

INSPECTION REPORT

ABBOTS LEA SCHOOL

Liverpool

LEA area: Liverpool

Unique reference number: 104736

Headteacher: Ms. C Boycott

Reporting inspector: Ms. V Wilkinson
18461

Dates of inspection: 1st – 4th July 2002

Inspection number: 245027

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community Special
Age range of pupils:	5 - 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Beaconsfield Road Liverpool
Postcode:	L25 6EE
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. G Glynn
Date of previous inspection:	April 1996

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18461	V. Wilkinson	Registered inspector	Design and technology Music Religious education	How well are pupils taught? How high are standards?
19693	S. Hall	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development. How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
14691	J. Hall	Team inspector	Mathematics Modern foreign language	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils? Equal opportunities
14563	G. Pirt	Team inspector	Art and design	How well is the school led and managed?
30597	R. Howells	Team inspector	Science Personal, social and health education	
1358	G. Essex	Team inspector	English Physical education	How well does the school care for pupils?
1769	M. Holohan	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Geography History	

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved?	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	11
The school's results and achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	13
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	15
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	18
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	21
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	22
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	24
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	25
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	28

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Abbots Lea is a school for girls and boys aged 5 to 19 with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). When they start school their attainment is below average. There are 78 pupils in the school 76 having statements of special educational need. A small number of pupils have emotional and behavioural needs associated with autism and a very small number have additional needs such as visual or hearing impairment. There are residential opportunities for up to 16 pupils aged between 7 and 19. Pupils can board for between 1 and 4 nights a week. The school has been through a period of considerable disruption due to building work but in September 2001 staff and pupils moved into new primary and secondary accommodation. Currently residential pupils are in temporary accommodation so no comments have been made about facilities but judgements have been made about residential procedures and the twenty-four hour curriculum. There are currently four students over sixteen all of who are in Year 12. Because of the very small number, the report does not comment on achievement but judgements are made about the quality of the opportunities provided for them. The school promotes inclusion through links with local primary schools and a secondary school where it has a permanent teacher and support assistant. There are significantly more boys than girls. This reflects the national picture for schools with pupils who have ASD. Twenty-eight pupils are eligible for free school meals; this percentage is in line with similar schools. There are a very small number of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and no pupils have English as an additional language. 20 percent of pupils come from outside the city of Liverpool. The report does not make comparisons with the last inspection as the school has changed significantly since then.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Abbots Lea is a good school with many strengths. The headteacher is very committed to developing the school to meet the needs of its pupils. She is supported well by her senior management team and staff. This has resulted in good teaching and achievement. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Promotes pupils' personal development and their social skills very well, which enables them to develop very good relationships, behaviour and attitudes to work.
- Excellent use of the community extends pupils' learning and enriches the experiences they have.
- Provides very good opportunities for pupils to learn and socialise alongside their peers in mainstream schools and colleges.
- Teachers have a very good understanding of pupils' special needs and this enables pupils to make very good progress in developing their communication skills.
- Very good accommodation makes a significant contribution to pupils' learning.
- A very good partnership with parents and the high levels of care and concern shown for pupils ensure that the school looks after pupils very well.

What could be improved

- Organisation and planning of the curriculum for pupils in Years 3 to 11.
- The use of assessment to check how much progress pupils are making.

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 last inspection in 1996 judged the school to have serious weaknesses. In January 1998 the school was judged to have successfully met all the key issues identified. The headteacher was responsible for the school in an acting capacity at the time of the last inspection and was appointed to the post in April 1998. There have been considerable improvements to the school, clear admission criteria have been established to support its re-designation as a school for pupils with ASD. Staffing levels have been increased to meet the needs of pupils. A therapeutic service, including speech and language therapy, art and music, has been established to meet pupils needs. The school has developed an outreach service and extensive training opportunities for colleagues in education, health and social services, and for parents. As part of the Excellence in Liverpool initiative a learning mentor has been appointed to provide additional support for individuals and also a co-ordinator to promote enrichment of the curriculum. The school has been awarded 'Investors in People'.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets by the time they leave the school.

Progress in:	by age 11	by age 16	Key	
Speaking and listening	A	A	Very good	A
Reading	B	B	Good	B
Writing	B	B	Satisfactory	C
Mathematics	B	B	Unsatisfactory	D
Personal, social and health education	A	A	Poor	E
Other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	B	B		

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

Achievement and progress is good overall. A significant number of pupils have difficulties in the area of communication. Pupils of all ages achieve very well and make very good progress in developing their speaking and listening, communication skills because the school gives a very high priority to this area of pupils' development. Pupils achieve well and make good progress in reading and writing. Achievement and progress is good in mathematics and pupils in Years 1 and 2 make very good progress in understanding and using number. Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) for pupils in Years 2, 6 and 9 and accreditation for pupils in Year 11 indicate that a small number of pupils attain at the same level as mainstream school pupils of similar age. Achievement and progress is good in science, French, physical education and in the formal elements of personal and social education. In art, computers, design and food technology, history, geography, music and religious education progress is satisfactory. The targets set for pupils in their individual education plans are appropriate and progress is good. Pupils with additional special needs make the same progress as others through alternative work and good levels of support. The school has not set whole school targets for the improvement of standards.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils listen carefully, they are keen to work and they complete tasks without fuss. Pupils show respect for the environment, especially the new school buildings.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils are effectively learning to manage their own behaviour, to understand the consequences of their actions and to consider the feelings of others.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils demonstrate confidence. They are learning to work effectively in pairs and small groups and to make choices and decisions. Pupils take responsibility well and help in the classroom and around the school.
Attendance	Very good. The attendance rate has improved over the last four years. Pupils arrive at school on time and the school day starts promptly.

Pupils are enthusiastic about their work and co-operate sensibly with their partners and adults. Very good relationships are reflected in lessons and across the daily life of the school and these effectively support pupils to learn. They respond well to praise and encouragement and are clearly developing a sense of self-worth. Pupils' self-esteem has a positive impact on their learning and they are proud of their work. Pupils demonstrate very good personal development when they are involved in setting their own targets or contributing to their annual review.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:
Lessons seen overall

Aged 5-11	Aged 11- 19
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 good overall. Specialist teaching methods are implemented effectively to provide a framework in which pupils are effectively supported to make progress. During the inspection teaching was often very good and excellent teaching was seen in English, design and technology and history for primary age pupils and physical education for students over 16. Teaching in English, mathematics, science, French, personal and social education and physical education is good and the teaching of speaking and listening, communication, for pupils of all ages and the teaching of number for primary age pupils is very good. Where teaching is excellent or very good there are clear links between assessment and learning which enable teachers to identify what has been achieved and what needs to be taught next. There is very effective teamwork between teachers and support staff and this makes a significant contribution to pupils learning. Teachers promote pupils' communication skills and literacy very well within all subjects but numeracy and the use of computers is not promoted as effectively.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. The school makes excellent use of the community to support learning through visits, visitors and participation in local events. There are excellent links with mainstream primary and secondary schools and colleges and very good opportunities for the development of communication in a variety of learning and social settings. Programmes for teaching literacy and numeracy are well established. However, plans of work for art, music, geography, religious education and design and technology need to take more account of pupils' past learning.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Pupils' personal development is promoted very well throughout the school day. The 24-hour curriculum effectively supports the small number of pupils who board to become independent. The very strong sense of community and the role models provided by staff result in pupils' very good moral development. Cultural understanding is promoted well across the curriculum and the provision for spiritual development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good procedures and high levels of care and concern for pupils ensures their welfare, health and safety and promote their personal development and behaviour. The school provides very good therapeutic support for pupils who need it.

The curriculum for secondary age pupils is not organised well enough to reflect pupils' individual interests and accredited courses do not challenge all pupils. Assessment is unsatisfactory overall because teachers do not check that pupils have learned what they have been taught often enough. There is not enough written down about pupils' achievements, however, teachers know pupils very well and use assessment such as questioning, and observations of pupils and marking work effectively to support progress. Although a good start has been made developing assessment in English and mathematics, it is not effective enough in other subjects because the links between assessment and what has been taught are not sufficiently clear. The school has developed very effective links with parents. It provides them with good information about the life and work of the school. Parents participate very effectively in their child's learning by attending regular meetings about their progress, by supporting homework and by attending school functions.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher has led the school very well and has established a strong commitment from staff to improve what is offered. The senior management team makes a good contribution to the development of the school, however, teachers do not have enough opportunities to monitor other staff teaching the subjects they are responsible for.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Good. The governing body has a very good understanding of what goes on in the school. It knows the school's strengths and the areas for development. It has an effective role in managing the school and shaping its future.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. The monitoring of teaching through performance management is good. Senior managers and governors have had significant training in school self-evaluation, which is beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of what the school provides. The school recognises the need to improve planning for the curriculum and assessment.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Educational priorities are well supported through careful financial planning and money provided by the government to support specific projects is effectively spent. The school is beginning to apply the principles of best value well to its purchases and commitments. Staff, accommodation and learning resources are used well to support learning.

The school is beginning to evaluate its effectiveness but it does not have enough information about subject teaching or the impact of developments because the roles of subject co-ordinators are not sufficiently well developed. There is a good match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum. Training for staff in curriculum subjects and training for the teaching and management of pupils with ASD is very good. The school also provides high quality training for other professionals and parents in autism. Teachers are using their knowledge and understanding of ASD effectively to support colleagues in mainstream schools through the Outreach Service. Accommodation for primary and secondary age pupils is very good and pupils benefit from specialist facilities such as art, design and food technology, science and computer rooms as well as a soft play-sensory room and a splash pool. The temporary residential accommodation is satisfactory but the condition of the Beacon Hill Centre for students over 16 is unsatisfactory. Learning resources are good overall.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their child likes school. • Teaching is good and children make good progress. • The school is well led and managed and they feel comfortable to approach the school with ideas or problems. • The school works closely with them and they are well informed about how their child is getting on. • The school helps children to become mature and responsible and behaviour is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework.

