

INSPECTION REPORT

HIGHFIELDS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Rowley Regis, West Midlands

LEA area: Sandwell

Unique reference number: 103946

Headteacher: Mrs Deana Holdaway

Reporting inspector: Mr Douglas Hayward
21234

Dates of inspection: 16th – 19th September 2002

Inspection number: 246329

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Primary
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Beeches Road Rowley Regis West Midlands
Postcode:	B65 0DA
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Elaine Hipkiss
Date of previous inspection:	December 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mr D Hayward 21234	Registered inspector	Information and communication technology Art and design Special educational needs English as an additional language	How high are standards? How well are pupils taught?
Mrs C Laverock 15527	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Mrs G Robertson 24137	Team inspector	Foundation stage Geography Physical education	Staffing, accommodation and resources
Mrs K Spencer 30028	Team inspector	Mathematics History Music	How well does the school care for its pupils?
Ms A Storey 32172	Team Inspector	Science Design and technology	How well is the school led and managed?
Mr R Evans 20692	Team Inspector	English Religious education	How good are curricular and other opportunities?

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Highfields is a larger than average primary school for pupils aged 3 to 11 years. Most of the pupils are from white ethnic backgrounds, although about a fifth of pupils are from other ethnic backgrounds, including Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi. A higher than average number of pupils speak English as an additional language, although none is at an early stage of learning English. An average proportion of pupils is entitled to free school meals and about the same proportion has been identified as having special educational needs. These include emotional and behavioural as well as speech and language difficulties. At 2 per cent, the proportion of pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need is average for primary schools nationally.

Currently there are 393 full time pupils attending school. There are also 55 children attending the nursery on a part-time basis either for morning or afternoon sessions. Children start in the nursery at the beginning of the year in which they are four years old. Many have attainment below that expected of children at this age, and many children's language skills are not well developed. They make good progress, and by the end of their reception year the attainment of most children is in line with that of other children in Sandwell.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Highfields is a tremendous school with many areas of excellence. Pupils enjoy their lessons and find learning interesting and exciting. Their behaviour and attitudes to work are very good. The standard of teaching is very high and this helps pupils to make very good progress. The school is always looking for ways to improve. It is willing to be adventurous in providing a stimulating education. It is very popular and the headteacher provides outstanding leadership. It provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and management. Pupils say that, *'Mrs Holdaway's door is always open if you need to talk to her'*. She and the deputy headteacher form an extremely effective partnership and are determined to improve the school still further. Staff provide very good support in managing areas of responsibility.
- It provides a very high standard of teaching. Teachers are enthusiastic and hardworking. They work very well as a team and have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils say that *'They teach us with fun! They look after you and help you to get the goals you want. They break down your work into steps so you can understand'*.
- It places great importance on teaching pupils to behave very well and to want to learn from the moment that they start school. Pupils have great respect for all adults and they concentrate very well in lessons.
- It provides a very caring, supportive place in which to learn. It is extremely good in helping pupils to believe that they can do well. Pupils say that *'This school makes you feel warm and safe. It gives you confidence that you can do well.'*
- It provides a wide range of subjects for pupils to learn about. Exciting visits to places of interest and many visitors to school help to bring learning *'alive'* for pupils.
- It helps pupils of all abilities to make very good progress and to achieve results that are high in national tests when they are 7 and 11 years of age. It is extremely good at ensuring that work is at just the right level to make pupils do well. They say that *'Work is not so hard that you can't do it, but it is hard enough to make you think'*.

What could be improved

- Pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work.
- Opportunities for pupils to take additional responsibility around the school.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in 1997, when it was judged to provide sound value for money. It has made very impressive progress since then and has successfully tackled all the key issues in that report; for example, lessons in the nursery and reception classes are very good and much better now than in 1997. The school has also introduced excellent ways of finding out what pupils can do and ensuring that they continue to make progress from year to year. It has also dealt with areas of the report that were not key issues but which it felt could be improved. Strengths identified in that report, such as the standard of pupils' behaviour, teachers' planning and links with parents, are still strengths. Many areas have improved since 1997; for example, the proportion of very good and excellent teaching during this inspection is much higher than in the previous inspection. The value for money that the school provides has greatly improved and the school is in a very strong position to continue to move forward.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 6 based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
English	B	C	A	A
Mathematics	A*	B	A	A
Science	A	C	A	A

Key	
very high	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

There has been a steady improvement in national test results for 7 and 11-year-olds. In the most recent 2002 tests, results dipped slightly in Year 6, but those for pupils in Year 2 remained high. Because the inspection was so early in the autumn term, inspectors looked at the books of pupils in last year's Year 6 and Year 2 classes. Based on this evidence, standards in the foundation subjects in Year 2 were judged to be well above average in art and design and history, above expectations in geography and as expected in design and technology, information and communication technology, and religious education. In Year 6, standards were as expected in religious education. They were above expectations in design and technology, geography and information and communication technology and well above average in art and design and in history. All pupils in the infants and juniors make very good progress and the targets that the school sets for them are challenging. Test results show that the school helps pupils of all abilities to achieve their very best standards.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils say that <i>'This is a special school. It gives us lots of chances to work together and to help people'</i> . They are very positive about the way in which the school encourages them to become confident about learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils' behaviour is very good. They are polite, friendly and courteous to each other and to adults. They say that there is no bullying or racism in school and are sure that staff would sort out any problems. They say that <i>'Mrs Holdaway wouldn't let anyone get picked on'</i> .
Personal development and relationships	A strength of the school. Staff intentionally plan many opportunities for pupils to work together and they do so extremely well. Pupils say that, <i>'You can trust everybody. It's not every school that lets children give their own personal views'</i> .

Attendance	Attendance is not as good as in many other primary schools nationally. A significant number of pupils take long holidays during term time.
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TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 – 2	Years 3 – 6
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very good	Very good

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

During the inspection, 70 lessons were observed. Teaching was at least good in just over three-quarters of lessons. It was at least very good in just under half of all lessons and excellent in 10 per cent. This is teaching of the highest calibre. The proportion of very good and excellent lessons in Highfields is almost three times as high as the national average in primary schools. Teaching was unsatisfactory in only one lesson, when pupils lost interest. Teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve and set them work that is challenging, yet at just the right level for their ability. They plan lessons that are interesting and often unusual. These capture pupils' interest and, as pupils say, *'They teach us with fun!'* Teachers are positive in what they say and do. They use praise very well and make pupils want to do even better.

ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The school teaches a wide range of interesting subjects in exciting and imaginative ways. It makes very good use of visits and visitors to capture pupils' interest. There is a very good range of additional activities outside lessons for junior pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Pupils' work is very well planned and the school keeps careful track of the very good progress they make. Assistants provide good support in classes and small groups.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good. The school makes sure that they have the same very good opportunities to learn as other pupils. They make very good progress and reach good standards in their spoken and written English.
Provision for pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent. Many lessons develop pupils' awareness of <i>'the wonder of learning'</i> extremely well. This is a strength of the school's work. Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong and the school provides lots of opportunities for them to mature. There are missed opportunities to involve pupils in decisions that would make the school even more successful.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils are cared for very well in lessons and at playtimes and lunchtimes. They say that <i>'This is a very special sort of school, out to help every single child'</i> . All adults speak respectfully to pupils. The ways in which the school monitors pupils' progress are excellent.

Parents know how fortunate they are to have their children at this school. They receive lots of good information and feel confident to approach the school whenever necessary.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. Parents, pupils, staff and governors have a very high opinion of her. The deputy headteacher gives excellent support and her teaching and organisational skills provide an outstanding example for others. Subject co-ordinators work very effectively and enjoy the responsibility they are given.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. Governors are very supportive and proud of the school. They are very well informed and ask the right sorts of questions to make sure that the school runs smoothly.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent. The school has worked very hard and successfully since the last inspection. It is always looking for new ideas to help pupils achieve their best standards.
The strategic use of resources	The school uses its budget and building very well to give pupils a very high standard of education. It is very aware of the need to spend its money wisely to get the best value possible.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Twenty-six parents attended a meeting with the registered inspector before the inspection and 151 (36%) returned their questionnaires.

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All parents say that the school expects their children to work hard and do their best. All parents say that teaching is good and that children make good progress Almost all parents say that behaviour is good and that the school helps their children to become mature and responsible. Almost all parents say that the school is well led and managed and that it works closely with parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few parents would like to see a more interesting range of activities outside lessons. A few say that they are not well informed about how their children are getting on. A few disagree with the amount of homework that the school sets.

Inspectors agree with parents' positive views. They feel that there is a wide range of activities for junior pupils to take part in. The team feels that annual reports to parents are very good. Homework supports the work that pupils do in school and most pupils enjoy the additional opportunities to learn that homework provides.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The inspection took place in the second full week of the autumn term when pupils had been in their new classes for only a very short time. It was not possible to predict, therefore, what standards they would achieve in nine months when they were at the end of their time in the infants and juniors. Consequently the inspectors' scrutiny of standards of work in pupils' books in Years 2 and 6 was carried out on the work completed in the previous academic year. In addition, inspectors looked carefully at the work pupils completed last year in Year 1 and Year 5. These pupils are now in the current Year 2 and Year 6 classes. Work was scrutinised to gauge the progress they made last year and to judge the range of their ability in those classes.
2. The school has an unusual approach to pupils' learning. It emphasises the need for pupils to start learning from a viewpoint that is familiar to them, and one that they can experience at first hand. Hence at the beginning of term there are numerous visits to places of interest and visitors into school, to stimulate interest and excitement. In the week before the inspection several classes had been on visits linked to their topic work, for example a trip down a coal mine for pupils in Year 5, to a wood for those in the reception classes and to a local environmental study area for pupils in Year 6. During the inspection week there was a visit to a Victorian role play museum for pupils in Year 2 and a visit to school by actors portraying the Tudor times. All these visits were the initial stimuli for a term's history focus, which links closely to their own geographical area, for example a study of ancient settlers focuses on a nearby ancient settlement.
3. The school also has firm ideas about the conditions that are essential for pupils to learn most effectively. These include planned times for each class during the day when pupils will take part in a short mental activity linked to a physical activity. The idea is that this will refresh pupils and enable them to concentrate more effectively. Music is played at specific times in classes to help create an atmosphere that is conducive to learning or to indicate a break in activities. Water is available for pupils in all classes, supporting current thinking that dehydration is a bar to effective learning. Above all, the school is committed to raising pupils' self esteem so that they see themselves as successful learners. During the inspection many pupils were seen wearing badges such as '*Science Star*', reflecting the ways in which praise is recognised by the school as an effective means of improving learning.

Children in the Foundation Stage¹

4. Children attending the nursery do so on a part time basis and start after their third birthday. During the inspection, children had been at school for only a very short time. Although the majority had settled very quickly into the nursery routines, a significant number found it difficult to do so, despite the excellent care and support that adults provided. It is, however, in the children's ability to express themselves that major weaknesses are apparent. Most of them start in the nursery with attainment that is well below that expected for their age, particularly in conversational skills and the range and depth of their vocabulary. Many children do not know the names of the basic colours, for example '*red*' and '*blue*'. They do not know the names of some of the '*zoo*' animals that they play with in the sand tray, for example '*bear*' and '*lion*'.

¹ The Foundation Stage - this was introduced in September 2000 and forms a separate stage of education for children from the age of three until they reach the end of the reception year.

