimensional and much reduced in scale represent the relative positions of features in the real world. She used a good motivational strategy and ensured that each pupil individually carried out and understood a task. This was to find a sweet hidden in the classroom, having been shown its location on a plan of the room. As a result of this exercise, the pupils all showed that they understood that plans and maps show position in the real world.

21. Expectations of how pupils will behave are very high. Teachers believe that pupils will try their best and succeed in learning. The methods that teachers use suit the purposes of lessons well. For example, students in the sixth form have increased opportunity to learn directly within the community in activities such as shopping surveys or through work experience. A greater emphasis is placed on their responding appropriately through conversation and discussion rather than unremittingly through written work. In a few cases, however, the perceived necessity to make certain that pupils or students clearly mark their understanding of what has been experienced or discussed leads to an over-reliance on worksheets. These are time-consuming to complete and have uncertain usefulness. However, time is used very fully in most cases. In personal, social and health education lessons, teaching is not fully guided by a scheme of work, and the best use of time is not always made.
22. Pupils and students listen carefully to what they are told and try very hard when they are given tasks in lessons. They work hard and as a result they make good progress. As they become more mature, older pupils and students take the good opportunities that are given to them to express their independence. Some show great self-confidence in reading to or singing to the assembled school, while others are assured as they set off for work experience in the community. In conversations, students give a lucid account of their hopes and ambitions for the time after they leave school.
23. Basic skills are taught well. There are good strategies for developing literacy and numeracy. At a more basic level, communication skills are very well promoted by the very high quality work of the speech and language therapists in the language development department. Together with the teachers, work is planned that extends pupils' classroom experience of communication. Signing is well established and is used effectively, as is the use of symbols. Computer-generated symbolic writing make meaning accessible to those for whom traditional written language poses too great a challenge.
24. Teaching is of good quality in English, mathematics, science - where it is very good, and information and communication technology. Overall, in all other subjects teaching is good, except in personal, social and health education, where, because of lack of clarity about what should be provided, time is wasted on occasions. Teaching in personal, social and health education is, nevertheless, satisfactory.

25. Post-16 students are well taught. The style of teaching received, frequently encourages them to make more decisions for themselves and to pursue their own interests.
26. Pupils with more profound special educational needs, especially those with autistic spectrum disorder, are very well provided for. A number of the more autistic pupils are gathered in a class for vulnerable pupils. Here, they are managed with great skill and the classroom team, led by the teacher, shows a high degree of understanding of their needs and uses effective strategies to help pupils to be calm and to learn well.

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

27. The quality and range of learning opportunities offered to pupils is satisfactory. There have been satisfactory improvements to the curriculum and to its planning and management since the previous inspection. Pupils aged 7 to 16 are offered a broad and balanced programme of lessons that includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum appropriate for their age. The school places a high priority on giving all pupils full access to all learning opportunities. It achieves this because of the high quality support of the learning assistants and the inclusive approach of all teachers. Learning tasks are well chosen to provide relevant experiences at each stage of learning. Arrangements to ensure that all pupils are included in activities are very good. Pupils' individual learning needs are catered for well on most occasions, although there are rare instances when the same task is offered to all pupils in a group.
28. The school has not yet established regular procedures for subject co-ordinators to meet and plan with form tutors who teach their subject, nor to monitor their work. As a consequence, decisions about what subject content to include are currently left to form tutors to work out for themselves. While these form tutors are experienced, plan carefully and know the pupils well, the absence of joint planning and monitoring leads to noticeable unevenness in provision within subjects. Daily lesson planning varies in quality and clarity. Some show how pupils of differing ability are to be provided for and fully included in lessons while other planning consists of a brief note of an activity on the sheet for the full week. The practice of identifying, recording and then using clear targets for each pupil, set at a level appropriate to their ability is at an early stage, although there are a few examples of excellent practice.
29. Since the last inspection, the total time given to teaching and learning has been increased so that it is in line with national guidance. Teachers make full use of the time allowed for lessons in most instances. There are, however, occasions when pupils' individual needs prevent them from moving between classrooms without some loss of learning time, particularly when they must go to the second or third floor for the specialist rooms.
30. The thought given to and the provision for the development of pupils' communication skills are very good. Teachers employ good strategies to teach pupils' literacy skills that include strong verbal reinforcement. The approach to teaching numeracy skills is satisfactory overall and these are emphasised well in several subjects, for example, science and food technology. The curriculum for personal, social and health education, (PSHE), is not supported by a scheme of work, so that learning is not always effective and time is not used well.
31. The school has a mission statement that sets out the values that underpin the life and work of the school. There is also a brief curriculum statement that alludes to the key

principles on which the curriculum is built. The school has not given sufficient thought and expression to the principles by which a coherent and balanced range of learning experiences is to be constructed. At present, the curriculum lacks an over-arching and comprehensive framework to provide structure and take pupils' learning forward throughout their time in the school. The school has not brought together an outline of what pupils should experience and learn from ages 7 to 16. What is taught in many subjects is adapted from national guidance or helpful commercial material, but planning within some subjects is unclear about what is taught within each year or class, and across the key stages. Planning does not make sufficient links with pupils' targets and gives too little detail about how assessments are to be made. Assessment is used to inform planning only informally in the majority of cases.

32. The school has taken positive steps recently to extend the contribution of the community to pupils' learning so that it is satisfactory, and for example, thirteen pupils currently enjoy worthwhile work experience placements with local firms. The school has good relationships with partner institutions. It is well placed through shared links within the governing body to benefit from contact with the other schools in the Trusteeship. A number of teachers have regular contact with other schools.
33. Students in the sixth form are offered a good range of learning experiences that meet their needs and prepare them well for life after school. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of pupils and students who have had their work accredited by external awarding bodies, and this good work should continue to expand. The curriculum makes a very supportive and positive contribution to pupils' progress and achievements as well as their personal development. All pupils share equal access to the curriculum, and special educational needs provision arrangements pay due regard to the Code of Practice. The provision for extra-curricular activities is good. They reinforce many aspects of subjects experienced in the classrooms. There are several outings that are designed to widen pupils' understanding. A few links have been built up within the community, and with other schools, providing opportunities for social learning and interaction.
34. The school has maintained the very high provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development noted in the previous inspection and significantly improved the provision for cultural development. The school now very successfully promotes pupils' personal development in all these aspects.
35. It continues, for example, to make excellent provision for spiritual development. It fully matches its mission statement to provide "an education based on sound educational principles within a caring Christian environment, respecting the uniqueness of each individual and encouraging personal growth and respect for all" in every area of school life. The school is inclusive and welcomes pupils from a range of other religions and cultures. Teachers listen to and value pupils' opinions and ideas. Parents, in their response to the questionnaire, are very appreciative of the values and attitudes that the school promotes. Spiritual development is very strongly supported by daily acts of collective worship. Well-chosen stories are sensitively presented and are carefully matched to pupils' level of understanding. One sixth-form pupil concluded an assembly by reading a beautiful prayer she had written about caring and praying for one another. Simple symbols, such as lighted candles on the Advent wreath or the glittering decorations on the Christmas tree, are used well to promote personal reflection and evoke feelings of wonder. A prayer room is available for pupils who want a moment of quiet reflection during the day.
36. Provision for moral development is very good. The key school message - 'To be kind

to each other – always’ is consistently supported within a caring ethos where right and wrong is clearly distinguished. All staff present positive role models in the kind considerate way they work with each other and with pupils. They know pupils well and deal quietly and patiently with some erratic and difficult behaviour arising from their special educational needs. Rules and expectations are explained by reference to the effect that behaviour has on the feelings of others. Good behaviour is celebrated and pupils are aware of the rewards for individuals and classes if they behave and work hard. There are many examples, particularly in the informal parts of the day, of pupils showing genuine friendship, respect and concern for others and a clear wish to be supportive. As pupils grow older, they accept greater responsibility for their own behaviour and learning. Sixth form pupils provide very good examples of mature and sensible behaviour based on an internal set of principles developed during their time in school. Collections and donations to a number of charities demonstrate the school’s concern for others.