Inspectors agree with all the positive views expressed by parents in the questionnaire and at the parents' meeting. Inspectors feel that the school provides a suitable amount of homework for individual pupils based on a good understanding of their individual needs.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Pupils of all ages achieve well and make good progress overall because the school concentrates on developing their speaking and listening and communication. Pupils' achievement reflects the quality of teaching and results indicate that pupils capable of achieving broadly in line with national expectations are being effectively supported to achieve. For example, high levels of attainment in mathematics were achieved this year by a very small percentage of Year 9 pupils educated at the local secondary school and at Abbots Lea.
2. Pupils develop very good communication skills because teaching in this area is very effective and is supported by opportunities for a significant number of pupils to receive direct support from the speech and language therapist through individual or small group work. All staff, whatever their role, make sure that they take every opportunity to talk to pupils and involve them in discussion. As a result, pupils gain the confidence to communicate. The social- communication programme, being developed by the school, has a very positive impact on the progress pupils make in using the skills they have acquired.
3. Pupils are given very good opportunities to practise and apply their literacy skills in lessons across the curriculum. As a result, they make good progress. Primary age pupils achieve well and make good progress in reading and writing because they are taught in groups according to their ability. This means that teachers can more easily match the content of lessons to the needs of pupils, stretching those capable of higher attainment and taking things at a slower pace with others. This is also the case in mathematics where achievement and progress is also good. Pupils achieve well because the quality of teaching is good. The National Numeracy Strategy is well established, especially in mathematics lessons for pupils in Years 1 to 6. This has a positive impact on progress, particularly for pupils in Years 1 and 2 who make very good progress in understanding and using number. Teachers do not, however, provide enough opportunities for pupils of all ages to use mathematics in other subjects. As a result, opportunities to reinforce pupils' learning are being missed. The good achievement of primary age pupils in English and mathematics is effectively built on in years 7 to 11.
4. Pupils' achievement and progress is good in science because learning opportunities are well planned and ensure that there are suitable opportunities for pupils to build on past experiences. Younger secondary age pupils make very good progress because teachers have high expectations of them. Learning challenges pupils by providing good opportunities for scientific enquiry. Achievement and progress is also good in French, physical education and in the formal elements of personal and social education. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in understanding and using computers and there are some examples of teachers planning for primary age pupils to use their computer skills in music and history, which enables them to make good progress. However pupils of all ages would benefit from additional chances to improve their computer skills in other subjects.
5. Pupils achieve satisfactory standards in religious education, however, secondary age pupils in particular would make more progress if opportunities were planned to take better account of past learning. Pupils make satisfactory progress in art, design and food technology, history, geography and music. Teachers use the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's (QCA) modules of work to support their planning for these subjects but progress could be even better if opportunities were

part of a continuous programme of learning that identifies what pupils will learn throughout their time at school.

6. Pupils in Years 10 and 11, who are following accredited courses, achieve well because course requirements provide structure for their learning and this leads to high standards. The number of accredited courses offered to pupils is good and improving but the courses studied are not always sufficiently challenging for all pupils. This is because the curriculum is not organised well enough for the oldest pupils to choose what they study and this limits the amount of time available to provide more challenging courses. For example, pupils capable of higher attainment are currently unable to study for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), unless they are attending the local mainstream school. In addition, pupils' practical and vocational learning is not being recognised through accreditation such as the Youth Award Scheme (YAS) which is currently only available for students over 16.
7. Students over 16 make good progress and achieve well in basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy. Lessons are enhanced by regular opportunities for students to apply their learning in other subjects and in real life situations, for example, handling money as part of their enterprise activities. They also do well during vocational 'taster' courses, at college. They are effectively prepared to make decisions about their future and to cope with the demands of training or the workplace. Students' learning is accredited through YAS. They are currently working at bronze award level.
8. A number of pupils who have emotional or behavioural needs associated with their autism are very well supported to make progress. Systems, such as the learning mentor enhance their opportunities to achieve by helping them to participate more effectively in lessons. Any other additional needs that pupils have are addressed very effectively and have a limited impact on learning and progress. Care is taken to meet the needs of the most and least able pupils, so that they can make progress at different but equivalent rates. Teachers support these pupils appropriately by altering their teaching methods and, on occasions, by adapting work to meet their needs.
9. The relatively small numbers of girls make good progress, because teachers plan lessons and activities that appeal to both girls and boys. The targets set for pupils in their individual education plans (IEPs) are appropriate and their progress is good particularly where these targets are related to pupils' autism. The school has not yet set whole school targets to improve standards.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

10. Pupils are enthusiastic about their work and this has a positive impact on their learning. For example, in an art lesson, which was typical of many seen during the inspection, older primary age pupils listen very carefully to the teacher's instruction. Inspired by her demonstration, they are very keen to get started on their own designs. They work sensibly with partners and adults, concentrating hard as they experiment with different colours and textures. They are amazed at the range of resulting patterns achieved from shoe treads and radiators. As the lesson progresses, pupils become increasingly confident in trying out new ideas and most of them are able to talk about their finished work with pride. Pupils develop their confidence and self-esteem because the teacher has a very good relationship with them.
11. It is clear that pupils know how they should behave. They are effectively learning to manage their own behaviour because teachers and support assistants constantly

provide good 'models' for them. Pupils respond well to praise and rewards. This was seen in a Year 1 literacy lesson where the teacher praises pupils for 'good looking, good listening' and pupils respond positively by participating fully in the activity. Pupils are effectively learning to understand the consequences of their actions because of the consistent prompts and cues they are given by teachers. For example, when pupils behave inappropriately, teachers warn them that they have done wrong and provide good cues such as '*one minute to calm down*'. Pupils behave well at lunchtime and play appropriately in the playground. They say that incidents of anti-social behaviour are dealt with, and there was only one fixed term exclusion last year. The site manager says that pupils show respect for the environment, especially the new school buildings.

12. Pupils, grow in confidence and self-esteem because staff value and encourage them. For example, in a Year 10 science lesson, pupils are happy to share their ideas about volcanoes because they know that staff will value their contributions. Pupils learn to work in groups or pairs, most enjoy taking responsibility and like helping in the classroom. In the residence, pupils enjoy setting the table and planning activities. Pupils are learning to make choices and decisions. Higher attaining pupils make good contributions at their annual review meeting, giving their own ideas about their plans for the future. Pupils make sensible comments in the school's questionnaire, and the school recently took up their suggestions for new playground markings.
13. Absences are mainly due to illness and medical appointments. The unauthorised absence rate has decreased and is now very low. The vast majority of pupils arrive at school on time and the school day begins promptly.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

14. The quality of teaching is constantly being improved through very good training in the specialist methods and approaches needed for pupils with ASD. Recognised strategies such as TEACCH, Picture Exchange Communication (PECs) and Strategies for Crisis Intervention and Prevention (SCIP) are well understood by all staff and implemented effectively to provide a framework in which pupils are effectively supported to make progress. Consistent and clearly given prompts, reference to individual symbol timetables and strategies such as '*counting down*' to changes in activity all help pupils to cope with the demands made on them.
15. Teachers are also up-to-date in their subject knowledge because of the very good emphasis placed on the importance of professional development. Improvements in the accommodation, for example, in design and food technology and information and communication technology, have also helped teachers to significantly improve the range of practical activities they provide to promote pupils' achievement.
16. Teachers in the primary department 'team teach' in some subjects such as music. This enables them to provide pupils with a much wider range of learning opportunities and helps them to share their expertise. In Years 10 and 11, in a few subjects, teaching is often very good rather than good because teachers benefit from the structure provided by examination courses, for example, in French the course work ensures that pupils build systematically upon what they have already learnt.
17. Teachers have realistic expectations of pupils because of their very good understanding of autism and because they know them well as individuals. Teachers use questions and discussion well, checking what each pupil understands. These strategies contribute effectively to teachers' overall knowledge of pupils' achievement. Ongoing assessment such as questioning pupils and observing their

responses to activities are used effectively by teachers to help them plan what pupils will learn next, however, these assessment are not always written down to provide a record of achievement and progress.

18. During introductions to lessons there are plenty of reminders and checks on pupils' understanding. For example, in a science lesson, Year 10 pupils are given good opportunities to explain what they know about volcanoes. Very good use of questions enables the teacher to find out how much they understand by challenging them to give '*more information*'. Teachers are very careful to make sure that all pupils responded. They ask them by name to answer particular questions, which are well matched to their needs. Because teachers are encouraging, pupils are willing to have a go at answering. Teachers use their subject knowledge and their detailed knowledge of pupils to explain activities very carefully. Pupils are able to participate effectively because they know exactly what they are expected to do. For example, in a design and technology lesson for pupils in Year 4, very good explanations and demonstrations as well as very good opportunities to let pupils '*talk through*' what they are going to do enables them to be very successful.
19. Where teaching is most effective planning clearly indicates what the group and each individual is expected to achieve. For example a design and technology lesson for pupils in Year 4 is evaluated very effectively, records are made of pupils' responses to the experiences they have had, and '*next steps*' are clearly identified as a result of what has happened. In these lessons pupils' individual needs are catered for well, the least able are encouraged to complete simpler tasks or are given good levels of support while others tackle challenging work independently.
20. Teachers plan a variety of tasks that are calculated to interest pupils and pack a great deal into each lesson. This is one reason why pupils achieve. Because they are kept busy pupils concentrate, work hard and achieve well. Teachers usually bring lessons to a suitable conclusion, reminding pupils what they have learned and setting the scene for the next. This helps pupils to recall and clarify what they have learned and to understand where it fits within a sequence of lessons. Resources are used well to promote learning by gaining pupils' attention and interest. In a literacy lesson for primary age pupils the teacher provides a very good and interesting range of resources for the story 'Little Red Riding Hood'. A digital camera is used to very good effect to record pupils' achievements and their participation in the activity.
21. Teachers and support staff have a very good shared understanding of pupils' academic and personal needs and support staff make very good contributions to the quality of teaching. They are well informed about their role and are supportive of teachers and pupils, in an unobtrusive way. For example, by prompting pupils about their behaviour and by helping to keep them focused on the teacher or involved in activities. This enables teachers to concentrate on '*teaching and learning*' rather than being constantly distracted. There are very strong team approaches to managing the learning opportunities provided for pupils. This teamwork enables adults to provide pupils with as much support as they need; in consequence, they respond well and make good progress in lessons.
22. Teachers establish very good relationships with pupils and this results in pupils being confident to speak out and to ask questions. Across the school teachers create an atmosphere in which pupils feel relaxed and comfortable so they are well motivated and participate effectively in lessons. They plan exciting lessons that challenge pupils to work hard and produce high standards. For example, primary age pupils make very good progress in a music lesson using computers because the teacher uses her subject knowledge well to provide very good opportunities for all of them to successfully compose a piece of music

23. A small number of parents and carers are concerned about the provision of homework. Evidence shows that the amount and type of homework is satisfactory. It is set with an appropriate regard for pupils' individual needs and provides an appropriate extension to what is done in lessons.