5. Their willingness to speak to each other and to engage in discussion is also very limited. A significant number of them have difficulty in forming sounds and words. The school has already identified them as requiring speech therapy at some point. Many are very passive in their approach to adults and other pupils, and are far happier listening than speaking. This is so in many activities, for example role play, painting and using sand and water. They make very few comments to other children regarding their feelings about their work or offering advice or helpful comments. Adults have to work extremely hard to initiate discussion and to try to extend their vocabulary and confidence to speak.
6. Although most pupils' attainment in communication, language and literacy will still be lower than expected by the end of their time in the nursery, many have made considerable progress. It is even more commendable that, by the end of their reception year, the majority will attain the Early Learning Goals.²

The infant classes (Years 1 and 2)

7. The results of the 2001 tests and assessments for 7-year-olds show that the percentage of pupils attaining Level 2³ and above was average in reading, above average in mathematics and well above average in writing. The percentage attaining Level 3 was above average in writing and mathematics and well above average in reading. The school's results in comparison with those of all schools nationally were above average in reading and mathematics, and well above average in writing. Compared with those in similar schools, results at Highfields were well above average in reading and writing and above average in mathematics.
8. Apart from a very slight downturn in writing and mathematics in 2001, there has been a steady trend of improvement in pupils' results since 1997. This improvement has continued in the most recent 2002 tests and assessments. No national figures are currently available against which to compare Highfields pupils' results. The work in pupils' books completed in Year 2 in the last academic year matched test and assessment results in writing, mathematics and science. A cross section of readers from the current pupils in Year 3 (last year's Year 2 pupils) support the test results indicating that a high percentage of pupils have above average reading skills.
9. Standards in the foundation subjects were as expected for 7-year-olds in design and technology, information and communication technology, physical education and religious education. Standards were much higher than expected in history and art and design and above expectations in geography. It was not possible to judge attainment in music. Considering the attainment of children when they start in the nursery many pupils make at least good progress in the foundation subjects.

The junior classes (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6)

10. The results of the 2001 national tests for 11-year-olds show that the percentage attaining Level 4 or above was above average in English, well above average in mathematics and very high in science. The percentage attaining Level 5 was well above average in all three subjects. In comparison with those in all schools nationally and in similar schools, results at Highfields were well above average in all subjects.
11. There has been a steady trend of improvement in results for 11-year-olds since 1997 that is similar to the national trend. In the most recent 2002 tests for 11-year-olds results were

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

³ Levels – by the end of Year 2 pupils are expected to attain Level 2 in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Those who attain Level 3 are, therefore, attaining above nationally expected levels. By the end of Year 6 pupils are expected to attain Level 4 in English, mathematics and science. Those who attain Level 5 are, therefore, attaining above nationally expected levels.

slightly down in all three subjects. However, in English three pupils failed to attain Level 4 by only one mark. Because the school has very good tracking and monitoring procedures in place (**see paragraphs 61 – 63**) it was able to take some consolation from the fact that many pupils did, in fact make good progress. For example, the five pupils who attained Level 1 in 1997 all attained Level 4 in reading. All but three pupils who attained Level 2c in mathematics in that year also attained Level 4 in mathematics in 2002. Even though the percentage of pupils attaining Level 5 was lower than in 2001, higher attaining pupils still made good progress. All the pupils attaining Level 3 in mathematics in 1997 achieved Level 5 or 6 in mathematics in 2002 and all but two pupils achieved Level 5 in English. No national results are available against which to judge attainment. Nevertheless, despite the *'dip'* this year in results, the percentage of pupils attaining Level 4 in all subjects was higher than last year's national averages and in mathematics and science it was significantly so.

12. Pupils build on the good start they make, first in the Foundation Stage and then in Years 1 and 2. In the foundation subjects last year, pupils in Year 6 attained standards that were well above expectations in art and design and in history, above expectations in design and technology, geography, information and communication technology and physical education and reflected expectations in music and religious education.

Across the school

13. All parents said in their questionnaires and at the pre-inspection meeting that they were pleased with the progress that their children were making. The inspection team shares this view of progress throughout the school. There are no *'weak'* areas, where pupils make better progress in some years than in others. A scrutiny of work reveals that there is remarkable parity between the progress that pupils make in different classes within the same year group. Although girls do better than boys in Year 2 in national tests, that is because boys have much lower attainment than girls when they start school and it takes them longer to catch up. An impressive indication of the way in which the school addresses this gender issue is the fact that in the last three years there has been no statistical difference between the performance of boys and girls in Year 6 tests.
14. One of the school's strengths is the way in which it makes pupils believe in their ability to do well. It does not accept low attainment on entry as any reason why pupils cannot do well. High national test results for 7 and 11-year-olds over a period of time show this to be the case. The school believes that pupils should achieve the best standards that they are capable of. To do this it consistently challenges pupils by setting work that is exactly the right level for them to have to think hard, but at the same time succeed. As pupils quite rightly say, *'Work is not so hard that you can't do it, but it is hard enough to make you think'*. It is only when comparing children's **low attainment** when they start in the nursery with their **high attainment** when they are 7 and 11 that it is fully possible to judge their impressive **achievement**. The school helps all pupils, including those with special educational needs, to make at least good progress and in some cases very good progress.
15. To ensure that pupils work to their full capacity and make progress each year the school has introduced a system of target setting that fully involves them, so that they know what they have to do to improve. This process starts at a very early age; for example, in Year 1 this term one pupil has written, *'I would like to be good at spelling difficult words'*, while another has written, *'I'd like to learn how to write neatly'*. The targets are reviewed regularly and are shared with pupils' parents as well as with the pupils themselves and are often referred to during the course of lessons. They indicate whether pupils have achieved them or whether they need to work harder in order to achieve them. Older pupils are fully aware of National Curriculum levels, some of which are personal targets.

They are very good at determining whether their work has reached a specific level and if not, what they have to do to improve (**see paragraph 61**).

17. The school's systems for tracking pupils' progress enable it to set challenging targets for them to attain in future, as well as providing a goal for improvement in national test results. The information it collects also allows it to calculate the difference the school makes to the progress that pupils make. This is often referred to as '**value added**'. For example, the school added significant value to the progress of the five pupils who attained Level 4 in the 2002 reading tests for Year 6 pupils, having attained only Level 1 four years earlier (**see paragraph 10**). The school also ensures that able and talented pupils make the progress of which they are capable. Last year's results at Level 4 and Level 5 were at least above and often well above average. Results in Year 6 included pupils attaining the outstanding Level 6 in mathematics and science.
18. The school's strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy have had a significant impact on attainment in the infants and juniors that can be seen in the steady trend of improvement over the last five years. The way in which literacy is used in other subjects is often excellent, for example in writing in history and geography. However, the school's success in extending the pupils' **literary** skills across the curriculum has sometimes been achieved at the expense of their **literacy** skills, for example those of spelling and punctuation. Work is not consistently well presented and simple errors spoil the overall impact of some writing.
19. The school's strategies for teaching the foundation subjects are also very successful. In the inspection, standards were at least those expected at the end of the infant and junior stages, and in many cases were above expectations. At a time when many schools bemoan the lack of time to teach a broad curriculum because of the pressures of literacy and numeracy, Highfields provides an outstanding example of what can be achieved. The standards achieved in the foundation subjects reflect the school's exciting and innovative approach that captures pupils' interest, based on much first hand experience. Its approach also promotes very well pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (**see paragraphs 51 – 55**). The strong emphasis placed on collaborative working, the way in which subjects '*come alive*' with direct experience, opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their creativity and the effectiveness of stimuli, such as music, provide them with a new range of experiences.
20. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress throughout the school. This is because:
 - teachers plan work very carefully for them in lessons;
 - the school's overall strategy for supporting them in small groups is very well thought out and resourced;
 - provision for pupils with special educational needs is well managed.The school has been quick to adopt the revised Code of Practice for special educational needs. Parents at the pre-inspection meeting with children identified as having special educational needs said that they and their children were fully consulted throughout. Individual education plans are detailed and have easily measurable targets for improvement in literacy, numeracy and behaviour. During the inspection, in only one lesson out of 70 observed was work not appropriately set for lower attaining pupils. The school's system of '*setting*' pupils by ability for numeracy and elements of literacy in the juniors is very effective. It helps teachers to deal well with a smaller range of ability than would be found in the whole class group.
21. Group work for pupils with special educational needs in classes and in small withdrawal groups is well organised. Careful timetabling ensures that all pupils receive their full curriculum entitlement. They receive additional time to use individual computer programs designed to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Classroom support staff play a

significant part in supporting pupils. During lesson introductions they constantly interact with pupils to find out whether they understand the information they are receiving. Currently, however, they do not keep any on-going written record of whether pupils are meeting their targets in their individual education plans; for example, assessing the length of time that they can concentrate or their willingness to answer questions. This is a missed opportunity to add to the information that the school keeps to monitor pupils' progress and to review and update their individual education plans.

22. The school makes very good provision for pupils with English as an additional language and for pupils from minority ethnic groups and they make very good progress. Highfields includes and monitors all pupils, regardless of ethnicity or ability, in all activities. The support that pupils with English as an additional language receive is well organised, managed and monitored. Comprehensive and regularly completed reports show the amount of progress made. There is good use of individualised computer programs to help develop different aspects of literacy.
23. The ways in which the school organises their withdrawal from classes and their reintegration into lessons is extremely good. Pupils often attain high standards in a range of subjects. For example, a group of pupils were withdrawn for additional support during a literacy lesson. During the course of their group work they were prepared extremely well for the class free verse writing activity that they would rejoin. This centred on the topic of *'Fish'*. As a direct result of high quality support, these pupils, whose first languages are Punjabi and Arabic, were able to write,
*'The skin was cold as ice as he swam quickly through the glistening water.
Meandering through the sparkling river, clipping the plants like rain striking the grass
The plants were like a dark, evil forest that he could not escape.
Cautiously he swam towards the sharp, pointed hook holding the slimy maggot.'*

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

24. Pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour, and excellent personal development, are the result of the thoughtful and innovative approaches that the school uses to promote their learning. When children first arrive at the school, many have to learn how to behave in such a way that they are receptive to learning. They need to be taught how to sit still, to listen, to concentrate and to think. They achieve this well and it helps them to make progress during their time in the school. Pupils' behaviour gets better and better as they get older as a result of the school's work and expectations, and this was confirmed during lesson observations.
25. Because learning is so exciting and stimulating, pupils love coming to school. The rich experiences in a wide range of lessons and subjects provide a real sense of *'awe and wonder'*. Pupils gasp in amazement as visitors arrive in their classroom dressed in historical costume or as they are introduced to a new fact or experience. In history lessons, for example, this helps to develop pupils' ability to express their thoughts in sensitive ways and gain a deeper understanding about how life in the past compares with their own.
26. The caring, supportive atmosphere in which they are nurtured enables them to make mistakes without fear of being *'wrong'* and develops their individual talents and strengths. Pupils say that, *'Coming to school makes you feel warm. You trust everyone, and you are safe'*. Parents confirm this positive picture and their very good attitudes are an improvement since the last inspection.
27. By the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 6, they have developed into confident, secure and well-behaved 11-year-olds. They have a love of learning and respond positively to the challenges given to them. They eagerly join in lessons and

activities and want to do well. They know exactly what National Curriculum level they are working at and what they need to learn next to improve further. They never use that knowledge to demean others' efforts. Every pupil's uniqueness is valued and their potential reached. Older pupils say that *'The school gives you confidence. People help and push you towards the right answer'*. There is a 'can do' culture successfully promoted in the school and consequently pupils are willing to try new things