37. Very good attention is paid to the development of social skills, although the personal, social and health education programme is now in need of review. The school makes great efforts to teach pupils how to mix with others with confidence, to develop the ability to work as part of a team and to be a team leader. There are many instances where pupils are required to work together, to wait their turn, or share equipment. They learn to do these things well. There is a strong emphasis throughout the day on common courtesies so that pupils are polite and respectful at mealtimes for example, or when meeting new visitors. There are notable opportunities for pupils to compete in inter-school sports competitions, to learn personal and social skills while on shopping trips or to develop the skills of self-reliance and team working through participation in the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme. In assemblies and special services, pupils have the confidence to sing, speak or read in front of large audiences. Trips to places of interest and residential trips, such as sailing to France or visiting Lourdes are important in helping them practise key skills, such as working together, listening to each other and making new friends.
38. The school offers a very extensive and varied programme of cultural activities and visits, which enrich learning. In food technology, for example, pupils get to make, feel, taste and smell the bread from different cultures. In music, history, English and to a lesser degree in art, they experience both their own and other cultures. Through religious education they understand that there are other religions such as Judaism and Hinduism that hold different beliefs, and they know that ceremonies are important in all religions. Visits to local churches, a mosque and a synagogue increase knowledge of special places of worship. A Muslim mother visits the school to tell pupils about the beliefs, ceremonies and symbols in Islam, further evidence of the inclusive nature of the school. Trips to many places in London and Essex, to museums and castles, have all added significantly to developing awareness of a range of cultures. Pupils have a very good opportunity to experience French culture through the way it is taught but also from their visits to France.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

39. The school cares for its pupils well. St John's is a well-ordered community that provides a safe and secure environment for all. Staff are well aware of pupils' needs and provide a high level of care and support. The school emphasises the importance of staff knowing about pupils' individual needs. The school ensures that a high level of support is made available to meet these needs. Each pupil has an individual education plan. These findings reflect those of the last inspection.
40. There are effective policies for health and welfare of pupils and staff, and there is a policy for child protection. The headteacher is responsible for implementing child protection procedures that are consistent with both the Essex Child Protection Guidelines and the manual of procedures provided by the Trustees of the school. However, there is no direct reference to child protection procedures in the staff handbook, and while some is planned, staff have not for some time received training in child protection procedures. Satisfactory procedures are in place for first aid and fire protection. Fire drill is conducted at least once each term.
41. The school has a sixth form centre close to the main school building. It is located in a purpose built, imposing building that was built three years ago. The centre contains a 'Teaching Flat', in which every student has the opportunity to develop personal and independence skills. This innovative concept, providing a realistic idea of daily routine, has become very popular with students and parents alike. The school also provides a variety of work experience placements. A speech and language therapist and language assistant work in the sixth form centre, providing assistance and intervention for those students with communication problems. This enables them to develop sufficient communication skills to benefit from the opportunities provided.
42. In addition to the good support provided by the speech and language therapists in the language development department, the school makes a broad range of facilities and therapists available to those who need them, including music therapy.
43. There are very good links with the local community, local schools and college of further education. A local secondary school invites a group of pupils to their Christmas party every year. This has a positive effect on pupils, enabling them to get to know their peers from another school in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.
44. Pupils are well cared for by teachers and support assistants, who respect their individuality, relate positively to them and value their efforts and achievements, however humble they may be. The quality of individual support is good through the whole school. Pupils are taught to help one another and respect each other's views.
45. There is a clear policy on behaviour and discipline that parents support. They indicate that swift and effective action is taken when incidents of inappropriate behaviour occur. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour are rare. The rate of exclusions, both fixed term and permanent, is very low. The school operates a reward and sanctions system fairly and effectively.
46. Support and guidance for pupils and consideration of their welfare are strong features of the school's provision. The school is successful in promoting health, safety and general well-being of pupils. Good support for individuals is provided by outside counsellors. The personal development of individual pupils is carefully monitored and recorded.

47. The school fulfils its stated aims to promote spiritual, moral, social development. All staff make conscious efforts to make the mission statement a reality. There is a strong ethos of care and consideration for others, which permeates through the whole school community. The school ethos instils a sense of unanimity, trust and friendship between adults and pupils. Generally, good rapport exists amongst pupils. Staff provide them with good role models. The commitment and dedication shown by the school to all is fully inclusive and all the pupils, irrespective of their colour or creed, are considered as an integral part of the whole school community.
48. The school has sound procedures for monitoring attendance and punctuality and registers are marked appropriately. Necessary steps are taken in the case of absences, which have not been explained by parents. Difficult cases are referred to the education welfare service. This is an improvement since the last inspection.
49. The school is effective in identifying the needs of the individual needs of the pupils but it does not always use this information specifically to plan for the next stage of education. Some subject co-ordinators are very effective in planning and assessing needs and progress. This good practice is found in physical education, science and information and communication technology in which, significantly, pupils' achievements are high. It is not consistently applied in other subjects. Speech and language therapists provide excellent baseline assessments and use these very effectively in addressing the special educational needs of pupils. It is significant that pupils' achievements are high in these areas.
50. The school uses assessment to set Individual Education Plan (IEP) targets. These targets are reviewed and form part of the annual review procedures. The IEP deals with English and mathematics, personal development and behaviour. These plans are generally well used to identify appropriate levels of work. However, with the exception of classes in which pupils have autistic spectrum disorder, behaviour targets are not well used.
51. Assessment procedures to identify what pupils know, understand and can do are in the early stages of development. The school has decided to use National Curriculum levels of achievement as benchmarks for attainment, but in most cases, pupils' rate of learning is too slow to be measured by such a broad scale. Acknowledging this, the school is beginning to use "P" levels and EQUALS, but not all co-ordinators have adopted these.
52. The pupils now undertake accredited courses, enabling them to obtain certificates of achievement. National bodies, including OCR, AQA and ASDAN accredit the work of pupils in Years 10 to 14 in a broad range of areas. These include communication, use of mathematics, work-related skills, personal skills and independent living skills.
53. The school is in the early stages of developing its policy on assessment and it does not monitor assessment procedures across the school. It has recently introduced a performance management strategy that will help in the development of whole school targets and priorities. The school's procedures for supporting academic progress are satisfactory; targets are set but consistent evaluation of progress towards these at individual and group levels is missing. In addition, some targets lack specific criteria by which progress can be measured.
54. For monitoring personal development, targets are set in pupils' IEPs. Important events and milestones are also recorded in annual review reports. These are satisfactory.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

55. The school is held in high regard by parents and the local community and it works effectively with both. Parents did not raise any significant concerns at the parents' meeting or in the questionnaire. They find the staff helpful and approachable, and the school has worked hard to include parents and carers in a consultation process about their children and how the school operates. Parents feel that teachers are genuinely interested in their children, and they are all respected as individuals. For example, one parent made the following comments by way of a separate letter attached to her completed questionnaire; 'the main strength of St John's is that it really cares about the welfare of children and families. They recognise the importance that their support gives to the whole family and they fulfil their role in a structured and valuable way.' Parents feel that their children are in a happy, secure and positive environment and whatever their child's abilities the school makes them feel good about themselves.
56. The school has successfully established a positive, purposeful and strong partnership with parents. Parents and volunteers from the local community feel welcome in the school. Parents, through the Parents Support Group, are encouraged to play an important part in supporting their children's work at home and in the school. Arising from this, the school has introduced a "Mother and Daughter Initiative", improved home/school communication and changed the time of parents' evenings. Social occasions and support, the provision of refreshments during consultation evenings, represent other aspects of the sustained efforts the school makes to cultivate a strong partnership with parents.
57. The governors' annual report to parents provides necessary details about the life and work of the school community. The school prospectus is a clear and comprehensive document, informing parents of the school's ethos based on the doctrine of the Catholic Church, its aims, the curriculum on offer, health and care and the whole school policy on behaviour.
58. The quality of information provided for parents is very good. They are well informed through newsletters and formal and informal meetings. The use of a home/school book enables parents to provide learning support at home. Parents also receive detailed and comprehensive reports at the time of the annual review, which they are able to discuss with teachers. Following the recommendations of the Revised Code of Practice January 2002, the school extends an open invitation to all parents each term, so that they may discuss their child's progress and targets. The first such discussion session was conducted in November 2001. Parents are fully involved in the annual review process and the setting of individual education plan. This gives them a valuable opportunity to raise any issues or concerns that they may have.
59. Most parents are appreciative of the fact that they can approach the school, to talk with individual teachers or the headteacher. Any issues or concerns raised by parents are dealt with promptly with care and sensitivity. On the basis of the information provided by parents, the school may write to their local education authority or it may elicit support for housing issues, etc.
60. The school also receives strong support from certain parents in raising funds for the school. These parents organise social events, such as 'variety night' performance at a local police club. Local businesses give prizes for the Christmas concert and sports day in the summer.
61. The school's links with parents and the contribution they make to their children's welfare and well being, as well as learning, are good. This aspect continues to be a