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

24. The school successfully meets its aims for the curriculum by focusing on the development of pupils' communication, personal and social skills, by extending links with the community and other schools and by providing equal opportunities for its pupils. The curriculum is very effective in responding to the three major difficulties experienced by autistic pupils. The best learning opportunities are found in Years 1 and 2 and for students over 16. The planning and organisation of the curriculum in Years 3 to 11 is satisfactory. However, the way learning is planned in subjects such as art and design, design and food technology, history, geography, music and religious education prevents pupils from making more than satisfactory progress in these subjects.
25. There is an appropriate emphasis on the time allocated to English, mathematics, physical education and personal and social education. The time allocated to other subjects is satisfactory but not well enough organised. Timetable arrangements, particularly for older secondary age pupils, are not flexible enough to provide more challenging opportunities for accreditation. In addition, because pupils study all the subjects of the National Curriculum until Year 11 teachers are not able to tailor pupils' study to reflect their strengths and interests. The school does not make enough use of temporary disapplications from the National Curriculum for pupils who need a therapeutic curriculum for a limited period.
26. The options programme on Friday afternoon, whilst valuable for the development of pupils' personal, social, physical and communication skills, does not have enough emphasis on academic achievement. This time could be used to extend pupils' opportunities to follow accredited courses. The length of the teaching week for these pupils falls below the recommended 25 hours. This means that the timetable for secondary age pupils needs to be more effective than it is at present to support improved achievement.
27. Throughout the day, and in the residence during the evening, there is a very good emphasis on promoting pupils' personal and social skills. In addition the school devotes a high proportion of time, over a quarter in Years 1 to 6, and nearly a fifth in Years 7 to 11, to personal and social education. The emphasis placed on this area of development extends across the school day in an informal way and these opportunities bring significant improvement in pupils' personal development and create a positive approach to learning that is very evident in school. There are, however, no detailed plans to show how the curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to build on their learning from previous years. Although pupils make good progress their achievement would be improved with better planning.
28. The school has successfully established the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. These have been appropriately adapted to meet the needs of pupils with autism and elements are effectively included in the curriculum plans for English and mathematics in Years 1 to 6. In all subjects across the school teachers use every opportunity to promote pupils' speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. Planning to develop pupils' social-communication skills is very successful. The programme is well supported by visits to museums, shops, leisure and sporting facilities and there is good use of public transport, which helps pupils

become confident and independent to communicate in different settings. Pupils who have residential opportunities are also very well supported and they have opportunities to practise in the evening as well as during the day.

29. The school is developing a Foundation Stage curriculum in readiness for receiving children in the early years of schooling. Developments so far are satisfactory and the co-ordinator is conscientiously drawing on all the latest published information to plan appropriate provision.
30. The provision for careers education and guidance is satisfactory. The school has established good links with the careers advisory service. Pupils have appropriate opportunities to learn about the world of work through visits, work experience and business enterprise projects, like running a tuck shop. In Year 11, for example, pupils practise writing correspondence to employers as further development of their communication skills. In Year 12 there is further preparation for the world of work through assignments as part of the YAS and life skills course, both of which lead to external accreditation. The opportunities provided for careers education would be more effective if they were planned within a programme of continuous learning which identifies what pupils will learn and when.
31. There is a good range of opportunities to extend and enrich the curriculum through after school clubs for day pupils. These are very well organised by support staff, with careful attention to the composition of groups. Pupils visit restaurants, choose leisure activities in the community such as bowling, the cinema, and activities at an outdoor education centre. They prepare meals and travel on public transport. The after school clubs make a significant contribution to the development of pupils' communication and social skills, their independence and confidence.
32. Good use is made of visiting specialists to extend the curriculum, for example, there have been visiting potters, sculptors and musicians to run workshops. Residential opportunities during an annual exchange with a mainstream school in the south of England are very successful in boosting pupils' confidence and social skills. They provide them with a very positive experience of working and playing with others. Pupils have opportunities to participate in a wide range of projects and activities, many of which are funded and promoted by the City of Liverpool. The Greenhouse Project, for example, has been successful in extending pupils' awareness of the wide range of cultures in the city. The nationally funded Excellence Challenge has been suitably adapted to reflect the needs of autistic pupils. The funds are managed effectively by the gifted and talented co-ordinator to enrich the curriculum for pupils of all abilities. (The school does not have any individual pupils identified as gifted or talented.) A two-week play scheme in the summer holidays further extends the opportunities for pupils to learn. The scheme is well planned and organised by a very committed member of the learning support staff.
33. The school takes good care to ensure that there is no discrimination. Good action is taken to prevent racism and sexism and the school effectively promotes pupils' tolerance and understanding of a diverse society through visits into the local community. The few girls in the school have appropriate, support, for example, on personal hygiene at puberty, but there are currently no girls' clubs but these are to be introduced next term.

The provision made for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

34. The social communication programme plays a significant part in promoting pupils' social development. Conversations with pupils during the inspection and their ability to participate in residential activities and, for some, attendance at mainstream

primary and secondary schools underlines the success of the school's provision. The daily life of the school also plays a very important part in developing pupils' social skills because discussion and working together in lessons is strongly encouraged. Leisure activities are effectively supported by the strength of the relationships between staff and pupils. The school makes effective use of music and art therapy, for those pupils who need it, to help them learn how to function in group situations.

35. The school provides very well for pupils' moral development. Staff create a warm and supportive community in which strong role models of respect and tolerance are provided to support pupils' development. The school's atmosphere is such that all pupils feel valued and respected.
36. There are good opportunities for pupils' cultural development. The school works hard to ensure that pupils are aware of the range of cultures that exist in the local community. Participation in projects such as the Capital of Culture and the Greenhouse Project give pupils rich experiences. In addition there are visits to museums and recently a visit to the local Chinese community, which effectively extends pupils' understanding of their own and other cultures. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to develop an awareness of the needs of others in the community. Pupils collect for charities such as the Marie Curie foundation and take part in recycling activities to help the local environment. These experiences help pupils to develop an awareness of themselves in the wider community. Similarly, through curriculum activities, such as planting a tree in memory of Anne Franke, pupils are successfully made aware of their role as citizens in a wider world.
37. The provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. There are opportunities for class assemblies but greater use could be made of the time for reflection and sharing together as a community. Satisfactory attempts are made to provide pupils with a range of spiritual experiences such as the visits made by primary aged pupils to the countryside and to the park to experience the scents and smells of spring.

The 24 hour curriculum

38. The 24-hour curriculum effectively links the work in school with that carried out in the residential setting. Staff ensure that pupils have good opportunities to practise and improve their skills and, wherever possible they are involved in identifying their own targets. This contributes well to pupils developing an awareness of their own learning. There is good liaison between residential and school staff, and formal opportunities to discuss the care plans established for each pupil. Staff are aware of any targets that can be supported in both the school and residential setting so pupils are given consistent opportunities to develop and practise skills in a variety of settings. This makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development. A good range of activities is planned for the evenings such as visits to the cinema, shopping and opportunities for pupils to follow their individual interests. A most important feature of all these activities is the promotion of decision-making skills and pupils effectively learn to make choices and learn to have control over their lives.

Opportunities the school provides for inclusion and its links with partner institutions

39. The school has established an excellent relationship with partner schools and these have led to very good opportunities for pupils to learn in mainstream schools and colleges. The school takes every opportunity to include pupils in activities with other schools and in the community. The links established with a local secondary school, three primary schools and a college are excellent. The headteachers and staff of the schools involved are very supportive and the pupils concerned make very good

progress working and playing alongside mainstream pupils. Strong links with a local college give students over 16 the opportunity to experience taster courses before they leave school.

40. Eight pupils study for part or all the week in a local comprehensive school and they join lessons in religious education and in all National Curriculum subjects. Pupils participate in school performances, take part in work experience, and are thoroughly integrated into the life of the host school. The dedicated work of the secondary link teacher, the link assistant, and the secondary school staff make this inclusion programme is very successful.

The outreach service

41. As part of its excellent links with partner schools an Outreach Service has been established to meet demands for advice from mainstream schools that have a growing number of pupils with ASD. Two teachers and the speech therapist deliver the service. Their main role is to raise the awareness of their mainstream colleagues in the specific approaches used for pupils with ASD by delivering training and advice to teachers and support assistants on autism and behaviour management. They effectively help prepare resources, carry out observations and prepare programmes for individual pupils as well as work with parents and other agencies that are involved with pupils.
42. The feedback from the schools involved is positive with teachers reporting that their new skills have not only helped them in their management of pupils with autism but also of pupils with other behavioural difficulties. Further improvements identified for the service are appropriate. They include the development of transition plans for pupils as they move from class to class and from school to school, further training on the management pupils with autism in mainstream schools and training for carers and parents of mainstream pupils with autism. Although in its infancy, the outreach service has proved itself to be an invaluable resource for mainstream schools in helping them secure the inclusion of pupils with autism.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

43. The school has very good procedures to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety and it is successful in its aim to create a secure, stable and happy environment where pupils feel valued. Teachers, residential care workers and support assistants show high levels of care and concern for pupils and give them very good support and guidance. The learning mentor, speech therapist and therapists in art and music make very valuable contributions to developing pupils' social and communication skills, as well as providing an extra dimension to pastoral care. Pupils say they feel comfortable to talk to their teachers or to the learning mentor if they are upset.
44. The school has very secure procedures for child protection. Three senior members of staff have responsibility for child protection and they carry out their duties effectively. All adults working in school have a good understanding of the school's procedures.
45. The school pays good attention to health and safety. The site manager is vigilant of potential hazards, particularly during the current building work. Staff undertake risk assessments for pupils' activities, and have a good understanding of keeping pupils safe. The arrangements for first aid are good. Staff keep appropriate records of first aid treatment and keep parents well informed if their child is ill or injured.