28. Relationships in school are excellent. Pupils treat each other and the staff with respect. They know that their teachers and the headteacher like them and this helps them to value one another's differences. Pupils work very well with each other, in pairs and in small groups. They help each other with their work and solve problems set by their teachers through discussions, debate and experimentation. One of the strengths of the school is the way in which it fosters collaborative working. Pupils say that *'School gives us lots of chances to work together and to help people'*. Pupils develop the ability to respect each other's opinions and come to a consensus. They learn to value and appreciate their own work and that of others. At present opportunities for them to take additional responsibility are limited. They would like to do more and say that, *'It would take some of the weight off Mrs Holdaway's shoulders'*. The school is already planning good opportunities to extend the range of responsibilities they undertake; for example, establishing a student council and involving pupils in interview panels.
29. Pupils behave extremely well in lessons and in the playground. Pupils describe school as a place where they feel safe and that there is no bullying. They express confidence that, *'Mrs Holdaway wouldn't let anyone get picked on'*. Pupils learn and display a strong sense of right and wrong through a consistently applied behaviour policy that they and their parents have been involved in developing. The only times when they are noisy are when they leave assemblies and in the dining room at lunchtimes. There have been two fixed term exclusions in the past twelve months, which have been effective in addressing isolated, but serious, incidents between pupils.
30. Pupils arrive at school punctually and quickly settle to work in their classrooms. Attendance is below the national average and unsatisfactory when compared with the situation in other schools, although it has been slowly improving over the last few years. The majority of pupils attend regularly, although there are some who miss several days of school because of long holidays taken in term time or who are not always encouraged to attend school because of difficulties at home and this slows their progress.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

31. The quality of teaching promotes good and very good standards. Teaching was satisfactory or better in all but one of the 70 lessons observed. In that case the lesson was slow, there was little challenge and pupils lost interest. Teaching is at least good in three quarters of lessons. It is at least very good and sometimes excellent in almost half of all lessons. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is very good overall. The proportion of very good and excellent lessons is almost three times higher than the national average in primary schools. This is teaching of the highest calibre and has a significant impact on the progress and achievement of all pupils.
32. Teaching in the nursery and reception classes is considerably better than in the last inspection. It is very good overall and has a tremendous impact on the positive ways in which children work and their good progress throughout the Foundation Stage. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language is very good and helps them to work effectively within their classes and in small withdrawal groups.

33. Ninety-nine per cent of parents in their pre-inspection questionnaires agreed that teaching is good. It is far better now than it was during the school's previous inspection in 1997, although strengths identified in that inspection remain, for example teachers' planning and subject knowledge. However in that inspection only 7 per cent of teaching was judged to be very good or better, compared with the current figure of 47 per cent. The improvements are due to:
- a shared approach to teaching, based on a thorough understanding and agreement of how pupils learn most effectively;
 - regular monitoring of teaching and planning by the headteacher, deputy headteacher and subject co-ordinators to evaluate strengths and weaknesses;
 - changes in teaching staff and regular in-house training;
34. In addition, there are several other characteristics of good and very good teaching that are clearly apparent, for example brisk lesson pace, class management and the use of resources. Teachers display great enthusiasm for their work and their pupils. Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent. There is obvious mutual respect. It is difficult to realise that it is only the second full week of term, with the quality of relationships and the depth of knowledge that teachers have about their pupils. Teachers display a keen sense of humour and are extremely positive in their approach. No harsh or negative comments were heard during the inspection. Teachers are very clever at getting pupils to do what they want without any confrontation. For example, a pupil was inattentive and annoying others during a literacy lesson. Instead of telling off the pupil, the teacher very calmly said to the pupil, *'I don't think you can see very well from over there. Come and sit near me where there's a better view'*.
35. All teaching is very much in line with the school's philosophy for learning. It is extremely positive, has an underlying belief that all pupils can succeed and reflects teachers' high expectations. Lessons are extremely well planned and at just the right level. Work for groups within the class challenges pupils, but teachers' explanations are so good that they invariably understand. This is why one pupil explained that teachers, *'Break down work into steps so you can understand'*. Teachers constantly raise pupils' confidence and self-esteem by using a variety of approaches. They make pupils believe in themselves with positive comments about the work they **will** do rather than what they **want** them to do; for example, in a literacy lesson the teacher said, *'We are going to use fantastic vocabulary today. Words like gossamer and undulating'*. Another said, *'Come on! Blow me away with your wonderful ideas!'*
36. Linked to this positive approach is the teachers' very good use of praise to reward pupils' efforts, individually, as a group and as a class. Comments such as, *'Ooh, I like that idea! I'm going to use it!'*, make pupils want to contribute ideas. Throughout the inspection oral praise was a regular part of all teaching, with comments such as such as, *'Good girl!'*, *'Well done'* and, *'You've worked really hard!'* In a very good lesson, the teacher stopped other pupils to tell them how one pupil had tried three times to work out an answer to a number problem in his head. This, she told the rest of the class was an example of *'Resilience'* which was one of the class *'3Rs'* attributed to *'Super Learners'*. Throughout the school pupils wear their *'Super Learner'* badges very proudly and are keen to earn *'merit points'* from teachers for good effort and behaviour. Teachers' marking often includes perceptive and supportive comments, indicating when necessary what the pupil could do to improve. Marking relates directly to the learning target, but this means that errors in handwriting, spelling or grammar that are not current targets are often overlooked (**see paragraph 107**).
37. Teachers emphasise the importance of all pupils being included in every aspect of the lesson. This is clear from the way in which they encourage pupils to *'have a go'* at answering questions. Teachers repeatedly stress their expectation that everyone will offer an answer to their questions. They emphasise that there are no *'right'* or *'wrong'*

answers. All pupils know that their efforts will be valued and appreciated and this gives them confidence to speak in front of the rest of the class. This willingness to try is extremely important, because teachers plan many opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively (**see paragraph 110**). This is a strength of lesson planning. Pupils are willing to offer ideas in group discussion and others are happy to listen to them. Teachers are very good at supporting this work and intervening at just the right time to offer explanations or to question pupils further about their ideas.

38. The way in which teachers use questions to find out what pupils know is another strength of their work. These *'on-going assessments'* are an important part of making sure that the work is at just the right level and checking whether pupils understand enough to move on or whether revision is required. Questioning starts at the beginning of lessons in the recap of previous work, when teachers find out what pupils have remembered. The questioning is brisk and lively and establishes a purposeful start. The introduction of the lesson target immediately focuses pupils on what they have to learn. At the start of a very good mathematics lesson the teacher made clear her expectations by saying, *'At the end of the lesson I want you to be able to tell me something about each of these shapes'*. The teachers encourage pupils to carry out their own assessments of their work so that they will also know how they are getting on. For example, in the middle of a lesson one teacher asked, *'Table 1, what level are you working towards? What success criteria will you use to judge if you have achieved it?'* Lesson plenary sessions are also used very well to reflect on what has been learned. For example, in a very good history lesson pupils were using artefacts as stimuli to find out information. At the end of the lesson the teacher working closely with pupils with special educational needs asked, *'What did you know when you pulled that mirror out of the sand? What more did you know after you had carried out your research?'*
39. Teachers' planning and their use of resources are often excellent. They invariably use artefacts or modern technology that are guaranteed to stimulate and inspire pupils and help to make lessons exciting and unusual. For example, the use of modern technology to present ideas in visual form that is dramatic and effective. The use of interactive whiteboards captures pupils' imagination and makes them so much more receptive to new facts and information. The detail to which teachers go in planning their lessons inevitably captures pupils' interest. For example, a visit to a coal mine was followed up by opportunities to *'work'* and imagine life in a school corridor that had been completely blacked out. Resources in lessons are of good quality, appropriate for the task and always at hand so that no time is wasted.
40. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language in classes and in small withdrawal groups is of the same high standard that all pupils enjoy, and helps them to make good progress. Work is planned at just the right level for them to consolidate and move forward and they are well supported by trained adults (**see paragraph 69**). They are included in every aspect of lesson planning and their withdrawal from lessons is planned to support their progress, rather than exclude them from class activities. The use of individualised computer programs complements their class work very well and helps them to develop skills in identifying and using letter sounds and improving their comprehension. Class teachers and the co-ordinator for special educational needs carefully plan individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs. Targets are limited in number and progress towards achieving them can be easily measured.
41. The school's arrangements for setting homework are generally supported by the great majority of parents who returned their questionnaires. The work that pupils do supports the work that they do in class and many are keen to do homework, especially if it involves additional research. Many pupils use computers at home to download information about

class topics. Most parents at the pre-inspection meeting felt that homework was *'just about right'* in terms of volume and frequency.

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

42. The breadth, balance and relevance of the curriculum are very good and a strength of the school. The school meets statutory requirements in teaching the subjects of the National Curriculum and the Foundation Stage as well as religious education in accordance with the Sandwell Locally Agreed Syllabus. The previous report criticised aspects of the curriculum, such as challenge for more able pupils and the systematic development of knowledge, skills and understanding in some subjects. Since then the school has made very significant and imaginative improvements to its provision. The planning of the curriculum is meticulous and comprehensive. All subjects have detailed schemes of work which strongly underpin the teaching. Literacy and numeracy are very well taught and pervade the curriculum.
43. The curriculum is based on the principle that pupils' learning is best stimulated through experience. The school provides many of these experiences through an extensive range of visits and visitors to the school. These experiences are used very well to link together different aspects of the curriculum. Study of fish in science stimulated art work as well as literacy through pupils listening to and writing poetry based on a poem *'The Fish'*. This approach to teaching and learning is relatively new in the school but already its success is evident in the pupils' very good responses, active interest and eagerness to learn. The governors' report provides a lengthy list of last year's visits and visitors.
44. The school has carefully considered research information on how pupils learn and has introduced strategies to promote their learning. These include short daily physical and sensory activities, an accelerated learning programme and a strong emphasis on visual and auditory aids to learning. For example, in an excellent lesson combining scientific terminology and the learning of its spelling, the teacher used word cards and stood in different parts of the room as she introduced and discussed them. The visual activity helped the pupils to recall the terms and their correct spelling. One pupil with special educational needs correctly spelt *'camouflage'* from memory. Recorded music is widely used to relax pupils, heighten the learning atmosphere and stimulate thinking.
45. The school places great emphasis on the individual worth of each pupil. Opportunities for participation in all learning and extra-curricular activities are therefore strongly promoted by the school. It is very much an inclusive community where individuality and diversity are celebrated. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language are withdrawn from parts of some lessons for extra literacy support or music lessons. Teachers ensure that they rejoin the work of the class appropriately. Their curriculum, although slightly different in some aspects, is no less valuable or stimulating.
46. Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is very good. All classes have an allocation of *'circle time'* when issues of relationships and behaviour, as well as the wider community, are discussed. Pupils also discuss in depth with teachers their targets for learning, looking at the week's work in *'The Big Picture'*. The good sex education policy has been approved by the governors and is taught through the science curriculum in Year 6. The school nurse offers separate question and answer sessions for the girls. Parents are fully informed about the course and are aware of their right to withdraw their children from these lessons. This year there are no withdrawals.
47. Education in the use and abuse of drugs is also taught through the *'Healthy Living'* component of the science curriculum. The local education authority has issued

guidelines and the drugs liaison officer has attended staff meetings to discuss the issues. The headteacher, in conjunction with a trained member of the governing body, has drawn up a draft policy for the school.