strength of the school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

62. Leadership and management, as they did at the last inspection, make a positive contribution to the quality of education provided and to the standards attained. A new headteacher and deputy have taken up their posts this term and have therefore had too little time to make a major impact. They have, however, made a good start in providing leadership. The headteacher is clear about the educational direction the school must follow and envisages how it will develop over the next few years. The deputy shares this view. Action has been taken to address some pressing issues. Examples of this can be seen in the content and emphasis of the provision for students in the post-16 phase that has been reviewed, and additional opportunities for accrediting the work of the lower-attainers have been introduced. In addition, the introduction of the "Young Enterprise" scheme has resulted in the heightened involvement of students in economic activity. Staff fully subscribe to the school's aims, which are strongly expressed in its mission statement. The work of the school is permeated by these to a remarkable degree. Pupils thrive in the atmosphere of tolerance and mutual respect that the school provides. Those with management responsibility carry this out satisfactorily.
63. Team leaders oversee and manage provision for pupils within one of three broad age bands. They are well informed about the curriculum, resourcing, teaching and learning within the classes served by the teams. The performance management policy that the school has drawn up and will implement in January gives the team leaders a role in reviewing the quality of individual teaching, scheduling and carrying out observations in the classroom. They will also agree, annually, performance targets for the teachers in their teams. This additional specific responsibility makes it essential that clear structures, perhaps involving regular tightly focused meetings, are put in place so that crucial information is passed on.
64. In the mean time, the school has taken effective steps to keep under review the quality of education that it provides. Senior staff have undertaken observations within the classroom and good use has been made of an educational consultant to evaluate the quality of education and management.
65. Management within the curriculum is broadly satisfactory. It is good where teachers are specialists in their subject and do most of the teaching within it across the school. It is strong, for example, in science, music and information and communication technology. In several other subjects, however, plans to make certain that the curriculum offers pupils planned learning experiences that continue to move them forward as they progress through the school, are not fully in place. It is a weakness that the school lacks an overall policy to guide and shape developments across the curriculum.
66. The governors carry out their responsibilities well. They visit the school regularly and they ensure that it works and develops in accordance with the ideals of its mission statement. They fulfil their statutory duties. They are broadly informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses but have not yet established a means of keeping fully in touch with developments within the curriculum. The last report called for the governors to set up an appraisal system. However, as a non-maintained school, they were not legally obliged to do this. Recent changes in legislation have rendered this issue obsolete. The governors have, however, decided to enact a performance management policy of the sort that is legally required in maintained schools. This is a

sensible decision that will give impetus and direction to the school's efforts to improve.

67. The school development plan plots those matters that should be dealt with in the current school year. Targets for pupils' achievement are set. These point to the levels of success expected in externally accredited courses. As it stands, the plan has limitations that make it less useful than it could be. The time span of a single year is too short to allow the expression of longer-term developments. There are many aspirations listed in the present plan and they are not prioritised. Nothing seems to be more important than anything else. To be effective as an instrument that drives the school forward, the school improvement plan should have a time scale that is longer than one year and fewer targets that are in a clear order of priority.
68. The whole-school targets that are set reflect what is expected to be achieved by pupils and students aged 16 and 19. A satisfactory start has been made in target setting. Targets for younger age groups are not set, partly because of the difficulty in assessing the performance of pupils who learn very slowly. The fine graded scales now used to measure progress by most special schools would enable the school to monitor the progress made by groups of pupils year on year. This information could then be used to set targets that would challenge the school to enable its pupils to achieve more. To get the greatest benefit from target setting the school will need to adopt such a process.
69. The school has charitable status. It receives the bulk of its income from the fees it charges local education authorities that place pupils there. It also receives a large sum from charitable donations and some specific grant income from the Department for Education and Skills and this is used for the purposes intended.
70. Budget-making involves the governors who are rigorous in examining the proposed expenditure and considering the benefits it might bring. The principles of "best value" are known and adhered to. Financial administration is well controlled. The governors' finance committee is regularly given updates about expenditure and balances. Good financial planning has led to recent major improvements in accommodation and resources. Accounts are audited annually as required. There are no significant deficiencies in financial administration and control. The financial secretary is rigorous and carries out her role very well. Administration is unobtrusive and supports the work of the school and good use is made of information and communication technology to aid this.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

71. The school has sufficient qualified and experienced staff to meet the needs of the pupils and the demands of the curriculum. Recent appointments to head of department positions have strengthened the match between qualifications and responsibilities considerably, and are having a direct impact on the quality of subject planning. There remains more work to do, however, to ensure that their role in offering support, guidance and evaluation is fully in place. Learning support assistants fulfil a demanding role with high levels of commitment and understanding. At times, they fulfil an indispensable function in managing extreme behaviour by a few pupils. There is a good match for the number of support assistants to the needs of pupils. Teachers and learning assistants together form strong teams that promote the pupils' learning well. Some good training opportunities are available for all members of staff, from which both teachers and learning support assistants have benefited.
72. The standard of accommodation is good. Several areas or buildings are very good,

notably the new sixth form building, the food technology room and the ICT suite. The primary classrooms are attractive, with stimulating displays, and space is used well. The middle-school building provides good, spacious accommodation for a range of class-based activities. The specialist rooms provide good access to facilities that promote a broad range of skills. The distance between rooms and the need to climb stairs causes difficulty for a few pupils, and they often lose lesson time as a result. Provision for wheel-chair access, should the need arise, is only available for a few buildings. There are attractive grounds that contribute to pupils' pleasure and their learning opportunities.

73. The school has a good range of resources for learning and has improved the areas of weakness identified at the last inspection. The subjects that require specialist equipment such as science, design and technology and physical education have good resources. These are generally used productively, with, for example, pupils achieving well and producing good quality work in their tasks with computers, making Christmas mobiles, games activities and history. There is on occasion, a tendency to underuse equipment and materials.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

74. In order to continue to improve and to ensure that pupils and students are given the best possible opportunities, the governors and headteacher should:

1) Improve management of the curriculum by:

- allocating responsibility for curriculum oversight to a senior member of staff;
- producing a clear policy for the curriculum;
- specifying the time allocated to each subject at each key stage;
- producing detailed plans in each subject of what is to be taught;
- producing clear guidance on how co-ordinators are to monitor provision in their subjects.

(Paragraph numbers 19, 28, 31, 65, 78, 94)

2) Improve assessment practices by:

- allocating responsibility for assessment and recording of what pupils know, understand and can do in each subject;
- ensuring consistent use is made of information gained from assessment in planning lessons.

(Paragraph numbers 49, 50, 51, 53, 78, 108, 121, 126)

In addition to the above, the school should take account of the following minor issues when it is drawing up its action plan in response to the inspection:

- a) Improve the quality and usefulness of the school development plan;
(Paragraph number 67)
- b) Develop target setting to a greater extent;
(Paragraph number 68)
- c) Fully implement the draft performance management policy.
(Paragraph number 63)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	69
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	25

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	1	18	36	14	0	0	0
Percentage	1.4	26.1	52.2	20.3	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	99
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	27

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	14

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	6
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	10.63

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.19

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	9
Black – African heritage	11
Black – other	4
Indian	4
Pakistani	5
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	2
White	63
Any other minority ethnic group	0

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	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: Y3 – Y14

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	16
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	5.6
Average class size	10

Education support staff: Y3 – Y14

Total number of education support staff	27
Total aggregate hours worked per week	736

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
	£
Total income	1,156,877
Total expenditure	1,092,413
Expenditure per pupil	12,005
Balance brought forward from previous year	-5,699
Balance carried forward to next year	58,765

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	5.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	2.6
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
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	99
Number of questionnaires returned	58

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	83	12	2	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	62	26	2	0	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	64	28	2	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	24	24	14	7
The teaching is good.	74	14	0	0	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	64	19	7	2	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	79	12	0	2	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	76	16	2	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	60	22	7	2	2
The school is well led and managed.	69	24	0	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	67	22	3	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	59	17	3	0	16

Returns do not add up to one hundred percent because there were a number of responses left blank on the returned questionnaires. These were recorded as "blank", rather than "Don't know".

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH

75. Pupils achieve well in English, particularly in speaking and listening. Most pupils enter the school with varying degrees of speech and language difficulty but they make rapid progress in their ability to understand and respond appropriately. Very good teaching of communication skills in the lower school is a major factor in this, as is the high-quality input of the speech and language therapists of the school. There is very close and effective collaboration between therapists and teaching staff in all sections of the school. Very precise targets for the development of specific language skills are identified and used by all staff, including support assistants, to focus on individual needs. As a result, pupils rapidly increase the number of words that they use and show increasing confidence in using speech during their years in the younger classes. By the time they are 16, pupils are comfortable and confident in talking in a whole range of subjects and social settings. The excellent relationships that exist in the school also play a major part in enhancing speaking and listening skills. Staff listen well to pupils and value their comments. Pupils listen well to each other, quickly learn to take turns in discussions and develop confidence in talking to others. Symbols are being used with increasing effectiveness to support this process for those pupils who have more severe communication difficulties, particularly those with autistic spectrum disorders. Here again, the speech and language therapists play a vital part in supporting staff in their use. The "Writing With Symbols" computer software links well with these developments in the teaching of reading and writing skills to these pupils. However, signing is used less consistently and not all staff have the confidence and expertise, even at the lowest levels of the system used, to make effective use of it.
76. Reading skills develop well in the lower school. Pupils have a very positive attitude to their reading schemes and are keen to tell visitors about the progress they are making. Three pupils in Class 2, for example, read from their readers and talked with interest and enjoyment about the characters and events in the stories. There is a wide range of attainment in reading among these younger pupils. Some are being assisted by the use of symbols to match words and objects while others are reading competently at Level 1 of the National Curriculum, using their phonic skills to tackle new words and acquiring a growing sight vocabulary. Teaching, both in the lower school and in the later years, is very well organised and planned to address these varying levels in each class and support assistants make a very valuable contribution to the monitoring of progress. By the time they are 14, pupils are using a bigger range of books and texts, both in English and other areas of the curriculum. They enjoy using the well-stocked school library and the higher-attainers are beginning to read for information on a variety of topics. The progress of these pupils aged 15 and 16, however, is slower. Though satisfactory, it is limited by the restricted range of reading with which they are presented. They continue to develop their ability to read for information but there are insufficient opportunities for them to read for pleasure or to enjoy a range of literature. Fiction, poetry and drama need to form a greater proportion of what is taught if pupils are to develop the higher level skills they need to respond to creative writing, for example, in understanding the depiction of character or the development of plot. Lower-attaining pupils in the same year groups are still using schemes that are inappropriate for their age and interests.