46. The procedures established to manage and support the residential opportunities provided for pupils are good. Currently the school is using accommodation at a local convent while major refurbishment is carried out on its own facilities at Abbots Lea House. Pupils stay for between one and four nights a week. At the moment there are sixteen residential places but this is due to increase when the school returns on-site. This temporary arrangement has been managed very well and the head of care and residential staff has been very effective in supporting pupils through all the changes. Routines are well established and procedures to ensure pupils' care and wellbeing are effective. Pupils are clearly well settled. The temporary accommodation is satisfactory and was inspected for suitability and safety by Social Services before pupils moved in.
47. The co-ordinator for special educational needs is meticulous in her attention to monitoring and arranging provision. Links with external agencies and with parents are very good and resources and medical support for pupils with visual and hearing impairment are in place and well managed. The appropriateness of the placement for pupils, who are found to have more severe learning difficulties and need an early developmental curriculum, is kept under careful review. The procedure for monitoring personal development through individual education plans is very good.
48. The school's arrangements for monitoring and improving attendance are good. The school strongly discourages holidays during term time and gives parents clear guidelines about which absences will not be authorised. Certificates are given to reward full attendance. Staff follow up any unexplained absences and the headteacher works closely with the educational welfare officer when attendance is a cause for concern.
49. The school, through the headteacher's involvement with the multi-agency 'Care Pathway' initiative, is actively involved in developing a 'single point of contact' service for children with autism and their families. This initiative has a remit to draw together services, skills and expertise from across the city so that children's needs can be met more effectively. As part of this initiative the school has established very effective links with interested professionals and parents working to meet the needs of children with autistic spectrum disorders.
50. Assessment is unsatisfactory overall because it is not sufficiently well linked to what is taught, particularly in those subjects where planning needs to be improved. However, there are elements of assessment, which are effective and enable the school to promote learning. The assessment of pupils' achievement in accredited courses is good and teachers have a good understanding of the ability of individual pupils. They are well informed by the way they monitor pupils' progress towards the targets in their IEPs and the good use they make of ongoing assessment such as questioning pupils, observations of pupils' responses during lessons and the marking of work.
51. The school has made a good start at developing assessment that is better linked to the curriculum, particularly in English and mathematics, where developments have benefited from the structures of the national strategies. Pupils' attainment is recorded against specific criteria and the colour coding used for each year helps to show progress over time. However, there is still room to develop more consistent recording of the evidence that supports these judgements.
52. In other subjects teachers have their own preferred method of assessment. As there are few shared assessment formats the usefulness and quality of what is recorded varies. Overall the links between what has been taught and assessment are not sufficiently clear and there is not enough consistent use of assessment criteria such as National Curriculum, QCA or PIVATs levels to describe what pupils

know and can do. This means that teachers are not always sure how effectively pupils are learning because progress is not measured as accurately as it could be.

53. Termly reports and the written contributions for annual reviews and reports contain detailed and helpful information. However, the school does not always have evidence to support the statements teachers make about pupils' knowledge and understanding as there is little written down to support their judgements. Despite the shortcomings there are in assessment, there have been several positive developments in the way the school monitors and supports pupils' academic development. Assessment criteria such as 'P' levels are now being used effectively for the youngest pupils to track progress and set targets, particularly in the area of communication. For the oldest secondary age pupils the arrangements for assessing accredited coursework are very effective and have been commended by the examination board.
54. Pupils' individual education plans contain a comprehensive set of targets covering play, imagination and physical needs as well as English and mathematics. The targets set for learning are not always written in a way that enables progress to be measured easily but the quality of these plans is being effectively improved through regular monitoring, which includes written feedback by senior management. The school has already identified the need to improve its assessment of pupils' academic attainment and progress and a good action plan has been produced to address this area of development.
55. Procedures for the annual review of pupils' statements of special educational need are carried out effectively, however, there is a lack of clarity in how recommendations for changes to pupils' statements are carried through, particularly with regard to residential opportunities.
56. There are very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour. Staff expertise in this area and their very extensive knowledge of pupils' individual needs are apparent not only in the day-to-day management of pupils but also in the planning documents and other records used. Staff training in the management of behaviour, comprehensive behaviour and bullying policies and information, and an emphasis on rewarding pupils by giving merits to reward 'positive behaviour' all make a significant contribution to the very good standards of behaviour in the school. Records of Achievement, including evidence such as certificates and photographs of pupils taking part in a wide range of activities, are conscientiously kept and updated. They reflect the significant emphasis the school gives to the celebration of pupils' successes.

The therapies department

57. The school provides very good support for pupils through the 'therapies department'. School staff include qualified and experienced speech, art and music therapists who work with pupils to address their emotional needs and improve their communication and personal development. The therapists provide very well organised support and make a key contribution to promoting pupils' learning and well being. There are good opportunities for pupils to work with the therapists as individuals or in small groups but pupils spend time out of lessons over a considerable number of weeks to attend these sessions and this has an impact on the amount of progress they make in learning how to work in paired or group situations, how to manage their behaviour and to communicate effectively. The school is aware that it needs to find a way of ensuring that it achieves an appropriate balance between therapy and learning so that pupils' needs in both areas are met effectively; at the moment pupils' therapy occasionally interrupts their learning.

58. There are good systems of referral for pupils to the therapy service. Comprehensive assessment of pupils' needs enables the therapist to set appropriate targets for improvement. Therapists monitor the effectiveness of the sessions well and can clearly identify that pupils make good progress. The school employs a full-time speech and language therapist and a full-time speech and language therapy assistant. The speech therapy assistant provides effective support to pupils through programmes derived by the therapist. Co-operation and liaison between the therapist and teaching staff is very close and effective. Team teaching and the use of the therapist in groupwork make a significant contribution to the progress pupils make.
59. The expertise of the speech therapist is used effectively to train teachers in writing individual communication programmes for pupils, in assessment and to provide advice and information on communication issues for staff. The speech therapists input has been particularly important in developing the use of PECs for pupils with more complex communication difficulties. The deputy headteacher and the speech therapist are working closely together to develop a social communication programme for all pupils. This is already beginning to have a positive impact on the progress pupils make.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

60. Parents' and carers' views of the school are exceptionally positive. They recognise the school's many strengths, and particularly value the way that staff treat each pupil as an individual. Many parents have made a positive decision to send their children to Abbots Lea, even though some of them live a considerable distance from the school. One parent said, *'As soon as I walked into the school, I knew it was the right place for my child – there was a sense of warmth and belonging'*. Over thirty-five per cent of parents returned the Ofsted questionnaires and there were no significant concerns about any aspect of school life. Parents who attended the parents meeting were also very positive in their views.
61. The school has established very good links with parents who say that the school treats them as equal partners in supporting their children and parents feel that staff are very approachable and *'really'* listen to them. An ethos of trust has been established between home and school and parents feel confident in sharing information with teachers, particularly through the home-school diary, which is a very effective means of communication. Parents value the opportunities to meet formally with staff and informally at functions such as the school coffee mornings. The school is constantly striving to improve its links with parents and carers and the headteacher is very receptive to parents' suggestions. The school regularly surveys parents' views through a detailed questionnaire.
62. The information provided for parents is good. The prospectus and governors' annual report gives parents useful information but does not celebrate the special qualities of the school. Good half-termly newsletters inform parents of future events, particularly the coffee mornings and social evenings. These beneficial meetings give parents and carers very good opportunities for training, advice and mutual support. The therapists, learning mentor and other senior members of staff offer helpful home visits. These support parents with specialist programmes for their children. The school's annual reviews of pupils' statements of special educational need give parents good information about how their children are getting on. Parents and carers value the termly consultations with staff where they are able to discuss their children's progress, as well as talking about any concerns. Pupils' annual reports are good and give parents useful information about how their children are doing and the levels at which they are working.

63. The impact of parents' involvement on the work of the school is very good. Parent governors are very supportive and often attend staff training sessions. The very active parent teacher association works hard to raise considerable funds for the schools and events are very well attended. Parents' contribution to their children's learning is very good. The school greatly values the help offered by parents in lessons and on visits. The vast majority of parents are very keen to support their children and attendance at meetings and annual reviews is high. Parents want to work in partnership with the school and they try to ensure that strategies to manage their children's particular difficulties are continued at home. Parents help their children with their homework and make helpful comments in the home-school diary.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

64. The headteacher has led the school very well to create, what is effectively, a new school. She has developed a very good team spirit and staff morale has been effectively maintained during significant upheaval. There is an excellent commitment by all staff and in particular the senior management team, to improving the work of the school. The headteacher's vision for the school is very clear and challenges the school to develop opportunities for pupils to work and socialise with children in mainstream schools. The headteacher is very well supported in this vision by staff and governors who clearly see the school continuing to develop and increase its already close links with other local schools, to mutual benefit.
65. The headteacher is good at delegating responsibilities. Members of the large senior management team, particularly the deputy headteacher, are responsible for a significant number of tasks that are essential for the smooth running and continued development of the school. They carry out their responsibilities well but a recent review of their roles has recognised that more clearly defined job descriptions are needed particularly for teachers who are responsible for co-ordinating subjects. This will enable them to promote higher standards more effectively. Currently they do not have enough opportunities to identify and share good practice. At present, the headteacher and members of the senior management team observe a good number of lessons during the year. This has had a positive impact on promoting improvements in the quality teaching overall but it has not focused sufficiently on subjects.
66. The governing body carries out its statutory duties well and is hardworking, well informed and supportive of the school. Governors make a very good contribution to the school development plan and to the current debate about the school's future. It has a very good understanding of the areas for development. Governors have undertaken considerable training, particularly in school self-evaluation. This has a positive impact on their performance and is demonstrated in the very good knowledge they have about many aspects of the daily life and management of the school. For example, how financial planning is related to the effective provision of staffing.
67. Processes for school development planning are good and appropriate targets for improvement are set. These are focused on five main areas of the school's work and cover a three-year period. There are good links between the school's plan and the local education authority's education development plan. This ensures that the school is well prepared to meet any local initiatives. The school development plan has estimated costs for its priorities and responsibilities for task are clearly identified. The school has appropriately established criteria against which it can judge the impact each priority has on standards, and recognises that these would provide more information if they were written in more specific terms.