48. The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Sports include netball, football and badminton. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 have the opportunity to take part in musical activities such as choir, band and ocarinas. Other activities available are gardening, drama, textiles, dance and French. Free tuition on orchestral instruments is available from the local education authority's music service, and keyboard lessons are provided by a local music studio.
49. The school is involved with other schools in a number of very useful partnership projects. These include numeracy and technology with the local high school, involvement in the raising of standards in the Education Action Zone and being the target school in Sandwell's scheme for accelerating the learning of able and talented pupils.
50. The school's provision for personal development is excellent. This is an improvement since the last inspection. The school is extremely effective in raising children's self esteem so they achieve at the highest level possible. It firmly believes that every pupil can achieve well. Its results in national tests confirm this view, especially since so many children start school with low attainment.
51. The strong spiritual influence, which underpins every part of school life, contributes to the very high quality of teaching and learning. Lessons are exciting and imaginative with a rich diet of visits and visitors bringing learning to life. Lessons often take place with music playing in the background, helping to calm pupils and establishing a creative atmosphere in which they flourish, for example as a background to a literacy lesson in Year 6 when pupils were writing imaginative poems about nature and in Year 5 when pupils drew detailed and thoughtful landscapes of the Black Country linked to their topic on coal.
52. In assemblies, music enhances times of meditation, when pupils are encouraged to reflect on feelings and emotions. They take this very seriously. The theme of light, which was the focus during the week of the inspection, most effectively demonstrated to pupils the connection between the potential within them and the achievements possible if they believed in themselves. Hundreds of candles were lit in one assembly, one for each pupil in the school. This was a very memorable representation of each person's value.
53. Pupils have very good opportunities across the curriculum to explore and develop moral values. For example, in a literacy lesson on different poetic styles, the issue of whether it is right to kill fish through angling was explored. Staff present very positive role models in the way they speak to pupils. They treat them with respect at all times, patiently encouraging and promoting co-operative working.
54. The school very successfully fosters a sense of community through its shared values and through its relationships between staff and pupils. This is extremely effective in developing maturity, confidence and responsibility. Parents confirm that the school is doing this well. Achievements are celebrated, ranging from medals for goal scoring presented by West Bromwich Albion Football Club, to efforts made in written and artwork. The only area that lacks development is the provision of opportunities for pupils of all ages to exercise more leadership and responsibility around the school, for example at lunchtimes and through decision making about school improvement.
55. Pupils are encouraged to explore their own and other's cultures through visits, dance, music and literature. The development of their appreciation of their own culture through history and geography is particularly strong and vibrant. Pupils in Year 6 make a residential visit to the Netherlands and this is the basis of a term's work, which includes

studying Delft pottery, comparing landscapes in Holland and England and writing about local traditions. The school provides very good opportunities for developing pupils' appreciation of other cultures as well as their own. Major religious festivals are celebrated and valued and subjects like art, music and religious education help to foster understanding.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

56. Staff make every effort to get to know each pupil and to understand their particular circumstances. As a result of this, pupils' needs are accurately identified and very well provided for. The school has effectively addressed the key issue identified in the last inspection to '*devise and implement an agreed system for monitoring and recording personal development*'. Areas such as concentration, independence and respect for others are now monitored alongside pupils' academic progress.
57. Each pupil is valued and supported in a caring atmosphere. Pupils say that, '*This is a special school, out to help every single child*'. Pupils know that their teacher and other staff like them, and this helps to make them feel secure as they try new things. They say that '*Mrs Holdaway's door is always open if you need to talk to her*', and that '*Teachers listen to us*'. The thoroughness of the school's approach to ensuring the welfare of its pupils is well illustrated, for example in its approach to computer safety. It has issued a comprehensive policy dealing with potential drawbacks of Internet use and asks parents to sign and return a copy.
58. Lunchtimes are well supervised, although the youngest children in reception find the dining room noisy in their first days at school. There is a good range of play equipment available in both playgrounds which helps occupy pupils. First aid is administered appropriately and sensitively, although there is no medical room where pupils feeling unwell can be cared for. Pupils with particular medical needs are supported well and the site is accessible for wheelchair users. The building is well cared for by staff and governors who carry out regular risk assessments to ensure that the school is safe. The headteacher is the designated teacher for child protection and all staff are aware of the procedures they should follow if they have any concerns about particular pupils.
59. Pupils receive a friendly welcome when they arrive each morning. Music is played in classrooms and pupils quickly settle to work. Their attendance is efficiently recorded and no time is wasted. The school has good systems in place to address below average attendance levels. These are informed by accurate monitoring and each situation is specially targeted. Agreements have been reached with individual families, which are reducing the number of days being missed, and leading to improvement over time, although there are some parents who allow their children to have several days off school and others who take their children for extended holidays during term time. This slows the progress they make. The school soon plans to appoint a learning mentor so that more can be done to improve attendance with specific families. Good attendance is rewarded and celebrated, and this is also contributing to the increase in attendance levels.
60. The school is very effective in achieving good behaviour. A policy has been developed in consultation with parents which is implemented consistently and positively throughout the school. Good behaviour is frequently rewarded and acknowledged, and the strategies which the school deploys to deal with lapses of concentration in lessons, or thoughtlessness in the playground, are extremely effective.
61. The school has excellent procedures for finding out what pupils can do. This means that teachers know their pupils extremely well and are able to plan work that is suited to their individual needs. Planning documents identify which National Curriculum level pupils are working at. Pupils themselves are well aware of what level they are working at and what

they need to do to improve. By the time they reach Year 6 pupils are expert at awarding a National Curriculum level to their own and each other's written work through a list of criteria. They are also able to state what they need to do to get to the next level. Half-termly or end of unit assessments are carried out in all subjects and information is recorded about pupils' attainment.

62. Teachers collate comprehensive information about what pupils have achieved so pupils are in a position to know exactly what pupils' strengths and weakness are. This avoids unnecessary repetition of work when pupils move from one teacher to another. The co-ordinator for mathematics has analysed National Curriculum tests and provided teachers with information regarding strengths and weakness throughout the school in this subject. Teachers use this information, in turn, to plan for the year.
63. The school is beginning to computerise its assessment procedures to make it even more efficient and effective to monitor and track pupils' progress over time. Science assessments throughout the school are a particularly good example of this. Records for English and mathematics are monitored on a regular basis by the senior managers in the school who identify pupils who might be requiring additional support or who exceed their expectations and require further challenge. Teachers have a very good and thorough understanding of National Curriculum levels and meet together on a regular basis to discuss individual pieces of work and agree a level. Targets at the beginning of lessons are made clear and used successfully as a measure of success at the end of the lesson. Pupils also have individual or group targets that they work towards achieving. For example, pupils in Year 4 have particular ongoing targets for their science work such as, '*I am learning to make a prediction*', '*I am learning to design a table*', and, '*I am learning to communicate ideas*'. Following an investigation pupils were encouraged to look back at their targets to see how much progress they were making towards them.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

64. Parents' views of the school are extremely positive and have improved since the last inspection. Parents say that they are fortunate to have their children at Highfields School. They speak very highly of the nursery and of how their children have increased in confidence since starting. All those who responded to the inspection questionnaire feel their children are making good progress, that teaching is good, and that their children are expected to work hard and achieve their best. Almost all parents feel that the school is well led and managed and that it is helping their children to become mature and responsible. The inspection confirms all these positive views.
65. Parents find staff approachable and accessible. All teachers make sure that they are available to parents by being in the playground at the beginning and end of each day. Office staff are also very friendly and supportive to parents when they visit the school.
66. The information provided for parents is very good and is an improvement since the last inspection when reports needed to be more detailed. Parents are now very well informed about how their children are doing through thorough summaries of each subject or learning area. Reports are written in a very positive and encouraging style and inform parents about how they can help their children with learning at home. Homework and reading diaries, explanations of targets, open mornings and workshops help parents understand how subjects are taught. Parents of children in the nursery particularly like the photograph of their children on the front of reports. Parents of pupils with special educational needs say that they are well informed and play a full part in the reviews of their children's individual education plans.
67. The prospectus is very clearly written and explains the work of the school well. However, it does not report attendance rates and comparisons with the national average so in that

minor regard it does not meet statutory requirements. The governing body's annual report contains all it should and is informative, as are monthly newsletters from the headteacher. A few parents mentioned that dates of events sometimes changed at short notice and the school acknowledges that this occasionally occurs.

68. A small number of parents would like a more interesting range of activities outside lessons. Inspectors feel that there is a good range of clubs that are run voluntarily. Because of their popularity these are currently over-subscribed and the school has had to restrict attendance to one club per child.
69. Parents demonstrate their support of the school through the Friends Association. They also attend class assemblies, school productions and multi-cultural festivals. They are very effective in this role and contribute to the very good progress which pupils make in their learning.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

70. The leadership and management of the school are excellent. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and educational direction for the work of the school. This is a much more positive judgement than that made during the last inspection. The head is very highly regarded by all who work with her as a headteacher with foresight and perception. All the key issues identified then have been successfully addressed. The school has a sense of purpose and an excellent commitment to continuous improvement that is shared by all who work there. Pupils speak very highly of the school and in their pre-inspection questionnaires 99 per cent of parents quite rightly acknowledge that it is well led and managed.
71. The deputy headteacher has been appointed since the last inspection and provides excellent support for the headteacher. Her teaching and organisational skills provide an outstanding example to others. The headteacher and deputy headteacher work very effectively as a team. They share a vision of how pupils learn most effectively and are willing to take calculated and informed measures to implement this. One element of success can be seen in the school's improving results in national tests. Perhaps more important is the attitude of pupils to their learning. Their self-confidence and self-esteem are very high. They say that the school is responsible for making them successful learners who enjoy a vibrant and relevant range of learning experiences.
72. The staff and governors share the headteacher's vision of the school as a learning community and one which **'makes visitors long for childhood'**. They believe that every pupil can be a successful learner and that they should be respected and at the heart of everything the school does. This is evident in the curriculum the very high quality of teaching and the excellent provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
73. There is a strong commitment to team building and providing opportunities for staff to develop professionally. This is a strength of the school's work. For instance, the role of phase co-ordinators has been developed since the last inspection. Their key purpose is to work with the headteacher and deputy to improve the school, introducing new ways of improving learning. They are very effective, leading by example, reviewing and evaluating what they do and meeting regularly as a team to ensure that there is consistency and progression across the school. They produce handbooks that give detailed information about each phase. These have been very helpful for newly qualified staff joining the school. Other staff provide very good support in managing areas of responsibility as either subject or cross-curricular co-ordinators. They monitor the high quality curriculum, ensure that pupils' progress is assessed and track the standards

achieved. This is very good improvement since the last inspection when these roles were not clearly defined.