77. Pupils' achievements in writing are satisfactory. In the lower school, they make steady progress through the writing tasks that are set in the workbooks of their reading schemes. Lower-attainers make sound progress in matching sounds and letters as they learn to write their names and keywords from their reading schemes. Others are able to overwrite and copy with increasing control and accuracy and the higher-attainers are beginning to write independently and produce complete sentences. A particular strength of teaching is the effective use of reading to stimulate writing. Pupils are helped to produce their own versions of stories such as "The Snowman" and "The Hungry Caterpillar" and to record their opinions, by overwriting or copying, in sentences beginning "I like this book because...." By the time they are 14, pupils' writing shows satisfactory development of their ability to spell common words with good levels of accuracy, to write with more consistently formed letters and to make use of punctuation. Higher-attainers are writing their news in a sequence of sentences and lower-attainers are making good use of the "Writing With Symbols" programme. By the time they are 16, pupils' written work shows satisfactory progress in writing for more formal purposes, for example, letters and form filling, as part of their work for units in their externally accredited coursework. Most of their writing, however, consists of copying and short phrases or simple sentences on worksheets and there is very little evidence of pupils, particularly the higher-attainers, being asked to produce anything of a more challenging nature. The range of writing attempted is very limited. There is no extended or creative writing. There is satisfactory progress in the written tasks of the two units needed for a pass in the accredited course followed by higher-attainers. However, they are not given the opportunity to develop other skills required for the further modules of which they are capable.
78. Overall, improvement in English since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Teaching in the subject is now predominantly good. Pupils' achievements are higher both in their speaking and listening and in their reading, although it is still the case, as noted in the previous report, that not enough is done to stretch the older, higher-attaining pupils in their reading. Learning resources have also been developed well. Weaknesses still exist in planning and assessment. Co-ordination of the subject has not yet got to grips with the need to plan and monitor the development of the English curriculum on a whole-school basis. The advantages of the National Literacy Strategy have not been fully exploited by the school. Effective monitoring of teaching has yet to be established and assessment practice varies throughout the school. As a result of these shortcomings, there is a lack of clarity about whole-school standards in the subject and about the setting of whole-school targets to raise standards, particularly in writing.

MATHEMATICS

79. Achievement by pupils is good in the primary classes up to the age of 11 in relation to their targets and learning needs. Achievement is also good in the middle classes to age 14 and in the senior classes to age 16. This is a good improvement since the last inspection. The information gained from observations and from work indicates that pupils make good progress in relation to their identified learning needs through the good focused teaching and constant reinforcement.
80. Pupils entering the junior classes have made little headway previously in early mathematical understanding and skills. Records and teachers' observations indicate very low levels of understanding on entry to the school and most pupils are working towards Level 1 of the National Curriculum. The youngest pupils within the primary years, with careful prompting, usually count accurately to 10 and know that the last object counted gives the name for the whole group. They know the numerals from 1 to

9 and write them to record their own answers. They recognise the symbols for addition and equals used in calculating addition sums to 10 and interpret them correctly. Through the good focus on how a number sentence is formed children are beginning to understand that the amounts on both sides of the "equals" sign must be the same. Most children know a few number facts for addition based on counting, such as 4 add 1 is 5. They have gained the skills to find the addition of two numbers within ten correctly when using cubes to count and rely heavily on the practical materials which the teacher rightly provides, as well as continual prompts and reinforcement.

81. The older pupils in the primary years demonstrate clear progress in number skills and are helped to concentrate through the very focused teaching, good pace and continuous support. Most have gained the early number skills required to count to 20 or 25 and they recognise the printed numbers. Most pupils put the numbers in correct order, with some prompting, and to read numbers such as 15 or 23. They are less secure when given unfamiliar or challenging tasks, for example when a numeral is missing or turned over and they have to identify it. While there is a very good supportive atmosphere and relationships that encourage pupils, the emphasis of the tasks is on knowing: recognition of the numerals, saying the number names and knowing the order of numbers, without providing simple, practical activities with real objects to help pupils build their mental number patterns and understanding. Thus, when pupils make a mistake the reinforcement is with the numerals, not with objects to count. Computer programs are used well to provide interest and reinforcement. One pupil was observed identifying where to place numbers on a 5 X 4 grid, and used the ICT skills well to drag numbers into the correct position. By the age of 11, pupils are achieving well in relation to their prior learning. Previous work indicates a good sequence of attainment over time. Overall, the sensitive handling of the pupils encourages them to take an interest and concentrate so that they achieve more than would be expected.
82. In the middle school, pupils build on previous work and apply their skills in a good variety of tasks. In one class, for pupils with severe learning difficulties, most are operating at a pre-number level. They are beginning to build simple shape sequences and to recognise numerals but they are not yet consistent. Teachers' close observations of pupils, and choice of tasks that are very finely graded to match their stage of learning, enable the pupils to achieve success. In other classes, the teachers' encouraging style gives good recognition to every correct step so that pupils try hard to succeed. For example, in the upper group, pupils know the basic method for adding two numbers using the standard layout for Tens Units, and are beginning to extend this successfully to H.T.U. Most of these pupils know several way of making 10, but are less sure when trying to make 20. They are methodical in setting out the additions with numerals in the columns and understand about the tens carry figure. Pupils worked hard within a calm atmosphere, but were not always able to read their, correct, answers indicating that they require continuous access to practical apparatus which is not always available since their understanding of place value is still at an early stage. They also need further reinforcement with links to mental patterns and counting beyond 100. The very good relationships and support in all classes help pupils to become settled and interested in the tasks. This was shown in a lesson on solid shapes, where the teacher's lively introduction and good questioning emphasised some of the simple properties to look for. Through constant repetition, pupils are beginning to recognise and name shapes such as cuboid and cone, and to understand that some shapes will both roll and slide. In the class for the more vulnerable pupils, most present demanding or challenging behaviour that interrupts learning and demands the attention of the teacher or support assistants. Nevertheless, overall

achievement is good. Their very early stage of learning and difficulty in building and retaining understanding, however, indicate that they require an approach based more on good primary practice, with many opportunities to experiment with informal, everyday objects. The tendency in several classes is to focus on the formal knowledge and skills set out in the guidance and to give insufficient access to practical apparatus and everyday materials to help build understanding.

83. In the senior years and to age 16, pupils continue to consolidate their understanding of number and to learn new skills. For example, in a purposeful lesson on probability that captured their interests well, pupils demonstrated their good understanding of the possibility of events in their lives happening, such as the fire alarm going off or the film Christmas Carol being shown on television. They gave thoughtful answers in response to the teacher's encouragement, showing an early understanding of a probability scale. Their skills for recording events are unreliable, however, and were not given sufficient focused attention by the teacher during the class discussions, since most pupils do not place the tallies or ticks in the correct columns or always match one-to-one the tally with the event. The task of recording the numbers of heads and tails when tossing a coin provided useful links to understanding money as well as the physical skills of spinning the coin, within a good practical context. Pupils' previous work shows a satisfactory coverage and balance of the mathematics curriculum, with a strong emphasis on number but appropriate attention to measure, geometry and data handling. Most of their written work is suitably recorded and presented. Pupils' good achievement overall through the school to Year 11 is underlined by the way students in the sixth form are tackling their work. This shows, for example, that with support, students understand how to carry out a survey and record the results on a data sheet they have prepared. They have the skills to collate their information, although they are not fully accurate in completing the 'five bar gate' tallies. Students demonstrate mostly confident number skills for the required additions and ordering of numbers, working out most answers mentally. They have good skills in using an electronic calculator, entering the numbers and reading the answers correctly.
84. Pupils have good attitudes towards their work that has a positive effect on the quality of their learning. Most pupils have good behaviour, taking on the self-discipline to maintain concentration and effort so that they achieve well. The few pupils who present challenging behaviour are managed very well by the teacher or support assistants and helped to take part in activities. Good relationships and expectations of the pupils enable them to understand and gain skills for a variety of tasks. By age 16, therefore, good teaching and relevant tasks ensure that pupils have mostly good learning experience across mathematical topics and have made good gains in skill and understanding. Most pupils are working within Levels 2 and 3 of the National Curriculum. Progress in the skills of numeracy is good overall. Pupils are helped to apply their numeracy skills within several subjects, for example food technology and science, where they make measurements and calculations.