68. The numerous tasks outlined in the plan are related to clear overall objectives for the school and it is possible to see how each action contributes to the achievement of the school's aims. However, development plans have not been established for all subjects. This is because a small number of teachers have been given responsibility for their subjects very recently and because there are not enough opportunities for co-ordinators to monitor teaching and learning. As a result co-ordinators do not have enough information on which to base targets to improve provision and standards.
69. The day-to-day management of the school's delegated budget is good and is carried out efficiently. Satisfactory use is made of information and communication technology for recording the purchase of, and paying for, goods and keeping financial records. Suitable financial information is provided to help the governing body and senior managers make decisions about how monies will be spent. This information has been used well to respond to the budget changes that will follow the increasing pupil roll. For example, financial reserves have been used effectively to maintain existing staff levels, as well as for more strategic purposes such as helping staff prepare for changes related to pupils' needs. Sums of money provided by the government for specific projects, including the development of information and communication technology, literacy, numeracy and staff training have been well spent.
70. The school makes good efforts to ensure that its work provides good value. For example, it consults widely before embarking upon its plans for development and takes steps to make sure that it obtains good value from the major goods and services that it buys. The consultation process it undertakes with governors, staff, parents and pupils is of a high standard and provides useful information on which to base targets for improvement. Although the school does not check the value of the service it provides, by comparing itself with other schools, it has begun to consider the costs of its provision against the outcomes of what pupils achieve in tests and examinations.
71. There is a good number of well-qualified teachers and support staff. The provision of speech, music and art therapists and the learning mentor contributes very well to pupils' achievement, their personal development and their well being and the co-ordinator for gifted and talented pupils ensures that pupils' curriculum opportunities are enriched through a wide range of additional experiences. The school expects a commitment to further training in the area of autism from all new staff and there is very good induction of all staff into the school. This is based on an excellent induction manual. Training arrangements are very good with both teachers and support staff able to apply to any courses they are interested in. The provision of training, in conjunction with Manchester University, for members of the school as well as those from outside of the school is very good. The small size of classes has a positive impact on learning, particularly in areas such as communication where pupils benefit from smaller groups.
72. The newly built accommodation is very good and is well maintained by the site manager, who is closely involved in the ongoing modernisation and refurbishment of residential accommodation and the building used by students over 16. He is well supported by the cleaning staff. There are a number of specialist rooms, in the new building, including, science, design and technology, art, sensory room and splash pool that are of very good quality and meet the needs of the pupils very well. The school also makes very good use of local facilities including the nearby swimming pool. Resources are good and meet the needs of the curriculum. The school provides good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

73. In order to improve the quality of the education provided for pupils and to raise standards the governing body, headteacher and staff should: -

I. Improve the organisation and planning of the curriculum particularly for pupils in Years 3 to 11. (paragraphs 24,25,26, 97,103,106,111,131)*

**The school is already aware of the need to improve the curriculum and co-ordinators are beginning to plan appropriate developments in their subjects.*

II. Improve assessment to so that teachers can check, more effectively, how much progress pupils are making. (paragraphs 51,52,53,83,84)*

**Assessment has already been identified by the school as a priority development and a suitable action plan has been established which will improve the school's current procedures.*

In addition to the key issues outlined the school may wish to consider the following minor points in their action plan:

- ◆ Improve the roles and responsibilities of managers in monitoring and evaluating pupils' learning. (paragraph 85)*

**The roles and responsibilities of subject co-ordinators have already been identified as an area for improvement. A suitable plan has been established to further develop their role in managing and monitoring their subjects.*

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	52

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7	27	47	17	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	78
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	28

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	3
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	1

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	3.4

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.2

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	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	72
Any other minority ethnic group	6

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y R – Y 13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	17.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	4
Average class size	6

Education support staff: Y R – Y 13

Total number of education support staff	40
Total aggregate hours worked per week	1246

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001 - 2
	£
Total income	1,363,007
Total expenditure	1,419,164
Expenditure per pupil	18,430
Balance brought forward from previous year	56,651
Balance carried forward to next year	494

Attainment at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3 and attainment of pupils in accredited coursework at Year 11.

The 2002 Standard Assessment Test results show that:

- In Year 6, 37% of pupils entered for English tests achieved Level 3. In mathematics 12% Level 4 and in science 62% achieved Level 5.
- In Year 9, 22% of pupils entered for tests in English achieved Level 5. In mathematics 33% Level 4 and in science 33% achieved Level 5 and 22% Level 6.
- Pupils in Year 11 achieved 9 units in NEAB mathematics and 6 in French. In addition 12 pupils achieved 32 AQA units, successfully completing between 1 and 4 units each.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	78
Number of questionnaires returned	28

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	89	7	3	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	82	18	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	68	21	3	3	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	53	35	11	0	3
The teaching is good.	89	7	0	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	78	22	0	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	86	14	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	65	35	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	75	18	0	3	7
The school is well led and managed.	93	7	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	78	22	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	68	25	3	0	3

Inspectors agree with the positive views expressed by parents in the questionnaire and at the parents' meeting. Inspectors feel that the school provides a suitable amount of homework for individual pupils based on a good understanding of their individual needs.

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

PROVISION FOR CHILDREN OF RECEPTION AGE

74. The provision for children of reception age is satisfactory because the curriculum is being appropriately developed from the recommended Foundation Stage curriculum and the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. There is currently only one child of reception age. Children learn alongside pupils in Years 1 and 2. The teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the needs of young children and plans learning to take good account of individual need. Children have appropriate opportunities that prepare them well for the next stage of their education. The early learning goals have been effectively incorporated into teachers' plans and provide the focus for achievement. Individual education plans reflect children's autistic needs well. The teacher monitors children's responses to activities and any significant achievements are recorded; these records are used effectively to plan work. Adults work effectively together to support learning by extending children's participation in activities and taking every opportunity to develop their communication.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS OVER SIXTEEN

75. The opportunities provided for students over 16 have only been established in the present form for nine months. The curriculum is good; it successfully increases students' independent living skills, their self-confidence, access to the community and their social and communication skills. The YAS accreditation provides a good basis for recognising students' learning and they also have access to external accreditation through a life skills course, and entry-level certificates for other subjects. Appropriate courses in literacy, numeracy and computers are provided to help students maintain and improve their basic skills. There are flexible timetables, strong links with a local college, and opportunities to learn how to travel independently. An appropriate adult environment is provided at the centre.
76. The head of the post-16 provision has managed this new initiative very effectively ensuring that the school has good foundations for further development. The accommodation currently being used by students is unsatisfactory but major improvements, which include significant building work, are planned to start in September. Students will move into temporary but suitable accommodation in the school grounds until the work is completed. Resources are satisfactory and the school makes very good use of the local community to extend and enrich the opportunities it provides for students.

ENGLISH

77. Learning opportunities in English are good. There is a very effective emphasis throughout the school on teaching communication skills and pupils' progress in this key area of their development is very good. Progress in reading and writing is good.
78. A significant number of pupils have communication difficulties. Teachers make very good use of PECs in order to meet pupils needs both in lessons and during other activities such as snack time. As a result, pupils rapidly learn to respond to greetings and questions, to make choices and to succeed in early literacy activities such as matching words and pictures in a "Big Book". Very good behaviour management, both by teachers and support assistants, and activities such as dressing up and role-play promote pupils' high levels of interest and involvement.

79. Teaching and learning is good and there are examples of very good teaching for pupils of all ages. An example of excellent teaching was seen for primary age pupils. Primary age pupils are grouped in sets of similar ability for English lessons and their progress is very well planned through the structure of the National Literacy Strategy. Pupils in the lower-attaining sets demonstrate good progress in both reading and writing when they pick out the initial letters of words, use magnetic letters to build simple words and progress to writing simple sentences independently. The work of pupils in the middle set shows steady progress in spelling common irregular words, in linking sentences and in the increasing range of writing they attempt, for example, instructions and simple play scripts, and in the books they read. The highest-attaining pupils respond very well to teacher's high expectations when they look at the use of language in poems. They understand the effect of alliteration and think of synonyms for particular words; one pupil produces "ecstatic" for "happy".
80. In all of the primary sets, pupils' speaking and listening skills develop very well. This is shown in the way they listen to others and wait their turn, in the expanding vocabulary they use and in the confidence they show when speaking to the rest of the class. The weekly "social-communication" session for all pupils in the school does much to promote the appropriate use of language for social purposes. The skilful use of questions by teachers and very effective management of pupils, together with very good relationships, are major factors in the promotion of pupils social use of language. The contribution of the speech and language therapist and her assistant, through teaching, planning and advice to staff also has a significant impact on pupils' achievement.
81. Secondary age pupils continue to develop their speaking and listening skills very well. In a social communication lesson for Year 10 pupils, for example, they are relaxed and confident to talk about a variety of scenarios, devised by the teacher, to help them initiate conversations and ask for directions. It is clear they have developed a good awareness of 'what is' and 'what is not' appropriate language to use in different situations and they display a growing understanding of the needs of others when they talk.
82. The reading of younger secondary age pupils includes an increasing range of literature both classic and modern and in writing about the books they have read, pupils show an understanding of characterisation. In lessons they are encouraged to look more closely at the language used by authors. Year 7 pupils, for example, are challenged by the teacher to find examples of metaphor and simile in a poem and higher-attaining pupils do so quickly. By Year 9, pupils are producing a good range of writing and there are good quality, longer, narrative pieces in their folders, they demonstrate good imagination in their work on the topic "Shipwrecked". In general, however, pupils of all ages would benefit from more opportunities for creative and personal writing, in genres such as poetry or dramatic dialogue.
83. Pupils in Year 10 are read extracts from Ann Franke's Diary but are given few opportunities by the teacher to express empathy with the author's situation. Three pupils in this group read for the inspector; their reading is fluent and accurate but they have little to say about their enjoyment of the book and its characters or indeed about other books they have read. Their written work shows that they make good progress in reading for information and they can clearly extract information, for example, from brochures, instructions and timetables. Pupils in Year 11 show high levels of appreciation and enjoyment of a poem from a GCSE anthology they are reading. They respond thoughtfully to the ideas and language in the text and very good teaching provides clear explanation of the technical terms needed to discuss the language of the poem. The coursework and supervised examination work of these pupils indicates that they have made very good progress in both

reading and writing and that the entry level examinations do not provide adequate recognition of the standards they achieve.