74. There is an excellent programme for monitoring teaching and learning, which is carried out through a careful study of curriculum planning, work sampling, discussions with pupils and direct observations of lessons. The headteacher, deputy headteacher, phase co-ordinators and subject managers are all involved in this important management role. The governing body gives very good support to the headteacher and staff. Meetings are organised with agendas and minutes and governors carry out their duties very well. They have established an effective committee structure to oversee the work and life of the school. Appropriately, they have ensured that discussions about the curriculum take place at full meetings, as they believe that all governors should be aware of the school's individual approach to learning. Governors are very well informed by the headteacher, know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are involved in drawing up the school improvement plan. They monitor the progress of the plan although they are at an early stage of evaluating its impact or cost-effectiveness. They carry out their role as '*critical friends*' to the school very well.
75. The school makes very good use of all available resources to achieve the improvements in the standards of work and the quality of education it provides. A financial adviser plans the initial budget according to the educational priorities identified in the school improvement plan. He provides regular, up-to-date financial information which the staffing and finance committee reviews carefully. There was a significant underspend at the end of the last financial year which the school plans to use to improve the building and grounds. Financial grants are received from the standards funds for schools and are used creatively to achieve maximum benefits. The governing body is well aware of, and applies, '*best value*' principles.
76. Overall, the level of staffing in the school is good. Teachers' experience and qualifications match the demands of the National Curriculum and the primary age range. They are suitably qualified and benefit from regular training in the subjects they lead. This keeps them informed of the latest developments. There are very good procedures to help teachers who are newly qualified or new to Highfields. The school's arrangements for managing the performance of its teaching staff are firmly established and are very good.
77. A strength of the school is the provision of an experienced and effective group of learning practitioners and learning assistants. They are very well trained and well deployed, and work closely with the teachers. They provide high quality assistance, particularly when supporting literacy and numeracy and those pupils for whom English is not their first language. Their role in supporting pupils with special educational needs is well focused, although they do not make or keep any written record of how and when they monitor specific aspects of pupils' individual education plans. With the large number of support staff now working in school, this is a missed opportunity to ensure that their expertise is fully used, for example in regular reviews of the pupils' progress. There is a strong team spirit amongst the staff with everyone playing a full part in the successful running of the school.
78. The school accommodation is satisfactory overall. It dates from Victorian times, but has been extended and improved over the years, providing additional classroom space. The nursery and reception classes now have a secure, fenced playground within which an exciting adventure area has been created. There are, however, still weaknesses in the accommodation:
- the infant building comprises two open-plan areas, one leading off the other. Both areas are relatively small for the number of pupils taught. Even with very well behaved pupils, it is difficult to minimise noise;

- there is no medical room;
- there is no grassed area on the school site for athletics and games. The school playing field is a 15 minute walk away and a main road must be crossed. Most games skills are taught in the playground to avoid wasting time getting to and from the field.

79. The internal accommodation is in very good decorative order and clean. All areas are enhanced by displays of pupils' work. Some parts of the outside of the building are in a poor condition, but this does not reflect the ethos promoted by the school. The site and buildings are well secured and litter free. The overall quality, range and accessibility of resources are good. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is well provided for in the classrooms and centrally through the library. The range and quality of resources for the Foundation Stage are very good and support exciting teaching and learning.

80. Taking into consideration:

- the children's low attainment when they start school and the very good progress they make;
- the pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour;
- the very good quality of teaching the school provides;
- the attainment of pupils at the ages of 5, 7 and 11 years;
- the consistently improving trends in results in national tests;
- the exciting and imaginative curriculum;
- the very good links with parents;
- the excellent quality of leadership

the school provides very good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

81. **In the context of its many strengths and the very high quality of education it already provides, the school should now:**

improve the quality of pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work by:

- ensuring that the agreed school handwriting policy is consistently applied;
- ensuring that the skills pupils learn in handwriting lessons are consistently transferred to all forms of writing;
- ensuring that teachers' marking focuses regularly on the quality of handwriting and elements of presentation, for example spelling basic words correctly;

(paragraphs 18 & 107 of the main report)

provide additional opportunities for pupils to take more responsibility around the school by:

- considering how they can develop their communication and decision making skills further, for example by continuing to develop the very good work that has recently started by setting up a student council.

(paragraph 28 of the main report)

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

- to continue to implement and monitor the already successful strategies for improving the rate of pupils' attendance.

(paragraph 59 of the main report)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	76
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	32

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Number	7	26	21	15	1	0	0
Percentage	10	37	30	21	2	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	27	421
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	0	75

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	7
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	0	69

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	55

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	6.5
National comparative data	5.6

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	0.5

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 (Year 2)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	17	23	40

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	13	15	16
	Girls	22	23	23
	Total	35	38	39
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	88 (85)	95 (92)	98 (92)
	National	84 (83)	86 (84)	91 (90)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	13	15	16
	Girls	22	23	23
	Total	35	38	39
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	88 (88)	95 (93)	98 (92)
	National	85 (84)	89 (88)	91 (90)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	35	24	59

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	28	32	35
	Girls	22	21	24
	Total	50	53	59
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	85 (83)	90 (80)	100 (88)
	National	75 (75)	71 (72)	87 (85)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	30	33	35
	Girls	22	23	24
	Total	52	56	59
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	88 (85)	95 (85)	100 (97)
	National	72 (70)	74 (72)	82 (79)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
272	1	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
17	0	0
19	0	0
6	0	0
0	0	0
5	0	0
0	0	0
9	1	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0

The table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only. It gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	17
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	25
Average class size	30

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	23
Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	
Number of pupils per FTE adult	6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001 / 2002
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	£
Total income	978,729
Total expenditure	959,450
Expenditure per pupil	2,117
Balance brought forward from previous year	54,792
Balance carried forward to next year	74,071

The school's carry forward is 7.5% of its annual budget. Some of this is earmarked for improvements to the school building.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	4
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	6
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate 35%

Number of questionnaires sent out	421
Number of questionnaires returned	147

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	73	24	3	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	83	17	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	70	29	1	0	1
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	46	42	7	1	4
The teaching is good.	80	19	0	0	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	63	30	7	1	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	73	22	1	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	84	16	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	52	41	5	1	1
The school is well led and managed.	73	27	1	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	76	22	0	1	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	40	39	12	1	7

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

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

82. The Foundation Stage, with its high quality provision, is a strength of the school. No overall judgement was made in the previous inspection, and at that time there was no nursery class. However, there have been significant improvements in the ways in which teachers in the Foundation Stage plan children's work to ensure that it meets national requirements, including opportunities for children to learn through play and to choose activities.
83. One nursery class and two reception classes make up the Foundation Stage. Children are admitted to the nursery in the September following their third birthday on a part-time basis only. They leave the nursery following their fourth birthday. After a staggered intake, children attend the reception classes for the full day. At the time of inspection there were 55 nursery and 60 reception children. Nearly all the children receive nursery education. A qualified teacher, a nursery nurse and a learning practitioner in the nursery staff the Foundation Stage. Two teachers, one nursery nurse and a learning practitioner work in the reception classes. Children and parents are very well prepared before they enter Highfields. Parents are fully involved in the transition from home to school. Arrangements include a meeting for parents, a visit to the nursery for children and parents, and a home visit by staff. All this helps children to settle quickly.
84. Attainment on entry is below that expected of children at this age in the nursery. Frequently their attainment in language is well below expectations. Children make good progress in their learning in the nursery, although when they start in the reception class the attainment of many is still below that expected for children of this age. Staff use assessment well to help them identify children who require additional support. By the end of the reception year most children are on course to achieve the Early Learning Goals in all areas of learning. Some will achieve beyond that level. A significant number will not reach the goals, particularly in communication, language and literacy, and also in mathematics.
85. The curriculum offered is very good and meets national requirements. It is broad, balanced, stimulating, interesting and exciting. It comprehensively covers all areas of learning, including parts of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in the reception year. The emphasis is consistently on very good quality experiences in children's learning.
86. Staff work very well together on curriculum planning to ensure that children do not repeat the same activities in the reception year that they did in the nursery. Parents are fully informed of their children's work and progress through informal discussions and formal interviews. The accommodation and resources are good. Outdoor provision is very good. At the time of the last inspection there was no fenced area for children in the Foundation Stage. There is now a large, securely enclosed area that is imaginatively marked out for games. The new adventure area is a tremendous asset to the overall provision.

Personal, social and emotional development

87. Children's personal, social and emotional skills are well below those expected when they enter school. They make good progress, and the majority are on course to attain the Early Learning Goals. Children enjoy coming to school and happily leave their parents and carers. They settle into nursery and school routines well because the teachers are

very well organised and have lots of very good support from caring nursery nurses and learning assistants. Skills of co-operation are developing well. Most children in the nursery are still learning to share with each other and to take turns. The teachers create tasks that encourage children to develop responsibility for their classroom and to learn to care for things. They show excellent levels of responsibility when they clear up the toys and tidy up the book corner area by placing books in the appropriate place. Children show responsibility in selecting their chosen activity and their concentration on these tasks is very good. Rules are clearly established. Children know that they must listen to their teacher and each other and practise 'good sitting', 'good listening', 'good looking' and 'good answering'.

88. The teachers create a secure environment where expected behaviour is clearly identified. This is necessary to ensure that the children learn the 'Highfields Golden Rules' from an early age. A strength is the adults' use of questions and the routine planning of opportunities for children to talk to others. These contribute well to growing levels of confidence and the development of their language. Children learn to respect and care for each other. Their ideas and work are valued and teachers give positive feedback. Celebrations, for instance Diwali and Christmas, develop the children's awareness of cultural and religious differences. Reception children are expected to join in whole school assemblies everyday. This is, however, inappropriate at this time in the school year. Children lose interest and have little understanding of the issues being discussed. Children in the reception classes join the infant pupils at lunch time. Most have good manners and politely ask the lunchtime staff for help. All children join in and thoroughly enjoy the school's brisk physical and mental exercises which help them concentrate.

Communication, language and literacy

89. Children enter the reception classes with attainment below that expected at this age. For a significant number, attainment is well below expectations, particularly in conversational skills, the range and depth of their vocabulary and hand control for writing. The planned range of activities in the nursery and reception classes promotes the children's language and literacy skills well. All children make good progress, and by the time they are five many are on course to reach the expected levels, but few will exceed them. All children listen well, focus on their teachers and other adults and follow instructions. Children in the nursery use only a limited range of vocabulary. They are taught individually and in small groups to encourage and develop language. They listen attentively and enjoy story time. Staff carefully intervene in children's imaginative play to ensure that language is developed and children's vocabulary is increased. Children in the reception classes listen well in small groups and as a whole class. At every opportunity staff engage children in conversation often on an individual basis, for example during snack time or when at play with the sand or water. There are good opportunities for children to talk about their experiences and interests throughout the day. Few children in the nursery recognise their own names but, to encourage recognition, staff record all names on children's work, for example on the paper while children are painting.
90. Children learn letter sounds in the nursery and in the reception classes through very lively, thorough teaching. In both classes children learn book handling skills systematically and enjoy joining in well known parts of traditional stories, for example, 'Run, run as fast as you can. You can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man'. Parents are involved in helping their children to read. Children take books home and parents are expected to share the story and record comments in the home school diary.