85. The quality of teaching in the lessons seen was good through the school and shows a good improvement over the last inspection. Teachers and support staff are very sensitive to pupils' needs. All members of staff apply high levels of skill in managing pupils' behaviour and in motivating them. Pupils' quality of learning is generally good as a result of this positive approach. With help, pupils are soon interested in the tasks and are prepared to work for long periods to try and complete the work. The very good assessment system in one class provides clear evidence of progress and is used very well to inform further planning. This practice is having a positive effect on both progress and attitude but is not found in nearly the same detail in other classes. While teachers give mostly verbal assessments and recognition to pupils, alternative forms of marking to suit pupils' needs should be explored. The quality of lesson planning varies considerably. Some is clear and carefully adapted to the needs of each pupil but other planning is a brief note on weekly sheets and gives insufficient attention to a detailed breakdown of objectives to help with finely graded activities. The choices of task are generally good in themselves, and relevant to pupils, but there is generally too great a focus on abstract number and insufficient use of apparatus and everyday contexts. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which helps them to give clear explanations. Teachers have good skills of questioning which they use to good effect in helping pupils to think about their work. The range of resources is satisfactory and has been extended well recently.
86. The co-ordinator provides satisfactory leadership and direction for the subject. He has adopted nationally available resources to provide a scheme for progression of skills through the school and a suitable subject improvement plan. He is encouraging an increasing use of ICT to support pupils' skill development. At present he does not monitor lessons, teachers' lesson planning or pupils' work and this position should be reviewed and suitable plans made. There is a satisfactory range of teaching and learning materials, although how these are used, and identifying other suitable apparatus, should be given close attention.

SCIENCE

87. Pupils achieve very well in science. Pupils of all abilities make very good progress in relation to their prior attainment. There has been a very good improvement overall in science since the previous inspection.
88. By the time that they are 7, pupils use their senses to explore materials. They carry out experiments on predicting whether heavy and light objects float or sink. They begin to establish a very simple method of classification and build up a basic scientific vocabulary, for example, understanding rough, smooth, light and heavy. By 11, pupils experience work on light and its properties. They examine light travelling through materials and understand the formation of shadows. Higher-achievers further develop scientific language. They test their predictions, and understand that light comes from a variety of sources. When they are 14, pupils understand simple electrical circuits. They work out what is needed using knowledge from previous lessons and manage to light small bulbs. They then develop an understanding of electricity in everyday life and use their information technology expertise to record data. When they are 16, higher-achievers are working towards Level 3 in National Curriculum terms. They explain states of matter, solids, liquids, and gases. They understand that metals can be used as conductors of electricity and build up good subject expertise. In their work on the human body and circulation, pupils begin to understand the importance of the heart and the function of the blood.
89. Teaching is by class teachers in the primary department and by a specialist science teacher in the senior school. The quality is very good. Teachers have very good

subject knowledge and organise activities appropriately to encourage all pupils to learn. Teachers have in-depth knowledge of their pupils, use time and different activities effectively and set high expectations that are realistic for pupils. Lessons are very well planned with clear learning outcomes. Teachers allocate support staff appropriately, to maximise opportunities for pupils' learning. Questions are well used to motivate, encourage recall and extend learning. Teachers guide and encourage pupils towards making correct choices and to learning from incorrect answers. Lessons end with a good review of learning. Learning is very good as a result and pupils behave very well. They respond positively to adult help, especially from the support assistants and they work well independently. There are occasions when pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, disrupt lessons, this has an impact on learning when teachers are very involved in managing behaviour. These pupils are in strange territory in the science room. Their behaviour in their own base is better. Apart from these very small problems, pupils learn to share equipment and do their best at all times. They look after the equipment and help each other. They are very enthusiastic about the subject in every age group.

90. The science curriculum is well suited to the needs of pupils. There is a policy and the schemes of work closely follow the programmes of study of the National Curriculum. There is ample time allocated to enable investigation and experimental work. Longer-term plans are in place but the focus has been on short and medium-term planning. There is a very good system for recording and assessment. The IEP targets do not include science, although reports go towards the annual reviews. The schemes of work are reviewed and updated annually, and include teaching plans and adapted to meet special needs. Progression is assured through this process. Pupils' work is celebrated in records of achievement. When pupils are 16, their science work includes parts of the accredited Youth Award Scheme, ASDAN and AQA qualifications. The school plans to use "P" levels as indicators of attainment and proposes to implement EQUALS more fully.
91. The co-ordinator is very well qualified and enthusiastic about her subject. She co-ordinates all key stages and teaches Key Stages 3 and 4. There has not yet been an opportunity to develop regular meetings and monitoring, but she does have an oversight of all medium and short-term planning. There is an effective and realistic development plan for the subject, she is aware of the strengths and weaknesses. She understands the needs for development of the monitoring of teaching, and for regular meetings. The good work of support staff could be shared, and they could be involved in planning for individual pupils. The co-ordinator needs to develop her expertise in working with pupils with specific behaviour problems. Resources are good, imaginative, high quality and well matched to pupils' needs and abilities. Accommodation is good, even if it is at the top of the building. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. There is a dedicated science room, with access to information and communication technology, which is a strength. The co-ordinator is a specialist teacher and pupils can follow accredited courses. Teaching has improved, as has learning.

ART AND DESIGN

92. Pupils' achievements in art and design are satisfactory. By age 11, pupils have gained a sound understanding of appropriate materials and processes. In one lesson, for example, they were helping to create a collage of photographic images and were encouraged by some very effective teaching to think about and evaluate the results of their work. Their pastel drawings of fireworks show good use of colour, line and tone. By age 14, pupils' artwork shows satisfactory development in the control and care with which they produce drawings, paintings and simple prints. In one lesson, pupils applied the finishing touches to three-dimensional representations of their names, shaped from clay. Most were working independently and they enjoyed coming up with their own ideas for the colours and motifs used. Lower-attaining pupils, however, required much "hands-on" support from staff to complete their work. By the time they are 16, pupils have continued to improve their skills, albeit in a limited range of materials and processes. Pupils aged 15 and 16 worked on watercolour landscapes. Teaching provided very clear, step-by-step demonstration of the different stages of composition and pupils were able to mix and apply paints competently. Teachers displayed good knowledge of the techniques being taught. Questions were asked to prompt higher-attainers to evaluate their work and to consider ways in which it could be improved but more could have been done to pursue this aspect of the lesson with these pupils. Nevertheless, as a result of the teaching, pupils make satisfactory progress and come to enjoy the subject. They are pleased with what they produce and they co-operate well with the teacher and help one another. They respond eagerly to questions.
93. Within the limited range of work seen, in class and on display, there is satisfactory progress in the basic processes and skills used. There are insufficient opportunities, however, for pupils to experiment and explore their potential in the subject, particularly for the higher-attainers. Most of the activities provided focus on a mechanical process to produce similar artefacts with little scope for the expression of the pupils' own ideas. The kiln, the possibilities of computer-generated art, textiles, photography and the work of artists and designers from different times and cultures are used little, if at all. As a result, those aspects of the programme of study which address pupils' knowledge and understanding and their enjoyment of the visual arts remain largely undeveloped. The teaching observed was satisfactory. However, in the prolonged absence of the co-ordinator, it lacks sufficient specialist support and advice to provide a more varied and challenging range of activities for pupils.
94. There has been satisfactory improvement in teaching and overall standards in the subject since the last inspection, when they were found to be unsatisfactory or poor. Much remains to be done, however, in curriculum development, in the use of resources and in extending the range of teaching competence. When this is done, the subject will make a more positive contribution to pupils' cultural development.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

95. The subject is taught in two broad areas - resistant materials, and food technology with textiles. Teachers plan to the guidance of the National Curriculum and use other commercial guidance as a scheme of work, adapted sensibly and well to the needs of pupils. Tasks are chosen to lift pupils' imaginations and to capture their interests as well as provide a wide range of good opportunities for basic skill development. The quality of the curriculum is very good in food technology. It is good overall for resistant materials although the approach does not provide sufficiently for pupils to experiment with their own ideas. Pupils' achievement is good in food technology and satisfactory

in resistant materials in relation to their learning needs and is good overall in the subject. There is good improvement since the last inspection in achievement, teaching and subject management, with particularly significant improvement in food technology.