84. Work in English is effectively co-ordinated and the adaptation of the National Literacy Strategy has been particularly well managed. The quality of learning opportunities is reflected in the good standards achieved by pupils. Assessment is satisfactory, a good start has been made developing systems but currently teachers do not record enough information about what pupils have learned. Teachers know pupils very well and they use ongoing assessment such as questioning and observations effectively to promote achievement and progress. More written evidence of pupils' attainment would help to improve standards in reading and writing. The use of information and communications technology is inconsistent and the promotion of reading for pleasure, particularly by the lower-attaining pupils, is not as effective as it could be. Co-ordinators have already identified the need to use the school library facilities better to encourage independent reading, of both fiction and non-fiction. Provision for pupils' communication needs is of a very high standard and the school is now well placed to improve the development of pupils' reading and writing to a similar standard.

MATHEMATICS

85. Pupils achieve well and make good progress because they have a very positive attitude to their work. The quality of teaching is good and the National Numeracy Strategy is well established, especially in lessons for pupils in Years 1 to 6. The subject is well led and managed and co-ordination of the primary mathematics curriculum is very good. Assessment is satisfactory and good improvements are planned. Currently teachers do not make enough written records of pupils' achievement but they use their good knowledge of pupils as the basis for the National Curriculum levels that are reported to parents. Although the levels of achievement are accurate this approach to assessment is not good practice for the measurement of progress.
86. In Years 1 and 2 pupils make very good progress in their number skills. The lowest attaining pupils, for example, in less than six months, make significant gains in their control of a pen to write recognisable single digit numbers. Higher attaining pupils use real coins accurately in a shopping game. These younger pupils also make good gains in their knowledge of two-dimensional shapes like circle, square and triangle. By the end of Year 2 the majority of pupils are achieving levels of understanding, which are just below or in the lowest levels of attainment of the National Curriculum.
87. In Years 3 to 6 pupils continue to make good progress in number skills and in their understanding of shape and measurement. Their progress in using and applying mathematics and in handling data in charts, tables and graphs is satisfactory. Using mathematics to solve problems, and analysing mathematical information, are skills that pupils find more difficult because teachers do not give as much attention to them as the other areas of mathematical learning.
88. Pupils are managed well, time is used effectively in lessons and by the end of Year 6 pupils make enough progress to be entered for SATs. This year the highest level reached by Year 6 pupils was broadly similar to that achieved by pupils in mainstream school. Younger secondary age pupils continue to make good and frequently very good progress. Pupils are taught particularly well in Years 7 to 9 and higher attaining pupils entered for SATs in Year 9 achieved levels close to the national average. A small number of pupils who attend a local secondary school for mathematics achieve above the national average.

89. In Years 10 and 11, the highest attaining pupils achieve up to GCSE grade C standard when they study mathematics at a local secondary school. For the pupils at Abbots Lea a very small number achieve the entry level certificate in mathematics. They can calculate equations, plot and interpret bar and line graphs, and calculate the perimeter of a two-dimensional shape. A larger number of pupils gain unit awards in mathematics, which demonstrates that they can use calculators, have an understanding of money management, statistics, time and calendars. The quality of assessment for externally accredited mathematics courses is very good and letters from the examination board confirms this.
90. The National Numeracy Strategy is firmly embedded in lesson plans and this helps to keep the quality of teaching in mathematics high. Teachers make good use of the three-part lesson recommended in the strategy, and pupils respond very well to the consistent framework it provides for their learning. Teachers ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for pupils to practise their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in mathematics lessons and the structure of lessons with whole class, group, and individual activities supports pupils' personal and social development very well. Teachers use methods that take very good account of the difficulties pupils have in thinking flexibly and applying their skills. Not enough opportunities are planned for pupils to use computers or to use their mathematics skills in other subjects.

SCIENCE

91. Teaching is good and pupils achieve well and make good progress. Standards of attainment by the end of Year 9 are very good. Teachers are respectful and have high expectations, they adapt their teaching to meet the abilities of all pupils and this helps them to make good progress.
92. Pupils are given many opportunities to explore scientific ideas for themselves. The two co-ordinators plan effectively to ensure that pupils learn progressively. Teachers use their knowledge of pupils' abilities effectively to give those capable of higher attainment more challenging work. Pupils' personal development is supported well when they are expected to take more responsibility for their own learning.
93. Teachers ensure that the youngest pupils have good opportunities to explore the qualities of different materials. They make learning interesting and pupils in Year 2 participate well because games such as guessing the names of objects in a "feely bag" gain their attention. As pupils get older teachers effectively extend their understanding when they are asked to group materials that are magnetic and when they describe what different materials are used for. Because pupils are given plenty of opportunities to carry out investigations they do so with a good degree of independence, for example, when pupils investigate which materials will dissolve and how to separate mixtures. There is a good emphasis on developing key concepts and skills and pupils are taught about 'fair tests'. They apply this understanding well during an investigation of streamlined shapes. Pupils in Year 3 know that they must use the same amount of plastecine for each shape that they test.
94. Pupils learn about forces through play with toys that need pushing and pulling. Teachers develop their understanding well when they investigate friction by testing out how fast toy cars run along slopes with different surfaces. In their study of living things pupils are effectively taught about growth when teachers provide opportunities for them to observe the growth of seeds. Because their learning is reinforced by the story of 'Jack and the Beanstalk', pupils understand and are interested. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to develop thinking skills

when they ask them 'what will happen.' Teachers listen seriously to pupils' responses and value their attempts. This encourages pupils to contribute and supports them to investigate for themselves. In their study of electricity pupils in Year 7 confidently find out what effect it has placing a lamp in different positions in a circuit. The teacher explains clearly and sets pupils practical challenges that enable them develop a clear understanding of series and parallel circuits.

95. Teachers effectively develop pupils' understanding when younger secondary age pupils study materials and are introduced to kinetic theory, to chemical reactions and to the uses of chemistry. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of energy sources and in a Year 7 lesson, they confidently discuss the process of oil formation, oil products and their uses. The teacher uses resources well and pupils examine rock samples with interest. This helps them to understand rock formation. Teachers help pupils to make connections in their learning, for example, the study of volcanoes is well linked to learning in history and geography. The teacher takes the opportunity to talk about the plight of people whose homes and livelihoods have been destroyed by an erupting volcano and as a result pupils' learning is extended
96. The oldest secondary age pupils study modules for the Certificate of Achievement course, however, pupils' test results at the end of Year 9 indicate that they have the ability to pursue a GCSE course which would provide them with greater challenge. Teachers appropriately plan alternative activities for pupils who are not able to investigate for themselves. They are helped to learn by observing others and support assistants provide effective encouragement to help them participate to the best of their ability. Teachers and assistants make every effort to develop pupils' awareness and to stimulate their interest.
97. Teachers know pupils well and have a good knowledge of their abilities because they check their achievements throughout and at the end of lessons. However, they do not always write down their judgements and this makes it difficult to identify any gaps in pupils' understanding. Teachers mark pupils' work consistently. This also provides them with good information but the marking system does not include advice for pupils, about how to improve, and teachers are missing opportunities to annotate the levels pupils have achieved. The accommodation for science is excellent and resources for teaching are well chosen.

ART AND DESIGN

98. Despite good teaching pupils' achievement and progress is satisfactory because the curriculum is not planned to take sufficient account of pupils past experiences. This limits the amount of progress they can make and is reflected in their satisfactory achievement. The school has recently introduced a commercial programme of work to support teachers' planning but it is not suitable for all pupils.
99. There are good examples of teachers providing opportunities for pupils to develop their imagination by creating art in response to music, for example, a painting, inspired by the piece 'Toccata in D minor'. In the most effective lessons teachers' plans are based on a good understanding of the subject and activities are well matched to pupils' needs. In these lessons teachers make sure that small group work enables pupils to create art using different methods, such as collage, printing, and three dimensional work, as well as different techniques such as drawing and painting.
100. Teachers provide appropriate opportunities for primary age pupils to learn basic drawing and painting skills and they are appropriately supported to explore shape, pattern and texture as they create collages and simple prints through rubbings. Older pupils are given suitable opportunities to develop further understanding about

colour, tone and line. Teachers ensure that there is sufficient emphasis on studying the work of known artists. For example, when pupils undertake an interior design project, they are provided with examples of work by Richard Hamilton. Teachers also give pupils suitable opportunities to work together and express emotional aspects through their work as they develop a mural of the school.

101. Teachers are using a programme of work that links art and music but it is not always adapted effectively to reflect or meet the needs of all pupils. Lesson observations indicate that the concepts are too difficult for lower attaining pupils. Pupils study the painting the "Twittering Machine" by Paul Klee. As they produce their artwork they listen to and are supposed to be 'influenced by' a piece of music by Maxwell Davies. The concepts behind working in this way, *one art form influencing and informing another*, are complex. When the 'expected' outcomes are suitably matched to pupils' abilities they succeed in making marks on paper that are generally reflective of the sounds of the instruments. With support pupils develop these marks into a collage with layers of pattern and colour that reflect the different layers that can be heard through the instruments in the music. On occasions lessons planned in a similar way result in very different standards because of the teachers' subject knowledge.
102. In lessons teachers retain pupils' interest because activities have a good pace and provide opportunities for them to take part in interesting experiences. Pupils are asked to 'create' a room for 2002. They make good progress as they identify items to put in the room and decide where they should be positioned. Pupils are successful because the teacher provides a good range of resources, including examples of work by other artists as reference material.
103. The co-ordinators responsible for art are keen to develop the subject further. The creation of a curriculum plan has been identified as a priority following the move into new accommodation, which will enable teachers to provide pupils with increased opportunities. Resources for the subject are satisfactory for the work being undertaken. The accommodation is excellent although at present, because of the on-going building work, it is not being used fully.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

104. Teaching is good, however, pupils only make satisfactory progress because the curriculum is not planned to take enough account of past experiences. An example of excellent teaching was seen for primary age pupils. The primary and secondary co-ordinators are effectively improving curriculum plans and these include a much wider range of opportunities, which can now be provided because of the excellent specialist accommodation for both design and food technology.
105. Teachers provide very good opportunities in food technology to reinforce pupils' communication and numeracy skills. The youngest primary age pupils explore and learn about different fruit. They are interested in the activity and concentrate well because the teacher provides a very good range of resources. Pupils' personal development is supported effectively when they are asked to 'choose' green or yellow, large or small melons and to touch and taste the fruit. The teacher ensures that there is a very good emphasis on encouraging pupils to communicate and pupils make very good progress by contributing either verbally or by using PECs. The teacher manages the activity very well to meet all pupils' needs. Excellent relationships and the enthusiasm of the teacher ensure that pupils get the most out of the opportunities they are given. Older primary age pupils make a pasta and vegetable meal. There are good links to the personal and social education programme with an emphasis on healthy eating. When higher attaining pupils are given responsibility for weighing the pasta, they use their understanding of

'weighing' in a practical situation. These well planned opportunities help to reinforce pupils' understanding because they are able to recall and use things they have learned in other subjects.