Mathematical development

91. Children's knowledge of mathematics on entry to the reception classes is below that expected for their age, and especially their very limited mathematical vocabulary. They are given a wide variety of resources and experiences and no opportunity is lost to reinforce number work in a variety of ways. Children consolidate their learning well, because the practical activities give them good opportunities to do so, for example comparing sizes in the nursery through the story of *'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'*. Children in the reception classes make good progress in counting skills, number recognition and mathematical language. Most are able to count well beyond 10 and many to 100. They know the names of common shapes, for example *'triangle'*, *'square'*, *'circle'* and *'rectangle'*, and know some of their properties. In a good lesson one child said, *'It is a triangle. It's got a long side and short sides'*. They learn to recognise some three-dimensional shapes, for example *'sphere'*, *'cylinder'*, and *'cuboid'*. In the nursery they begin to use non-standard measures in capacity and volume and learn to compare containers. In reception classes they use terms like, *'full'* and *'empty'* and transfer water from one container to the next. When supported by an adult they play simple number games appropriately. Most children are on course to achieve the Early Learning Goals.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

92. Children's attainment in this area of learning on entry to nursery is below that expected at this age and their general knowledge is poor. Teachers provide very good opportunities for the development of children's knowledge and understanding of the world. For example, they use early morning, playtime and ends of sessions to talk about families, homes, and past and present activities in their lives. Children in the reception classes show some understanding of the wider features of their community, for example local shops. They go on walks to the nearby Uffmoor Wood to look for signs of autumn. Staff make very good use of the school, the local environment, visits and visitors to enhance the children's knowledge and understanding. This is very much part of the school's philosophy that children should learn from direct experience. They grow beans in tubs in the small nursery area, water them, and watch them develop. Children in the reception classes learn to recognise the changes in the environment over time and are aware of the patterns of nature when looking at objects found on their autumn and spring walks. Children are appropriately encouraged to learn through rich practical experiences and by direct use of their senses. They have good experience of using technology. In the nursery they use the computer confidently and demonstrate how to use a mouse to *'dress Teddy'*. Children make good progress and many are on course to attain the expected standards by the end of the reception year.

Creative development

93. Children's attainment on entry to the nursery is similar to that expected nationally, except in hand control, which is below average. The teachers provide a range of interesting resources that are well directed to extending the children's creative development. All children have good opportunities to develop their use of colour through painting, collage and modelling, for example the delightful nursery paintings of daffodils. Children mix their own colours most successfully to match those being observed. The reception classes look carefully at colour mixing and develop blending producing paintings of African land snails that are exceptional. They explore a wide range of materials, for example sand, paint, crayons and glue when they colour and stick. Children use their imaginations and colour their pictures boldly. The excellent whole school practice of *'mark making'* begins in the nursery. Children learn to make marks with large chinks on the playground, in sand and with finger exercises at a table. They rapidly move onto mark making with coloured pencils, recording straight and wiggly lines. There are many opportunities for the children to take part in role play and they do so imaginatively, after reflecting on the stories they

have heard or recalling their own experiences. The role play clothes and resources are bright, clean and well thought out by all staff. Children explore sound, listening to the teacher singing or taped music and join in appropriately. They love singing and join in the actions. They learn how to hold and play musical instruments. In a good, wide range of creative activities children show evident enjoyment and develop skills in their responses to what they see, hear, touch and feel. Nearly all children are on target to attain the expected levels by the time they finish the reception year.

Physical development

94. Most children are well developed physically and most on entry to the reception year have reached the expected levels. They have immediate access to the outdoor play area, which is well fenced off and imaginatively set out to encourage exploration and physical challenge. The children in the reception classes additionally take part in the school physical education programme. Both nursery and reception classes use the spacious hall for physical challenge. Children's ability to control their limbs and movements is well developed and teachers provide good opportunities for them to explore the body's potential, for example climbing, jumping and running. By the time they are five, most children can hop, jump and climb. They enjoy moving to music, especially music with a strong rhythm. Children achieve reasonable control of small equipment, carefully using scissors, pencils, crayons and paintbrushes effectively. Hand-eye co-ordination is developing through matching and positioning shapes, decorating and sticking, but children's hand control for writing and intricate creative activities is less well developed.

Teaching

95. The teaching of the children in the Foundation Stage is very good overall. All staff work very well as an effective, efficient teaching team. They have very good knowledge of how young children can be motivated and how to extend their learning. The Foundation Stage team is enthusiastic, fun promoting and vibrant. They help the children to make good progress. The relationships between staff and children are excellent. Staff provide very good role models. They have appropriate expectations of work and behaviour for all children, including those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language. Activities are exceptionally well planned and are well matched to the needs of all children. The teachers' plans have clear learning targets and build well on what children can do and already know. All staff have a clear understanding of how children learn and what will interest them. Staff expectations are excellent. The teaching positively promotes the Early Learning Goals and provides a very good foundation for the National Curriculum. The teacher with specific responsibility for co-ordinating the Foundation Stage has had a clear impact on the very good quality and range of learning opportunities, but has had only limited opportunities so far to monitor the good teaching practice throughout the Foundation Stage.

ENGLISH

96. Pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 classes achieve very high standards in all aspects of English. This judgement is based on the lessons observed during the inspection, scrutiny of last year's pupils' books and discussion with pupils and teachers. The previous report found that standards were in line with the national averages, and that pupils made satisfactory progress. Since then standards have risen very significantly over the years with the school's national test results being above or well above the averages achieved by all primary schools. The number of pupils achieving the higher levels has also been well above average. Evidence from lessons observed indicates that these standards are being maintained. Pupils' progress is now very good in the infants and juniors.
97. The reasons for this dramatic improvement in standards are as follow:

- the excellent leadership of the curriculum co-ordinator;
 - the very high quality of teaching;
 - the stimulating and imaginative curriculum;
 - the ethos of the school which positively promotes and motivates pupils' learning;
 - the detailed and continuous assessment of pupils' attainment and progress, which enables teachers to plan work appropriate to individuals and groups of pupils.
98. The previous report stated that pupils' listening skills were good, but that their speaking was more limited. The school has carefully addressed this issue by ensuring that lessons include opportunities for literacy development. Teachers encourage pupils to describe their ideas and experiences. For example, following a visit to a Victorian house pupils in Year 2 described in great detail *'jobs'* they had undertaken such as *'scullery maid'* and *'boot boy'*. Pupils in Year 1 correctly use scientific vocabulary when making fabric houses, describing shapes and materials accurately. Other pupils studying houses describe the features of different types. They speak confidently and in sentences. The strong emphasis in lessons on group and paired discussion as well as the use of *'thinking time'* allows pupils to develop their communication skills and powers of expression well.
99. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 speak readily and articulately to each other, to the class and to visitors. In the junior classes these skills develop well. The school's strong focus on learning through direct experience provides rich opportunities for the development of pupils' speech and vocabulary. For example, pupils in Year 5 visited a coal mine as part of their history studies. This was consolidated in two very productive lessons. In one a professional historical actor visited the class as a Victorian coal miner. The pupils' task was to question him about his life and the conditions of his job. Their lively and relevant questioning continued without hesitation throughout most of the lesson. Most pupils participated in framing well-structured questions. In a subsequent lesson the pupils acted out a mine explosion in a blacked-out corridor. They worked well in groups, discussing how to re-enact the tragedy. The outcome was the very good expression of emotion in dialogue and drama.
100. Systematic teaching of reading skills in the infant classes ensures that pupils' reading develops well from an early age. The school has a good system of colour coded books to help younger pupils' reading development. Teachers' very good assessment records give clear indications of pupils' reading levels and results from tests and teachers' observations. The school allocates time for individual and group reading for which a good prompt list has been devised. The school hopes to introduce paired reading involving younger and older pupils in the near future. Pupils' reading diaries show regular reading at home. Many diaries have useful comments by parents and pupils themselves as well as teachers. As a result, pupils' achievement in reading is good and often very good at all levels. Of those pupils heard reading during the inspection there was often no substantial difference in the quality of reading and understanding between those deemed to be above average and average. Pupils read with fluency and expression showing good understanding of punctuation and dialogue. They have good skills in tackling unfamiliar words. All pupils showed enthusiasm for reading and gave good accounts of what they had read. Older pupils named favourite books and authors and gave good reasons for their choice. They described encyclopaedias in both book and computer form as sources of information. Pupils in Year 6 accurately read an unfamiliar non-fiction text and confidently recalled facts they had learned from it.
101. Judged overall, pupils make very good progress in their writing throughout the school. A scrutiny of last year's books showed a very wide range of work both in English and in the topics across the curriculum. Although pupils enter the school with a low level of literacy and communication skills, their well-above average results at the end of Year 2 indicate very good progress. Higher attaining pupils show very good vocabulary development, and write good extended sentences. They write well-sequenced descriptive paragraphs

of several sentences. These include writing about a visit to a butterfly farm, a profile of a favourite author and poetry. Pupils of lower prior attainment also write extended pieces, for example about a seaside holiday. They show a good understanding of spelling and punctuation.

102. It is clear from a scrutiny of last year's books, that there are many very good features in the development of pupils' writing in Years 3 and 4. These include confident writing in a variety of styles - narrative, letters, description and non-fiction. Pupils construct good extended sentences and know how to paragraph their writing. In a good lesson in Year 3 pupils learned to extract key words from a text to use in making notes. The lesson formed a good link with their work in history as they used a piece of historical writing to make notes on the dress, appearance and customs of the Celts. The lesson developed well as the pupils considered how to turn their notes into a brochure for an archaeological site.

103. Pupils make good progress over Years 3 and 4 in the range of their writing and the expression of their ideas but their achievement is slowed to some extent because teachers' marking concentrates almost entirely on targets for different styles of writing. They do not place equal emphasis in their marking on aspects of literacy such as spelling, punctuation and presentation. This deficiency is also apparent in the books of Years 5 and 6, but to a lesser extent. In the junior classes, pupils make very good progress in the breadth and quality of their individual writing, not only in English, but across the curriculum. Their thematic work includes a very good range of original writing. Imaginative stimuli and a constantly expanding vocabulary enable them to explore and revel in the possibilities of language for dramatic and emotional expression. For example, a pupil in Year 5 wrote, *'I tentatively sauntered through the soggy sinister swamp'*. A pupil in Year 6 wrote a four-verse poem powerfully describing a hurricane. The first verse:

*'The hurricane gathers momentum at sea
Smashing wildly into harbours.
Coughing out waterspouts, he rips boats
Into matchwood. He obliterates any towns
In his path of destruction'.*

104. In an excellent poetry lesson pupils studying Elizabeth Bishop's poem *'The Fish'*, considered her use of metaphor, simile and personification. They then produced some striking phrases as a preparation for writing their own free verse. These included *'sleek as a dart'*, *'sniggered past the other fish'*; and *'the fish swam elegantly as he sang a peaceful song'*.

105. The quality of teaching is very high. Of the thirteen lessons observed, three were satisfactory, two were good, four very good and four were excellent. In the best lessons, the teachers' planning was meticulous with clear targets shared with the pupils and activities designed to meet their individual needs and abilities. The teachers managed and paced their lessons so that not a moment was wasted. Relationships between teachers and pupils were excellent. Pupils were motivated to try their hardest, and anxious to succeed. In particular, the content of the lessons was exciting and stimulating so that pupils' interest and involvement were total.

106. Teachers skilfully use different devices to stimulate and encourage pupils' learning. Thinking and reflection time, physical activity, and appropriate posture all contribute to the receptivity of the pupils. Music also gives a strong support to learning. The teacher read the poem *'The Fish'* against a background of quiet, evocative music which greatly heightened its impact on the pupils. In a Year 2 lesson effective use of music again relaxed pupils and helped them to develop their thoughts in response to questions from the teacher. She used the pupils' visit to the Victorian house to stimulate their recall of

their experiences. They bubbled with excitement as they talked about what they had done on the visit. The teacher used the *'fishbone'* diagram very well to help pupils quickly write down their ideas and reactions.