96. Pupils are introduced to the early skills of handling materials and tools safely. They have satisfactory opportunities to work with and recognise the properties of paper, card and wood so that they make satisfactory progress in skills up to the age of 11. Emphasis on ensuring that all pupils make a finished product they like, allows pupils to experience the skills of the finishing stage, such as sanding and painting. In their work with food, pupils continue to build on their good initial achievements in the junior classes as they move through the school.
97. Within the middle school classes, pupils have been making Christmas decorations from prepared card templates. They have cut, fitted and decorated them. They have been introduced to painting glass, and show skills in using a brush to produce a pleasing finish. The teacher's good relationships and flexible approach encourage pupils to persevere. In food technology, pupils make good progress and achieve above what is expected through the good provision and teaching. Through the very clear explanations and focused discussions, pupils understand that there is a wide variety of some types of food, such as bread and fruit, and that these may come from many countries around the world. Pupils have felt and tasted several breads, such as tortilla and pitta, using a good range of words to describe the texture or taste. The teacher has made good links with literacy and pupils with adult support write down the facts they learn about food. Pupils understand that breads may be used in different ways, such as filling pitta bread with salad and chicken or wrapping tortilla around a spicy filling. Very good management and preparation ensure that all pupils are included in the activities.
98. Within the senior classes, pupils aged 11 to 16 have gained a satisfactory range of skills with resistant materials through tasks that provide direct practical experience. The teacher's good emphasis on tasks that capture their interest gives pupils the motivation to become involved and work hard. Most pupils are able to measure to length, cut wood, and drill holes. They take pleasure in their work and show increasing ability to evaluate it. Teachers and learning support assistants have very good relationships with pupils.
99. Evidence of previous work shows satisfactory achievement within a suitable range of interesting tasks and pupils have gained a satisfactory range of skills. The tasks provide satisfactory coverage of the subject, with an emphasis on finishing skills. The subject leader has adopted nationally published material to support continuity, coverage and progression. The teacher is aware of the need to introduce pupils to design and making skills. There is a clear expectation of pupils' behaviour and effort and most pupils respond well to the expectation and challenge, and apply their skills well to make an attractive product.
100. By age 16, pupils have gained good knowledge of how to prepare and present their food and dishes in food technology. During the week of the inspection, pupils who are now in the sixth form were preparing a meal that they would eat for their own lunch, as part of an Oxford and Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts (OCR) accreditation. This task demonstrated clearly the good progress pupils have made to Year 11 and into the sixth form. Within an orderly and well-managed lesson, all students worked with good attention and concentration, taking great care to prepare the ingredients for: macaroni cheese, shepherd's pie and pizza. Pupils had previously planned and designed their

meal, listed the ingredients they needed and had been out to the shops to buy them, showing good attention by the teacher to the whole process of food preparation.

101. The teaching and opportunities for learning in food technology are very good while the teaching of tasks related to resistant materials is good. The relationships between the teachers and pupils are a particular strength, as is the contribution of the learning support assistants. The well-structured curriculum captures pupils' interest very well and motivates them to persevere and produce good work. This has a direct impact on learning and progress, which is better than would normally be expected for food technology. Teachers use good methods that focus on first-hand experiences for pupils and often use careful questioning and support to help them. Their behaviour management of pupils is very good. Teachers' good use of a digital camera to record pupils' work promotes their good attitudes and interest well so that they are encouraged to work and persevere.
102. The workshops for both food and resistant materials work are well set out with a good working environment overall. Both co-ordinators have prepared a subject improvement plan that identifies suitable priorities. There is good attention to health and safety issues.

GEOGRAPHY

103. Pupils' achievements in geography are satisfactory. The school has maintained satisfactory improvements. A new co-ordinator has been in post for a matter of a few weeks and it is too early to see any great change.
104. By the time they are 11, pupils are developing basic geographical language. They talk about visits to parks and use these visits to produce a model, or map, with their favourite features. They identify features, know the names of materials used in the models. The most able pupils identify features on a map on the floor, and plot routes, safely. They work on the environment both in and out of school, know directions. Every pupil in this age group is able to consider differences in the weather and clothing. They understand the need for warm clothes.
105. By 14, pupils understand why people use maps and find their place on a map of the classroom. Many identify the correct symbols in pictures and develop good communication skills when listening and thinking about their work. The most able listen to sounds of various vehicles and ships and aeroplanes and call it transport. They record their findings on worksheets designed for the purpose.
106. By 16, the most able pupils identify countries in Europe and place their currency correctly. Every pupil identifies at least three countries with mountains. They develop atlas skills and the most able use the index to find answers.
107. Teaching during the inspection was good overall. Key geographical ideas, for example, that the real world may be represented by a map or plan, were seen to be very well put across in an excellent lesson for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. In the primary department, teaching was very good. Very good teachers use a range of interesting activities to explore topics on mapping and planning. Pupils are actively involved, and thoroughly enjoy the sessions. For instance, a group is motivated to work through being Santa's Helpers and deliver items correctly when given clues about the route. In another active session, the very youngest discover how to plan a park, following a visit. Very good teaching occurs when pupils are able to choose, when they make mistakes and correct themselves. Teachers' knowledge and

understanding of pupils' needs ensures that learning takes place. Learning is reinforced with good planning, good activities and high expectations. Teachers ask good questions and encourage pupils to develop language skills from the earliest age groups. Teaching is good when every pupil's needs are addressed and learning follows. Learning is hindered at times when some challenging behaviour distracts staff from their main tasks. Pupils generally behave very well, this does allow teaching and learning to develop in a very positive and caring atmosphere.

108. The subject is managed satisfactorily. The co-ordinator has been in post for about six weeks and has had little opportunity to make a significant impact. There have been no opportunities for him to observe teachers delivering the subject in their own rooms. Neither have there been opportunities to develop accredited work for pupils. Assessment procedures are agreed but not consistently applied and links with information and communication technology are at a very early stage. The co-ordinator is aware of the strengths and weaknesses in the subject. Resources are satisfactory.
109. The subject has maintained standards since the previous inspection, resources have improved and the co-ordinator is well placed to develop these further. Improvement therefore, is satisfactory.

HISTORY

110. Pupils achieve well and make good progress in history. This is because teaching is always at least good and is often very good and because teachers go to great lengths to make the subject relevant and meaningful. This represents good improvement since the previous inspection when teaching and learning were judged to be satisfactory. This good progress applies to all groups of pupils, regardless of their particular special educational needs.
111. Younger pupils make good progress in understanding of times past and chronology through investigating toys from long ago. Lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives. A very good 'museum' of toys from different cultures and ages has been assembled and these well-displayed resources motivate pupils and keep their interest. Pupils were required to choose a toy and place it on a new/modern or old/ancient table. Good questioning by the teacher, for example, "What is it made of?" and "How does it move?" encouraged pupils to examine and observe the toys carefully. They learned that if a doll was made of glazed porcelain it was old and that if a doll was made of vinyl plastic and looked more lifelike it was modern. A teaching assistant was well used and she noted pupils' responses. One old doll had a sticking plaster on its knee and the teacher asked, "What game do you think my daughter was playing with this doll thirty years ago?" Most pupils knew that the answer was "doctors and nurses", and learned that some games are timeless!

112. Pupils up to the age of 14 gain knowledge and understanding about World War 2. They learn to empathise with the plight of ordinary people at this time. They learned that food was in short supply because the country was blockaded and that you needed a ration book and coupon to buy items of food. Learning in this case was powerfully reinforced because the teacher demonstrated a ration book and just how much food a family of four lived on, assembling meagre quantities of sugar, eggs, milk and butter for all to see. A video of a street party was used effectively to capture the relief and joy at the end of the war and helped pupils identify that this means no more bombing and deaths and that dads would be coming home. Higher-attaining pupils completed a simple worksheet on the topic independently. Lower-attaining pupils needed prompts and one-to-one support to complete the task. Pupils not surprisingly develop positive attitudes to the subject and this enhances learning.
113. Older pupils are learning about The Domesday Survey. They begin to understand its purpose and what it found out. Higher-attaining pupils relate it in time to the Battle of Hastings and know that it was ordered by William the Conqueror as a means of raising taxes. Very good planning and preparation ensured that the pace of the lesson was maintained. Learning support assistants were effectively used to support individuals or small groups. Pupils' idiosyncratic and occasionally ritualistic behaviour was well managed or ignored so that the learning was not interrupted. The teacher had good subject knowledge and this showed itself in the confident way she linked the topic to previous work and adapted her questions and worksheets to match individual pupils. There was a good work ethic in the classroom as a result of the teacher's high expectations. Relevant handouts and a good plenary, in which everyone had the opportunity to share and show their work, reinforced learning. There are attractive displays on medieval history around the classroom to remind pupils of previous work and visits.
114. A new and enthusiastic co-ordinator leads the subject but is too recently in post to have yet made an impact. However, the history curriculum is well planned and delivered. It is broad and has a good balance of relevant practical activities and opportunities for recording. There is a satisfactory recording system and continuous assessment. Resources are good and good use is made of visits to, for example, the British War Museum and Victorian Toy Museum, to reinforce learning. The subject is very well supported by information and communication technology, both in terms of software to enhance topics but also through opportunities to visit web sites as sources of information. The subject makes a good contribution to literacy and numeracy and to social, moral and cultural development.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

115. Achievement by pupils is good in the primary classes to age 11 in relation to their targets and learning needs. Achievement is also good in the middle classes to age 14 and in the senior classes to age 16. This maintains the position at the time of the last inspection. The information gained from observations and from work indicates that pupils make good progress in understanding and skills in relation to their identified learning needs through good focused teaching. There is no marked difference in the performance of different groups of pupils when considered in relation to ethnicity or their special educational needs. Learning support was present in the lessons observed and pupils benefited greatly from the presence of such staff who were skilled in reinforcing the work demonstrated by the teacher.
116. Pupils enter the school with a variety of experiences but in general their understanding and skills are undeveloped. Suitable curriculum time available for ICT is provided as a

discrete subject and also across the curriculum. The school provides many worthwhile experiences in the very good computer suites that are having a direct, positive impact on pupils' standards. The improvement to ICT facilities is very good and gives pupils access to the full curriculum requirements. The application of ICT across the curriculum is developing so that pupils are learning and using their ICT skills in subjects such as mathematics and history. Good teaching enables pupils to make good progress, helped by their good interest and support.