106. An excellent lesson was seen in design and technology for pupils in Year 4. A very good lesson plan and an excellent recap of past learning, along with very clear explanations enables pupils to use a template to mark and cut a kite out of paper or plastic. The teacher makes very good use of questions to help pupils recall what they have learned in the past and apply it to the task they have been set. Pupils are very well supported by the teacher and other staff to be as independent as possible. There is an excellent emphasis on supporting pupils to 'think things through'. Pupils' special needs are met extremely well through consistently implemented methods to help cue them into 'what next' and to enable them to behave appropriately and respond positively to the learning opportunities they are given. Because of very effective teaching pupils make very good progress. Teachers ensure that the oldest secondary age pupils are given good opportunities to develop practical skills when they make a CD and video storage unit. The teachers' very good introduction reviews the previous week's lesson and this enables pupils to settle quickly because they are clear about the skills they will be using and what they will be doing.

GEOGRAPHY

107. Teaching is satisfactory as is pupils' achievement and progress. However, the amount of progress they make is limited because the curriculum does not provide enough guidance for teachers when they plan work. Assessment such as marking pupils' work and evaluating lessons is satisfactory and provides teachers with enough information to ensure that pupils make progress. but assessment is not linked effectively to the curriculum and it is difficult to measure the amount of progress pupils make from one year to the next.
108. For the youngest pupils there is an appropriate emphasis on developing a sense of place and location. Pupils begin by finding out about the school building and they learn how to locate specific rooms such as the hall or their classroom. The success of these lessons is reflected in the way pupils move independently around the school and undertake tasks such as returning the registers to the office. Older primary age pupils continue to develop their understanding of their environment through simple orienteering exercises around the school. Studying the weather is used effectively to practise skills of observation and recording.
109. Younger secondary age pupils develop an appropriate understanding of world issues by studying the work of farmers and the factors involved in the location of industries. Pupils are currently undertaking a comparison between the United Kingdom and Kenya and they demonstrate good understanding of life in other countries when they compare the climate, industry and lives of the people. Pupils' observation and recording skills are developed through further work involving the weather and these opportunities reinforce their learning in mathematics with the graphs and charts produced enabling them to make comparisons over a period of time. Older secondary age pupils undertake wider studies of the effects on the environment of transport. They are currently studying housing and its effects on urban communities.
110. Tasks are practically based and this supports pupils' learning well. For example, they examine the timetable of a farmer's day or use computers to research house prices and produce 'house for sale' advertisements. Teachers use discussion effectively to enable pupils to express opinions. This supports them to develop and demonstrate an insight into geographical problems. A Year 10 pupil, for example,

shows understanding when he states that an inner city house is less likely to have a garden. However, there are occasions when teachers set tasks that do not sufficiently challenge pupils, especially those capable of higher attainment. In a few lessons there is an over reliance on activities such as cutting and pasting to record what has been learned, which is not appropriate, particularly for secondary age pupils.

111. Management of the subject is satisfactory but the co-ordinator's role in monitoring teaching and learning is underdeveloped. Resources have been improved with the introduction of textbooks but teachers do not use computers enough to support pupils' learning.

HISTORY

112. Teaching is satisfactory as is pupils' achievement and progress. Because opportunities are not always planned with enough attention to what has been experienced in the past, pupils only make satisfactory progress. There is an appropriate emphasis on teaching the youngest primary age pupils the concepts of "old" and "new" as well as giving them a sense of the past by asking them to compare the toys they had as a baby with the toys they use now. Older primary age pupils undertake work on different times in history, such as the study of Henry the Eighth and his wives. Teachers plan interesting activities for pupils, which help them to learn, such as visiting the seaside and comparing pupils' experiences to a similar event in the past.
113. Teachers provide appropriate opportunities for secondary age pupils to undertake the study of the English Civil War and the study of life in medieval England. Teaching is good when resources are used effectively to support pupils' learning and interest them in a subject, for example, the use of aerial photographs to investigate the sites of a medieval village, however, in a significant number of lessons pupils' work indicates that there is an over-reliance on the use of work sheets. During the inspection there was an example of highly effective teaching in an excellent lesson for pupils in Year 4. The teacher makes very good use of computers to produce pictures and slides showing a Victorian seaside; pupils are fascinated and watch attentively. Their interest and attention enables them to draw effective comparisons between the slide images and a present day trip to the seaside. In a lesson for Year 7 secondary age pupils the teachers make very good use of the multi-sensory room to simulate life in a medieval house by building a mock fire and role playing 'sitting by it'. The effectiveness of this approach in developing pupils' understanding is demonstrated by the comment of one pupil, "*we do not have to work as hard because we have machines.*"
114. The management of history is satisfactory. Resources have been improved by the recent acquisition of textbooks and commercially produced work sheets. There is insufficient use of computers in lessons.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

115. Pupils' achievements in information and communication technology (ICT) are satisfactory. Improvements in resources and accommodation have already had a positive impact on standards. Similarly, clear-sighted and effective subject management has laid good foundations for further improvements to curriculum plans and assessment procedures.
116. The youngest primary age pupils are aware of the function of a computer and can name parts such as the keyboard, screen and mouse. By Year 2 pupils are developing confidence in basic operations because teachers provide opportunities

for them to do simple tasks such as opening and closing files. Similarly pupils up to Year 6 make satisfactory progress because they undertake simple word processing tasks such as writing their name and address and saving it to a file. By Year 9 pupils justify text and carry out word processing tasks in English as well as using composing software in music. As a consequence of the newly acquired resources pupils in Year 11 undertake complex tasks such as the construction of web sites and the preparation of a series of power point slides to illustrate a talk on the curriculum or their work experience.

117. Lessons are well planned, for example, in a lesson for pupils in Year 10, on the construction of a web site page, learning is interesting and challenging. This led to positive responses from pupils who are keen and enthusiastic. Pupils' confidence is clearly strengthened by the expertise of the teacher and the support assistant. A positive feature of the lesson is the opportunity for pupils to work on independent projects. In an effective lesson for pupils in Year 4 the teacher provides good opportunities to reinforce and extend pupils' learning when they are asked to change the size of the font and amend graphics. Teaching is effective when the difficulties of the tasks are well matched to the needs of individual pupils and this results in them being able to maintain their concentration and achieve well. The resources and the excellent specialist accommodation enhance the quality of these lessons further.
118. The use of computers across the curriculum requires further development to ensure that pupils have the opportunities to practise their skills and to benefit from the learning opportunities that ICT offers. Only limited use of computers was seen in English and mathematics although there was more sophisticated use of software in music. A few good examples of computer use were seen, for example, the history lesson for primary age pupils on the Victorian seaside made very good use of the interactive "Whiteboard" to display a range of slides. The extent to which computers are used across the curriculum depends very much on the skill and confidence of individual teachers.
119. The co-ordinator for ICT has a very clear vision of how the subject should develop and has worked hard, in the short time the resources have been available, to improve the curriculum. There is now a good overall plan, which will ensure the development of pupils' skills. An effective system of assessment has also been devised and is currently being introduced. There is a need for training to ensure that staff are skilled and confident to plan the use of computers into lessons. This is recognised and appropriate training opportunities have been planned.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES (French)

120. Teaching is good and as a result pupils have a very positive attitude to learning French and enjoy speaking the language. They achieve well and make good progress. Pupils confidently speak greetings at the start of lessons; they learn colours and to recite numbers, days of the week and months of the year. They speak short phrases to say their name and age in French and to say what they would like and dislike for snacks, television programmes and music. Pupils put a lot of effort into using the language and are prepared to 'have a go' even though their delivery is hesitant and their pronunciation is only approximate. Lessons are conducted almost entirely in French, and this is a key strength in the consistently good quality teaching observed. Pupils listen to the teacher attentively, facial expression and gesture are used well to help pupils understand and respond to questions and instructions. Pupils listen and join in with tapes in French and French songs and they learn to conduct surveys in French, for example on people's favourite snack foods. They make good progress learning to read a French television guide, they can find information written in French and then select

programmes. This is a challenging task that gives pupils a good opportunity to practise the days of the week, and letters of the alphabet.

121. Pupils continue to make good progress and achieve well in Years 10 and 11. They match pictures and photographs to captions. Pupils enjoy lessons and their behaviour, relationships and attitudes are very good. They only have one forty five minute lesson a week in which to practise vocabulary learned in previous lessons and learn new. On this short amount of time they do well to recall what they have learned from week to week. By the end of Year 11 pupils achieve unit awards in, for example, 'self, family and friends'; 'free time'; 'on the telephone'; 'at school'; and 'at my home town'. A small number of pupils have French lessons at a local secondary school and reach GCSE standard. Assessment for external accreditation is very good and has been commended by the examination board.
122. The subject is well led and managed. Curriculum and lesson plans are well conceived and written but have not yet been collated to provide an overall plan of how the subject progresses from Years 7 to 11. There is a general policy for French but it requires updating to reflect the particular needs of the autistic pupils at Abbots Lea school. Unfortunately, in the new school accommodation, there is no base for teaching French. The specialist teacher moves from class to class. There is, therefore, very limited scope to use displays of vocabulary, numbers, and colours, for example, to support learning. There is no area for permanent or semi-permanent displays of French artefacts to reflect the culture of France.