107. Teachers achieve very good continuity in pupils' learning through their planning which builds on the work of previous lessons and looks forward to the next phase of learning. Target setting is used well to enable pupils to understand exactly what they are to learn and how successful they have been. Very often discussion on targets is linked to National Curriculum levels. Pupils have a good understanding of these levels and know what they have to do to raise their own standards. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language make very good progress and are well supported. Teachers' marking is detailed, encouraging, and geared to each pupil's targets. It does not, however, sufficiently correct mistakes in basic spelling and punctuation, which are often slipshod. Teachers set homework, usually involving reading or spelling in accordance with the school's policy.
108. The co-ordinator has provided an excellent scheme of work based on the National Literacy Strategy. This is detailed and comprehensive and provides excellent support for the teachers. She has monitored teaching and planning extensively, and analysed assessment and test data. This enables pupils' progress to be closely tracked and development needs to emerge.

MATHEMATICS

109. Standards of attainment in mathematics are well above average. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language, make very good progress. Standards of attainment observed in lessons for pupils currently in Year 2 are already higher than those attained by pupils in the most recent tests for 7-year-olds. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection when standards were considered to be in line with the national average. The reasons for these improvements are:
- consistently very good quality teaching;
 - very good and comprehensive planning documents that clearly identify the skills and concepts that pupils need to learn;
 - excellent assessment procedures that track and record pupils' progress over time and prevent unnecessary repetition of work;
 - high quality leadership of the subject.
110. Pupils start school with low levels of competence in many mathematical areas. By the time they are in Year 1 they have made good progress, particularly in shape, where they have developed a sound understanding of the properties of two and three-dimensional shapes. Throughout the school there is a strong emphasis on different strategies for carrying out number work that develops pupils' abilities to calculate mental problems with increasing accuracy and speed. Teachers are very aware of the need to develop pupils' mathematical vocabulary. In nearly all lessons important key words are learned and there are many opportunities for pupils to discuss their work. For example, in a very good lesson in Year 4 pupils were asked to work in pairs. Their objective was to discover what number their partner was thinking of by asking searching questions. *'Is it odd in the seven times table?' 'Is it a multiple of 2?' 'Is it between 50 and 100?'* A strong feature of teaching pupils mathematical vocabulary is the use of *'mind maps'*. Areas of study usually begin with a *'picture'* of relevant words associated with that topic arranged in such a way that helps pupils to remember them. They provide a good focus at the beginning and end of lessons which, in turn, gives pupils and teachers immediate feedback about what they have achieved and what else they need to learn.

111. Pupils enjoy their numeracy lessons very much and concentrate well. The main reason for this is that teachers make their lessons interesting and encourage pupils to want to learn. An excellent lesson in Year 3 was entirely based on an imaginary Internet web site called, *'Winnie the Witch.com'* where the teacher took on the role of the witch herself. Throughout the lesson pupils were totally absorbed and found mathematics amusing and enjoyable but at the same time stimulating and meaningful. Their attainment and progress in this lesson were good.
112. The previous inspection found there to be a lack of opportunities for pupils to take responsibility within lessons. This is no longer the case. Teachers have high expectations of pupils being able to do this competently and sensibly giving them plenty of opportunities to work independently and in small groups. For one week every term teachers plan an investigative challenge for pupils to carry out throughout the week and report back to the class. For example, pupils in Year 2 were asked, *'Is the tallest person the heaviest?' and 'Does the heaviest person have the longest arms?'*. Pupils in Year 1 make predictions about their challenge and evaluate it after the test. One pupil wrote, *'I gess that there was mure (more) circles and I was rite'*. Older pupils make and test hypotheses and draw graphs and tables to present their findings to the rest of the class. In fact, the emphasis on investigating and applying mathematical skills is evident in many lessons. Teachers often expect pupils to select different strategies for tackling problems, choose their own way of recording their work or find different ways of carrying out a task.
113. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language are very well supported in numeracy lessons by classroom practitioners and assistants. An individual computer-based learning programme also supports their learning well on a regular basis. Teachers work very hard to make sure they plan work that is suitable for all pupils. Each year group is split into two ability groups for numeracy lessons. Activities are specifically targeted for different groups of pupils that support the learning of lower attaining pupils and challenge average and higher attaining pupils very well.
114. One of the strong features of Highfields School is the way in which meaningful links are made between different subjects. Mathematics is no exception. Graphs and charts are used to record work in science, accurate measurements are encouraged in design and technology and literacy skills are developed through appropriate use of vocabulary. Information and communication technology is used occasionally to support mathematics work such as graphs and charts in Year 6 and spreadsheets in Year 5. However, this is an area that the school has identified for further development as it is currently quite limited. Nevertheless, whenever it is used it adds further meaning to pupils learning. For example, in a very good lesson in Year 6, pupils were using a laptop computer linked to a projector to help them count in decimals during the mental starter to a lesson. Pupils accessed the programme themselves and had to beat the computer in a race to count accurately.
115. The standard of teaching is very high. Teachers know their pupils very well because of the excellent assessment procedures that are in place. Pupils are also aware of exactly what level they are working at because of the way in which teachers take time to discuss their work with them and let them know what they have to do to improve. Clear targets are set at the beginning of every lesson and are reviewed effectively at the end of the lesson as a measure of how much progress has been made. Regular assessments are carried out and the detailed information that is kept about each pupil means that when they move to a new class, the teacher knows exactly what level to plan for. The co-ordinator has carried out a detailed analysis of National Curriculum and other non-statutory tests which have identified areas of weakness which teachers duly take account of in their planning.

116. The co-ordinator for mathematics provides outstanding leadership and direction for managing the mathematics curriculum. He has developed an excellent scheme of work for teachers that cross-reference the National Numeracy Strategy with the National Curriculum. This means that teachers are in no doubt as to what levels their pupils are working at. He has established his role in monitoring the curriculum and offers necessary support when required. He has successfully involved many parents in understanding the mathematics their children carry out at school through workshops and open days. His action plan for the school improvement plan is clear and detailed showing that he is constantly evaluating the practice within the school and thinking of ways to develop even further.

SCIENCE

117. There has been a steady improvement in national test results in recent years. Standards for 7-year-olds are above those expected and those for 11-year-olds are well above average. This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection, when standards were in line with national expectations. The attainment of boys and girls is similar. The improvement in pupils' standards in science is due to:
- consistently good and very good teaching so that all pupils make good progress;
 - a well thought out approach to science teaching that emphasises a practical 'hands on' approach to lessons;
 - very good subject leadership and management;
118. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 have good knowledge, skills and understanding in all areas of the subject. They can name the main parts of a plant and remember how seeds are dispersed. They know that there are different sources of light and can describe the materials that objects are made from and simple electrical circuits. They are challenged to predict what they think will happen and to think how they could change things. Higher attaining pupils research the information they need and have a good knowledge of life and living processes; for example, they know what a balanced diet needs to contain.
119. The good scientific skills of pupils in Years 3 and 4 are evident in their recorded work and lessons. They are aware of the need for a fair test and construct their own tables for recording their results. They can make predictions based on prior knowledge and experience. For instance, a pupil predicted that the hypothesis that, '*all materials allow light to pass through*', was false because she knew that her curtains at home let through light. Pupils describe what their prediction was, what they did and what happened or what they found out. They know about the reflection of light, can name the main bones and muscles of the human skeleton and describe how animals are adapted to their environment.
120. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 have a good understanding of the apparent movement of the sun across the sky, the structure and function of the heart and the water cycle. They explain in detail what a fair test is. Pupils in Year 5 undertake an investigation using the knowledge, skills and understanding they have developed to find out, '*What is Ooblek?*' Pupils in Year 6 compile a book about fish, using various forms of research, including the Internet, to extend what they have learnt in class and to take them beyond their own world. For instance, they find out about fish in tropical waters. This captures their imagination as shown by one pupil who writes, '*It grows to be as big and heavy as a small truck??!!!*'
121. Pupils throughout the school display very good attitudes and behaviour in science lessons. Working individually and in groups is purposeful and pupils persevere at tasks. The activities that are planned make an important contribution to pupils' personal development. They give them the opportunity to collaborate, share, respect each other's contributions and come to a consensus. Pupils enjoy the work and find it interesting.

122. The quality of teaching ranges from sound to very good, and is good overall. Planning is very good, with clear targets for each lesson, which are always shared with the pupils. In the lessons which are good or better, there are targets for what the pupils will learn as well as for the skills they will develop. Teachers have good subject knowledge, and high expectations of pupils, and use questioning effectively. Where teaching is very good it gives pupils opportunities to plan their own investigations. Time is used well. Additional staff support those pupils who need it and resources are of a high standard. Teachers regularly assess what pupils know, can do and understand and record it to inform the planning of future lessons.
123. The good quality of teaching leads to good learning. Teachers' expectations and enthusiasm grasp the attention of pupils and well-planned investigations ensure that pupils are engaged in practical work. Very good links are made with other curriculum areas through the school's thematic approach. This contributes to a curriculum that is interesting and exciting. Lessons finish by reviewing the targets and pupils are asked to reflect on whether they have achieved them. The overall quality of marking is good. It helps the pupils understand what they can do and what they have learnt. Where it is very good it tells the pupils what they have to do next to improve.
124. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. This is a very good improvement since the last inspection when there was no co-ordinator for science and no monitoring of the curriculum. The science curriculum, including opportunities for investigation, is very good, as are the assessment procedures for tracking pupils' progress. New technology is used effectively; for example, pupils used CD-ROMs and mobile phones during one lesson to undertake research. The co-ordinator regularly monitors curriculum planning, teaching and pupils' work. She has undertaken an informal analysis of national test papers but has yet to ensure that an analysis of test papers for 7 and 11-year-olds is used to inform future planning.

ART AND DESIGN

125. Standards in art and design are well above those expected for 7 and 11-year olds. All pupils, including those with special educational needs make very good progress. These standards are much better than in the previous inspection when they were judged to be average.
126. Displays of pupils' art play a very important part in the way the school works. Art plays a significant part in developing pupils' spiritual awareness of the beauty of the world around them and developing their ability to observe carefully. The emphasis the school places on links between subjects is clearly evident from the range of art work, for example in history, religious education and English. Displays are colourful and vibrant and add to the stunning overall impression of a bright, attractive and stimulating place in which to work. Pupils say that they enjoy looking at artwork around the school and that they are proud of their efforts. Displays are in two and three dimensions and there are photographs that depict the wide range of activities throughout the school. The significance that the school attaches to pupils' artwork is evident in the care with which it is displayed, including examples that are framed and hung on walls.
127. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 build very well on the skills that they develop in the nursery and reception classes. There is an obvious progression in the development of their drawing and painting skills. They mix their own colours and make subtle and appropriate shades. They concentrate on '*mark making*' with different types of pencil and produce some incredibly detailed drawings. The '*overlap*' between subjects that the school promotes is seen in the work that pupils in Year 2 do using computers to produce patterns in the style of William Morris.