117. Within the primary classes, pupils have gained the skills to control the mouse while following and communicating ideas using text and pictures. Thorough and well-structured teaching focuses well on pupils' understanding of the steps to follow and building early mouse skills. One pupil was using a modelling program in mathematics and had gained the skills to place numbers on a 5 X 4 grid by dragging numbers into the correct position. The tasks on the computers motivate pupils to control the mouse carefully and enter the commands. By age 11, pupils have sufficient skill and understanding to use the mouse quite neatly for the tasks. They are beginning to use features of programs by clicking on the mouse. Teachers' good subject knowledge and choice of task give pupils the motivation to understand simple commands. Pupils maintain good interest and effort throughout the tasks. Pupils have appropriate experience in using subject-related programs that support language and mathematics work.
118. By age 14, pupils have continued their good achievement. Good teaching promotes good gains in pupils' skills through clear instructions and interactive questioning. Pupils show good recent gains by logging onto the computer and opening up a program. They have sufficient word-processing skills to enter simple text, although their actual keyboard skill is often slow. They have an early understanding of how to enter their data from a survey. They have gained a range of skills, such as entering tally marks, selecting a relevant picture and dragging it into position, and checking that the tallies match. The teacher provides many interesting and challenging tasks that extend pupils' understanding well. The quality of learning in some of the lessons is high since the teacher's positive style and good subject knowledge encourage pupils to try hard and engage well in the tasks. At present, pupils are over-reliant on the mouse and make insufficient use of the keyboard to enter commands.
119. By age 16, and within the sixth form, pupils are gaining the skills to design a table, such as 2 X 3 cells, adjusting the number of rows and columns. They know how to enter a heading, with help. Their mouse control and word-processing skills show good development from Year 9. Pupils are able to centre text, type in and correct their sentences and know about printing a copy, all with some support. The very focused teaching and good purpose of the tasks is having a direct positive impact on achievement. Pupils are making good gains in knowledge and skills in using the keyboard and mouse to enter text or commands. They show increasing confidence in using word-processing, data-handling programs, modelling and simple ideas of control.
120. Most pupils quickly become interested and are keen to use the computers. They demonstrate good attitudes and behaviour during ICT lessons. They are very motivated by the use of ICT and usually sustain concentration well to produce their work. This is supported and promoted well by the teacher and the support staff through their careful planning and interventions with the children. The majority of pupils work well, showing that their personal development is growing. A very few pupils find co-operation difficult, but all pupils have equal access to the tasks. Pupils are becoming independent in tackling the tasks, but many remain very reliant on the

teachers.

121. The quality of teaching is good through the school. The specialist ICT teacher has good subject knowledge and plans well for the computers to be used to good purpose. There is a good focus on direct teaching for understanding and skill development that promotes secure learning and improving standards. Teachers use their time well, giving direct instruction, but also ensuring that pupils use the skills themselves. Class organisation and management are good in the ICT suite, balancing good use of the ICT facilities such as the linked projector with direct, practical applications for pupils. The use of ICT as a natural facility to support classwork in other subjects is still developing and the school is aware of this. The school should explore the use of keystrokes to enter commands such as highlighting text as a straightforward routine for the pupils. Teachers make assessments of pupils as they work, picking up points to reinforce, and record each pupil's progress in lessons, but a comprehensive school recording system is only just being considered to track pupils' skills.
122. The co-ordinator provides good management. The school has a subject policy and has adopted national guidance to ensure progression. The co-ordinator prepares good, carefully structured sequences of lessons that help focus on thorough skill development and understanding. The subject has appropriate breadth, balance and progression through the school. There has been good progress in providing well-chosen tasks, promoting achievement well. The school has made very good investments in ICT resources, developing the computer suite and software.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

123. Achievements in French are satisfactory but there were clear indications in the lessons observed that standards are improving following the appointment of a new co-ordinator at the start of the current term. Pupils aged 9 to 11, are already showing good development of intonation and pronunciation in their use of single words and short phrases in French. They enjoy imitating the sounds of French and the fact that the co-ordinator is a native speaker of the language is a major factor in their success. Their recall of simple vocabulary, such as numbers and colours, is good. Teaching is very effective in its insistence that pupils listen carefully, respond and repeat in French.
124. Pupils aged 16, however, despite their good progress in the lesson seen, are unable to listen and respond in the language with any confidence. Their grasp of common words, such as those for family members, domestic animals and numbers above ten, is still insecure and they require much support and prompting to understand simple instructions or to use set phrases in response to questions.
125. Pupils respond very positively to the brisk pace and varied activities of the lesson. Teaching is good, overall. There is a very good collection of learning resources, including audio and video-cassettes, games and CD-ROMs as well as range of well-illustrated books, and teaching makes effective use of these to stimulate and maintain pupils' interest and concentration. At times, the work provides too great a challenge to the lower-attaining pupils, who require lots of reinforcement of their learning, but in general, teaching ensures that there are good opportunities to practise new vocabulary in a variety of contexts. Pupils enjoy their French lessons and respond well to the high expectations of teaching in the subject. They learn well.
126. French has developed well since the previous inspection when it had only recently

been introduced to the curriculum. The co-ordinator has a clear vision of the developments needed to raise standards and is aware of the need to improve planning and assessment in the subject. At the moment, planning is not sufficiently linked with assessment and a longer-term view of progression at all levels of attainment has not yet been established.

MUSIC

127. All pupils achieve well and make good progress in music across the school. This is as a result of specialist teaching that is consistently good and occasionally very good and because pupils have very positive attitudes to the subject. This represents a good improvement on the previous inspection when music was not taught to all classes and there was insufficient evidence to make a judgement on teaching and learning. This good progress applies equally to all groups of pupils including those with autistic spectrum disorders.
128. Pupils up to the age of 11, make good progress in listening and responding to a range of music. They enter the music room with an air of anticipation. Music is fun! The teacher has planned a series of activities to generate singing and playing that match pupils' needs. Pupils tap their feet or move in time to Slade's 'Merry Christmas'. They carefully choose instruments from a wide selection and handle them with great care and respect. They accompany the teacher playing 'African Noel' or 'It's a Baby' on their selected instruments or sing along on echo microphones. Higher-attaining pupils know the words and increasingly hold the tune while singing, or the rhythm while playing on the guitar or percussion instruments. Lower-attaining pupils explore their chosen instruments and listen in wonder and delight to the sounds they make. The teacher uses symbols and pictures effectively to indicate when she wants them to start and stop or to encourage them to evaluate how the music makes them feel.
129. Pupils up to the age of 14 build on their musical experience, knowledge and skills. They know what is expected of them. They show good social skills in waiting their turn or sharing and changing instruments. Some erratic behaviour is well managed by the quiet but timely interventions of teacher assistants so that all pupils take part and are successful. Pupils sing a variety of songs and play simple pieces with growing confidence and an awareness of rhythm and tempo. They have great fun and a sense of achievement when programming and playing along with the keyboard. The good, well-organised resources, are a powerful motivator for pupils to attend.
130. Older pupils develop their musical understanding and enjoyment through rehearsing 'Jingle Bells' together. One pupil sings and the others accompany her on drums, guitar and chime bars. Pupils rehearse their part in turn accompanied by the teacher on the keyboard. They listen carefully and appreciate each other's performance. They have difficulty as a group in maintaining regular and accurate beat but this improves through practice. The teacher encourages pupils to think about their performance. For example, "What could we do to make it sound better?" Higher-attaining pupils decide that bells should be added. The teacher has coloured coded the lyrics for chord changes for the guitarist and chime bell players and pupils follow these with reasonable accuracy. "Is it good enough to tape?" asks the teacher and the pupils practise hard. Their fourth effort is recorded and pupils get great satisfaction and a sense of achievement listening to it being played back.
131. The subject is managed effectively by a part-time teacher. Her quiet and assured style and high expectations encourage pupils to participate and behave. Her careful planning and assessment ensures that pupils build on prior learning. There is a

satisfactory policy and scheme of work in place. The school now has a small but dedicated and partially soundproof room, attractively displayed, in which good resources from a variety of cultures are stored safely. All these are notable improvements since the previous inspection. Music plays an important part in the life of the school being central to many religious festivals and daily assemblies. Good links have been established with a local high school, whose orchestra has visited and played for all the pupils. In this way, pupils have the opportunity, first hand, to hear stringed, wind and percussion instruments played together. Depending on LEA funding, the provision for pupils with additional special educational needs is enhanced by a music therapist who works for one day a week with individual pupils. Music is used well to support spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and reinforces very good listening skills.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