MUSIC

123. Teaching is satisfactory as is pupils' achievement and progress. Teachers and support staff work effectively together to provide a wide range of different activities, which include the very effective use of computers. The primary and secondary co-ordinators have only been responsible for the subject for a short time and they are already beginning to improve the curriculum. Subject plans are satisfactory and teachers are using a published scheme to support them when they prepare work, but an overall plan of what pupils in each year group will learn has not yet been established. This means that pupils can only make satisfactory progress even though they sometimes achieve well in lessons.
124. In a very good lesson for pupils in Year 3 a wide range of learning opportunities are clearly identified in the lesson plan, staff understand their roles and know what they expect pupils to gain from the experiences. The lesson is appropriately focused on developing pupils' skills and understanding and adults work effectively together and provide activities for pupils to listen to music and to compose. Pupils' understanding is enhanced, through the skilful use of questioning, when they are asked to identify and talk about parts of their own and each other's compositions that they like and dislike. In this lesson computers are used very well, enabling pupils to compose short pieces of music by selecting and overlaying different musical phrases. There are also good opportunities for them to explore musical instruments, such as glockenspiels, to produce sounds and to copy musical patterns.
125. In a Year 4 lesson the teacher successfully meets the needs of all pupils by providing good opportunities for those with limited communication and problems with behaviour and concentration to participate fully. Activities are planned at a suitable level and are of short duration. They are well focused on reinforcing pupils' communication skills, listening and responding, and their concentration. In satisfactory lessons the needs of all pupils are not met sufficiently well, for example, a guitar lesson does not provide less able pupils with enough opportunities to participate in music making. The curriculum is enriched by Friday afternoon options, which include opportunities for pupils to join the school band.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

126. The school makes good provision for physical education. It emphasises the use of physical activity in addressing the special needs of pupils and targets for physical development feature prominently in pupils' individual education plans. Pupils make good progress towards these targets and also in the areas of social skills, confidence and co-operation, which the subject encourages.
127. During the inspection week, pupils were observed taking part in athletics, games, swimming and climbing. There is a wide range of attainment among pupils but a common feature of the lessons observed was the very good attitudes demonstrated by pupils towards physical activities. Good teaching is a key factor in the very good attitudes that pupils develop. They are keen to improve their performance, listen well to instructions and persevere despite the difficulties, which many of them experience. A significant minority of pupils perform 'at or approaching' national expectations for their age. The organisation and management of pupils is very effective and teachers are very skilled in ensuring that pupils of all abilities take a full part in the lessons. Very good support is provided by classroom assistants to enable all pupils to participate.
128. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 complete a circuit involving a variety of tasks such as throwing and balancing. They enjoy the activity and many show good control and co-ordination. Staff maintain a lively pace but pupils sometimes find it difficult to follow instructions because of the poor acoustics in the gym. On occasions, individual pupils appear to be very distressed by the amount of noise and echo which fills the hall. The gym offers very good facilities otherwise and staff make good use of it and of the good stock of resources which have been built up. These enable teachers to plan a very good range of activities, for example pupils in Year 4 enjoy using lightweight javelins, shots and hammers in their lesson. Staff provide good coaching in technique and very useful feedback to pupils.
129. The teaching of secondary pupils encourages them to think more about ways in which they can improve their performance. Pupils in Year 7 and those in Years 10 and 11, for example, are asked "Did you get better?.....Why did you get better?" in a session on standing jumps. Very good knowledge of the subject is apparent in the teaching of this and other activities for secondary age pupils. There is also a very good rapport between the teacher and pupils, which promotes pupils' success in improving their performance. The lack of athletics facilities on the school's grass area limits the further development of pupils' skills, particularly for those capable of higher attainment. The excellent climbing wall in the gym, however, presents a real challenge to pupils, and students over 16 show excellent progress in technique, independence and, not least, in determination during their session on it.
130. In swimming pupils' progress is satisfactory. However the progress of higher-attaining pupils is restricted because the school uses the local sports centre pool at a time when the general public are also using it. Although an area is cordoned off for the school, other users stray into it. In addition, different ability groups of pupils have to use the same limited amount of space and this means that they sometimes get in each other's way. Higher-attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 did little more than complete timed lengths of the pool and although staff organise and manage the session as well as possible in the circumstances, there is a lack of focus on improving pupils' performance.
131. Assessment is satisfactory because teachers set and monitor individual targets for pupils but procedures do not provide enough detail about achievements related to what teachers have planned for lessons. Teachers have good knowledge of pupils'

achievements and abilities and this enables them to challenge pupils. The curriculum is enriched by Friday afternoon options, including golf and skiing, and by after school clubs. The important role given by the school to physical education is fully justified by the very positive contribution it makes to pupils' all-round development.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

132. Pupils' work indicates that achievement and progress is satisfactory. No lessons were observed during the inspection and a judgement has not been made about the quality of teaching, however, teachers' plans and samples of work indicate that pupils are given suitable learning opportunities. However, the school has not established an overall plan that identifies what pupils in each year group will learn. This means that progress is limited because opportunities do not take enough account of what has already been learned. This is a particular problem for pupils of secondary age who do not have a religious education lesson each week. Teachers provide these pupils with appropriate opportunities to study through topics, during which they learn about different world faiths and other aspects of religious education. Teachers' plans and pupils' work indicate that, over a year, pupils have enough opportunities to learn but the school does not monitor well enough to make sure.
133. The primary and secondary co-ordinators have only been responsible for the subject for a few weeks and they acknowledge the urgent need to address curriculum planning. They are already beginning to outline suitable improvements for the subject. A policy has been written and plans established for teaching the subject to secondary age pupils but these have not yet been shared with staff. The school has just received the local education authority's revised syllabus and co-ordinators have appropriate plans for this to form the basis of curriculum developments. In the primary department teachers are currently using the QCA modules of work to support them when they plan work. Learning opportunities for students over 16 are satisfactory. They are given appropriately planned opportunities to learn and make progress because their work is accredited through the YAS.
134. Pupils have learned about faiths such as Islam and Buddhism and visited a Mosque and they have also had opportunities to celebrate festivals such as the Chinese New Year. There are appropriate elements of religious education within class assemblies and within the personal and social education programme. At the moment religious education cannot contribute effectively to pupils' spiritual development or to developing their awareness of different cultures. Learning resources, through discussion with co-ordinators, appear to be satisfactory but a small number have been mislaid during the move into the new school building.

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL EDUCATION

135. The school promotes pupils' personal and social development very well across all elements of the school day and through the personal and social education curriculum because teaching is good. Pupils achieve well and make good progress in the formal elements of the curriculum. Teachers and support assistants effectively manage pupils' behaviour and teach them how to cope in social situations so that they become more confident and able to take part in learning and social activities. This has a positive impact on pupils' achievement and progress. Staff are excellent role models for pupils because they are patient and consistent.
136. Teachers' expectations of pupils throughout the school day are very effective at supporting their personal development, for example, pupils are expected to

respond to their questions and requests; the youngest primary age pupils are encouraged to listen by being rewarded with generous praise for making eye contact; pupils with limited speech are rewarded for attempting to vocalise requests or for using symbols to ask and answer. In a literacy lesson, pupils are encouraged to pay attention and listen to the story of Red Riding Hood because the teacher effectively uses 'props' as well as colourful pictures. To take a turn at dressing up pupils are expected to 'ask' the teacher.

137. Teachers and support staff make sure they promote pupils' confidence to participate in lessons. Pupils make very good progress and their ability to work and play as part of a group increases as they get older. Pupils are taught how to socialise with visitors to school, including pupils from a local secondary school who have work experience opportunities at Abbots Lea. Older pupils learn to recognise and address problems for themselves. A pupil clearly disturbed during a lesson asks the teacher if he can sit in the quiet room for a while. This enables him to return 5 minutes later and calmly rejoin the lesson. Teachers provide pupils with very good prompts to help them remember how to behave, for example, by reminding a pupil who is making noises during a science lesson that he is disturbing others.
138. Teachers ensure that pupils learn how to cope in social situations and there are very good opportunities for pupils to go on shopping trips, visit parks, museums and restaurants and use public transport. These visits are planned with the pupils and they are taught how to find their way to and from destinations, how to find items in shops, how to give and pay for goods or to ask for what they want such as bus tickets, meals or goods they cannot find on the shelves. Teachers provide suitable opportunities for pupils to practise and become confident and their progress in managing tasks is recorded regularly. Pupils whose development is slower are supported sensitively by staff who allow them to attempt tasks for themselves while being ready to advise and encourage them.
139. In personal and social education lessons pupils learn the practical skills they need in their daily lives. In one class the teacher provides good opportunities for pupils to learn how to use the telephone and how to carry on a conversation. Pupils are also taught life skills such as how to eat sensibly, and they make good progress. This learning is reinforced effectively in subjects such as food technology where pupils are encouraged to say which foods are good for them and why.
140. By the age of 16 most pupils have acquired the necessary personal and social skills to allow them to cope with the daily routines of life and they are able to successfully join mainstream colleges. Pupils who need continued support remain at the school, joining the post-16 unit where they have good opportunities to further develop life skills through a carefully structured course, which gives recognition of their success through the YAS accreditation.
141. The taught elements of the personal, social and health education programme are good but plans are not detailed enough to show how the curriculum enables pupils to build on their achievement from previous years. With the introduction of social-communication lessons and with many health issues addressed in science and food technology there is presently some unnecessary repetition in the formal curriculum. The oldest secondary age pupils who have mastered many of the life skills taught through the formal curriculum need to be given the opportunity for greater challenge by pursuing the accredited life skills programme that has been introduced for students over 16. Citizenship is already part of the learning opportunities offered to older secondary age pupils and, appropriately, is soon to be included for those in Years 7 to 9. The individual targets set for pupils are

monitored well and provide good information about individual achievement and progress.