132. The school has maintained the high standards in physical education noted in the previous inspection. Pupils achieve well and make good progress across the school. This is as a result of consistently good and occasionally very good teaching by specialists, who plan and build carefully on prior learning, and because of the effective support of learning assistants. This good progress applies to all groups of pupils, including those with complex special educational needs and to all boys and girls. Indeed, it is a feature of the subject that all pupils have full and equal access to a broad range of challenging physical education activities.
133. In gymnastics, pupils up to the age of 11 make good progress in learning different ways of travelling across, under and over a range of apparatus. In doing so they improve their balance, co-ordination, posture and confidence. Careful preparation beforehand in setting out the apparatus means that learning is continuous. Very good resources and facilities motivate pupils to learn and provide them with appropriate challenge. Good support from learning assistants ensures the less able are fully involved and at their pace. In this same age group, pupils develop speed, stamina and co-ordination when taking part in relay games. The teacher gives unambiguous instructions and clear demonstrations so pupils know what is expected of them. The tasks are made different, for example staggered distances and the use of a chair for one pupil, so that everyone has an equal chance of winning. Pupils have very positive attitudes to the subject. They listen and attend carefully. They join in readily, take turns and are beginning to show an awareness of teamwork. They take some responsibility for putting apparatus away. All pupils are changed properly for physical education and there is appropriate emphasis and care on dressing and undressing. The use of signing and/or symbols would better improve the understanding of some pupils with communication difficulties.

134. Pupils up to the age of 14 build on his prior learning and move with greater confidence and control around apparatus that is higher and more challenging. The teacher's specialist training and high expectations mean there is a proper focus on quality and rigour in the simplest of movements. Higher-attaining pupils use a trampette to perform a forward roll along a high box or balance and jump from high beams. Critical but supportive feedback from the teacher on how to spring and tuck into a forward roll means that pupils' performance improves within the lesson. Lower-attaining pupils need one-to-one support to travel along a low bench or ladder but they are challenged appropriately at their level and also make good progress. In a well-organised, inter-school games afternoon, pupils show great sportsmanship and politeness to visitors while taking part in an indoor hockey competition. There is a terrific ethos with pupils from three special schools joining in the competition whole-heartedly, but winning and losing with grace, and generously applauding one another. All adults present provide positive and effective role models to pupils on how to behave on such an occasion. A video camera is used well to provide a permanent record of the event which pupils watched with interest while enjoying refreshments at the end of the afternoon.
135. In swimming, this same age group makes good progress in becoming confident in the water and improving stroke techniques in front and back crawl. This is due to regular, positive experience, good resources and teacher expertise. Higher-attaining pupils swim competently fifty metres or more. Lower-attaining pupils move around the pool with confidence and experience buoyancy with the support of armbands or floats. Pupils enjoy swimming activities and are very proud of their achievements. They work hard to improve their water fitness and techniques because of the teacher's insistence on high standards. However, the effectiveness of the teacher in maintaining a whole pool/whole lesson overview is lessened because he goes in the water to support pupils himself. A larger number of well-organised learning support assistants or approved volunteers, some, who go into the water, are needed to support this aspect of physical education and to ensure the health, welfare and safety of all pupils.
136. Pupils up to the age of 16, demonstrate the good progress made in this subject over time by their skill, knowledge and understanding of basketball and by their enthusiasm for activity and good spirit in working at the skills and playing the game. The session is well planned and structured and proceeds at pace. There is a judicious balance between the introduction of new skills and the consolidation of them in a game. A learning support assistant is used effectively recording pupils' performance. Higher-attaining pupils bounce the ball with speed and control and shoot accurately from a standing position. Lower-attaining pupils bounce the ball more slowly and erratically and lack strength and co-ordination when shooting. Their peers encourage them and their individual efforts are valued.
137. The subject is well led. There is a good balanced curriculum in place with a broad range of relevant learning opportunities, enhanced by sporting links. This is supported by satisfactory assessment procedures. Facilities are very good and include a sports hall, small exercise room, grass and hard-court pitches. Good use is also made of community facilities to support the curriculum. These very good facilities, along with good resources have a very positive impact on learning. The subject makes a good contribution to personal, moral and social development.

POST-16 PROVISION (SIXTH FORM)

138. Most pupils stay on at the school beyond the age of 16 and, in many cases, until they are 19. The school makes good, distinct and separate provision for these students. They are offered a wide range of learning experiences through units of work that are accredited by OCR or ASDAN. The post-16 provision is known as the sixth form and students are placed in one of two tutor groups for their time there. Generally, the younger students are kept together but this is not always the case. The units of work, which count towards the National Skills Profile which is accredited by OCR, are delivered through a topic framework that gives integrity and structure to the curriculum. By this device, students are helped to work on their skills in a range of areas, such as communication, use of mathematics or information and communication technology in a realistic context such as shopping. Students generally attain accreditation at Level 1 and Level 2, and in some cases, Level 3.
139. Opportunities are given for each student to develop independent living skills. A well-resourced independence flat is used as a base for this aspect of their work. Students, supervised by experienced learning support assistants, spend a day in the independence flat on a regular basis. They plan their meals, go shopping to buy food, cook for themselves, and maintain the flat in a clean and tidy condition. They practise a full range of domestic skills, including bed-making, laundry and sewing. They learn effectively and are able to choose the right tools for jobs such as cleaning and dusting and they understand the importance of ensuring personal safety by treating sharp instruments or electricity with sufficient respect. Other aspects of domestic life are not neglected; just before the Christmas holidays, students were being helped to decorate a Christmas tree and were learning how to make a cheery Christmas atmosphere in the flat. In this area of their experience, students work in pairs and they are very good at collaborating with each other.
140. A team enterprise has been started and with the help of their teachers, students have researched to find a suitable product, and they have started to make and sell festive decorations. The project is run on conventional business lines and is capitalised by shares. Profits are divided among shareholders at the end of the year.
141. Students attend a local college of further education for specially tailored courses when they are in their first year of the sixth form. Some also attend link courses at the college in their final year. Work experience is offered to all students, although sometimes placements must be internal because of the severity of the students' special needs. Careers guidance is provided by the local careers service.
142. Students make good progress and good use of the opportunities provided. They appreciate the recently built sixth form centre that is very attractive. It provides excellent facilities to help them in their learning and personal development. They respond very positively to the good teaching they are offered and they feel secure because they are well known to, and cared for by all staff members who work with them. Their communication skills progress at a good rate. They are confident as they discuss their future plans. They speak clearly about what they will do when they leave school. When they are asked to think about social language in relation to an activity that they are about to undertake, they show a good understanding. For example, they are aware that shopping streets are busiest during Saturdays or in pre-holiday periods. They know what a "sale" is and connect simple facts, such as car parks are usually empty when shops are closed.
143. The students write answers to questions in simple single word or short sentence responses but when they are questioned, they fill in the missing information using

spoken language well. Their confidence in using spoken language is greatly helped by the very good relationships they have with each other and with their teachers. Students' appreciation of the use of mathematics also develops over time. They are able to read and understand price lists, to choose the cheapest item and to write down prices using the correct notation. The practical courses in horticulture, health and beauty, and food technology are very well used to provide a vehicle for broader learning.

144. Teaching is planned over a term and sessions are planned in outline. Because teachers know the students very well, this level of planning is sufficient and work is carefully matched to individual capabilities. The quality of teaching is good and plays a major part in the personal development of students. The methods used pay due respect to the fact that students are young adults and not children. Where possible, choice is given about activities and teaching sessions develop as dialogues, rather than as didactic lessons.
145. Students who have continuing speech and language difficulties or who have greater levels of special educational need continue to benefit from the very good therapeutic support that the school offers while they in the sixth form.
146. There have recently been long-term staff absences and these have had a negative impact on planning procedures and the delivery of the curriculum. The school, particularly the senior managers, has effectively minimised the negative effects of these absences but when full staff levels return it will be necessary to revise how the programme should best be planned and delivered. At present, there is too great an emphasis in some sessions on the use of worksheets and alternative methods of teaching and learning should be further explored. To some extent, the introduction of the team enterprise makes a good start in this direction. The sixth form is ably led by its manager and makes a very positive contribution to the good value that the school provides.