128. The pupils continue to make good progress in the junior classes. As they get older their art work shows a greater sophistication and application of the many art techniques that they experience. The detail in their *'mark making'* pictures of sea creatures almost defies description. The school is so proud of pupils' work that it has had their drawings copied into a printed collection. Beautiful embroidery and appliqué work depicting a traditional Indian tale gave pupils the opportunity to work collaboratively, thus following another of the school's strong principles. In Year 6, last term's residential visit to Holland provided the stimulus to study the work of Van Gogh and to use oil paints for the first time. Papier-mâché pots painted in *'Delft'* style are a colourful reminder of their visit. This term older pupils are using their laptop computers to *'draw'* fish in minute detail.
129. Pupils greatly enjoy art lessons and talk about their work enthusiastically. They have no trouble remembering the different techniques they have used and are keen to explain what they have done. They are interested and involved and enjoy working together, using equipment sensibly and carefully. They listen very carefully and offer thoughtful and considered answers to teachers' questions.
130. In the four lessons observed, teaching ranged from unsatisfactory to excellent and was very good overall. The unsatisfactory lesson did little to develop pupils' skills. The lesson pace was slow and pupils were insufficiently involved. It was not typical of the three art lessons in other classes, which were lively, challenged pupils and resulted in high quality work. Teachers are very good at actually **teaching** art skills, rather than letting pupils acquire them. They have very good relationships with pupils and use praise well, with clear, evaluative comments. They intervene at just the right time to ensure that pupils know how to improve their work. They are very good at helping them to develop a critical awareness of others' efforts by setting aside time for pupils to look around the class, discussing and constructively criticising the range of work on view.
131. Subject management and leadership are very good. There is a common, shared approach to art throughout the school and the steady development of pupils' skills and the standards of work they produce would not be possible without clear management and regular monitoring and support.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

132. Pupils' attainment reflects expected standards in the infants, and is above expectations in the juniors. This means that the school has maintained expected standards since the last inspection for 7-year-olds and has improved those for 11-year-olds. The curriculum is very good and has improved as a result of the introduction of a scheme of work. Older pupils have time in the juniors to build on the sound understanding that is established in the infants. They have good opportunities to develop skills and to plan, make and evaluate through focused tasks and mini-projects. As a result, all pupils progress and achieve well.
133. Work in Years 1 and 2 shows sound progress and achievement. Pupils make plans for a sensory garden, labelling the things that will be in it. They design and make a range of products such as puppets, fruit salad and *'cards for the Queen'*. During a design and technology day they made model cars and string-printed motifs to decorate handkerchiefs. They use tools and materials safely and are encouraged to evaluate the things that they make.
134. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 design and make sandwiches, giving reasons for their choices and thinking about healthy eating. They can write clear instructions in sequence and detail the ingredients and equipment required for food technology. They design labels and make *'Tudor'* houses. They can evaluate their work and what they did, including how

they co-operated, and are beginning to evaluate the work of others in the class. In Year 3, pupils are involved in a project with a local secondary school. They design chairs for historical characters in their own school before visiting the secondary school to assemble life-size models.

135. In Years 5 and 6 pupils make plans for improving the local area, explaining how it will be done and sometimes giving their reasoning. Linked to their history topic they design and make a model pithead structure to take a given weight, and textiles based on the Heartstone story, which are of a high standard. They find out about bridges, using the Internet for research and learn how to create different joints before designing, making and evaluating. They review what they did, the skills they used, what went well and what could be improved. They also comment appropriately on their partner's work.
136. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour were very good overall. The activities planned make an important contribution to pupils' personal development. They give pupils opportunities to demonstrate their creativity and to appreciate the culture of former times. Pupils work collaboratively with others, persevere at tasks and are encouraged to appreciate and value their own work and that of others.
137. The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good overall. The lessons were well planned with clear targets, which the teachers shared with the children. At the end of lessons pupils were asked to reflect on how well they had made progress in achieving them. Explanations were clear, questioning was used effectively and there was good emphasis on using materials and tools safely.
138. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The role of the co-ordinator is well-defined and focuses on leading on developments, providing guidance to keep staff up to date, reviewing and monitoring the quality of the curriculum and standards, and ensuring that resources are sufficient. Assessment sheets have been developed for each National Curriculum level to enable teachers to track pupils' progress, identify gaps in their learning and inform future planning. This is a considerable improvement since the last inspection when there was no co-ordinator, and no guidelines for the development of skills or assessing pupils.

GEOGRAPHY

139. Standards have improved since the previous inspection and are now above those expected in Year 2 and Year 6. All pupils make good progress as they move through the school. The school places great emphasis on providing pupils with good opportunities to appreciate their own locality and the wider world, enabling them to understand different human needs. Visits into the locality, and further afield, play an important part, bringing the learning alive and making it relevant. Much of pupils' work is done collaboratively and results in high quality, informed discussion and mutual understanding.
140. Infant pupils know about many of the main features of the local area from their visits and recognise many different types of houses. In the only lesson seen, pupils in Year 1 discussed them and compared different types. One pupil said he lived in a '*normal house, a stuck together house*', meaning a terraced house. The teacher gave plenty of praise so that pupils were confident and prepared to '*have a go*' at answering questions. Pupils in Year 2 learn to analyse the findings from their visits and use their results to make comparisons. For example, having counted vehicles one wrote, '*Gorsty Hill is busier than Beeches Road because Gorsty Hill is a main road and its got a town at the bottom of it and Beeches Road hasn't*'. Mapping skills are well developed through journeys which pupils make; for example, on their way to the Waterways museum they recorded roads that they travelled on and then transferred this information onto a map, using a coloured key code to denote the category of road. Infant pupils have a clear

picture of their locality and environmental features and begin to confidently use geographical vocabulary.

141. Pupils in the juniors make good progress with their understanding of maps. Pupils in Year 3 read climatic maps of the world, identifying the hot, dry areas, cold regions and the tropical rainforests. In Year 4 they use a map of Mexico to identify the main physical and human features such as rivers, railways, main roads and cities, remembering the important use of keys. Pupils in Year 5 learn about their local environment and how the land use has changed over a period of time. They make an in depth study of the local coal and chain making industry, using mapping skills to study old maps for land use. Pupils demonstrate good knowledge and skills and an understanding of local studies, so that by the time they reach the end of Year 6 they are able to use their information in all topics studied. There are excellent links with history and literacy. Pupils' writing is enjoyable and interesting to read. For example, one wrote of their Channel crossing en route to Holland.
- 'The waves pummelled the side of the boat,
We rock violently
I sighed with relief as the first views
Of Calais came into sight
The nightmare was over'.*
142. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the lessons and respond positively and with enthusiasm. They enjoy finding out about their own and other areas and work well individually and in groups. The focus on learning about nearby places gives the subject added meaning for pupils and provides them with a greater awareness of their environment.
143. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teaching is characterised by very good subject knowledge that is used to interest and motivate the pupils well and leads to good quality learning. However, teachers do not give pupils sufficient opportunities to use information and communication technology in their work. There is now a very good scheme of work in place that teachers use well to plan the excellent fieldwork and orienteering, which were gaps identified in the previous report. The subject is well managed by the co-ordinator as is shown by the hard work that the school has successfully carried out to ensure that the weaknesses in the previous report have been rectified.

HISTORY

144. Standards of attainment in history throughout the school are well above those expected of pupils nationally and all pupils, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language, make very good progress. This is a major improvement since the previous inspection when standards were judged to be average.
145. Since the previous inspection the school has thought very hard, and successfully, of ways to improve its approach to teaching history. The huge emphasis that the school places on pupils actually reliving historical periods is one of the reasons for the high standards. History comes alive for all pupils through an excellent range of visits to places of interest and visitors to the school and is used successfully to stimulate a new topic of study. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 visit Tudor houses and Victorian schoolrooms for some of their stimulus. They have a good understanding of famous people from history and recently had a visit from Queen Elizabeth II and Queen Victoria! Pupils in Year 3 dress up as Vikings and have an invasion day whilst in Year 4 Tudor dancing is a strong feature. Pupils in Year 5 study their local area and the impact of the coal mining industry. Following a visit to an underground mine, dramatic events take place as pupils recreate a coal mine in school and act out a mining disaster with great feeling and empathy. It is therefore not surprising that all pupils thoroughly enjoy their history lessons because they

are so exciting and interesting. The fact that they recall in great detail facts about past times is evidence of this. Gasps of amazement and fascination were often heard in lessons during the inspection.

146. Teaching is very good overall. Teachers are expert at making meaningful links with history and the rest of the curriculum. The historical theme of study for a term is a focus in nearly all subjects. For example, pupils in Year 4 studying the Tudors investigate the most effective wattle when designing a Tudor house in design and technology whilst most pupils are given access to the Internet and CD-ROMs to research information. Drama and role-play activities further enhance pupils learning. There is a very strong emphasis on developing their literacy skills. Opportunities for pupils to discuss and write about their work are frequent as are different styles of writing. In a diary extract one pupil in Year 2, following a visit to the canal, wrote, '*Monday. Today when I woke up I went up the hill (in my nighty) to get to the well for a bucket of water to wash myself with. I started to wash myself with the soap then I helped Mama and Papa to load the barge with goods to deliver to the mine (the goods are coal). After that we had dinner (fish from the canal) but then all eight of us got a present a new pencil and rubber! (I got the plain ones). Then we delivered groceries to the corner shop just like a normal day.*'
147. Pupils are taught to extract information in a variety of ways. Very good searching questions by teachers develop pupils' ability to think and apply their knowledge. For example, one teacher in Year 3 used very good questions to develop pupils' understanding of the role of the archaeologist. '*What did you know when you pulled that mirror out of the sand? What more did you find out after you had carried out your research?*' This, in turn, leads to pupils being able to draw conclusions such as, '*The Celts must have made things out of gold*'. Pupils in Year 6 are clear about the differences between primary and secondary sources of evidence. Pupils learn to ask questions about their work and use pictures, photographs and artefacts particularly well in drawing conclusions. For example, pupils in Year 4 questioned a '*coal miner*' from a hundred years ago. Relevant and thoughtful questions such as '*What was the work?*', '*How much pay did you get?*' and '*What were the conditions like?*' were articulated clearly.
148. Planning for history is very detailed and informative and teachers use the information they have gathered about what pupils can do to plan future work. There is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' skills at interpreting history and not just on gathering facts about the past. Teachers constantly think of ways of improving what they deliver to make it interesting and meaningful to pupils. The co-ordinator offers very good leadership and is in a good position to identify strengths and weaknesses. She has a clear idea of how to further develop the subject. Through her perseverance the school has collated an excellent range of resources and artefacts that add authenticity to history studies.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

149. Standards in information and communication technology are in line with those expected of 7-year-olds and above expectations for 11-year-olds. In the last inspection standards were judged to be in line with expectations. Staff have recently completed their national training and subsequently the school has reviewed its arrangements for teaching information and communication technology. The school's use of information technology is not yet firmly established in some subjects. The computer suite and a newly appointed part-time specialist teacher provide considerable scope to extend the existing range of work throughout the school. Pupils' computer skills are generally in line with those of pupils nationally. However, their use of other forms of information and communication technology is often far-sighted and extremely effective, for example mobile telephones and CD-ROMs to find out information and digital cameras to record evidence. The use of computers to support pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language is very good.

150. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 use the computers in the suite as well as those in their classrooms, supported by the teacher or assistants. About 50 per cent of them have access to computers at home and use keyboard and mouse controls confidently. They use art programs well to illustrate characters from familiar stories that are linked to their topics. In all the infant classes, computers are used well to support other subjects.
151. Pupils in the junior classes use spreadsheets appropriately to model or record data. They use elements of a word processing program increasingly effectively, for example cutting, pasting and changing font size and colour according to the nature of the text that is required. Older pupils use laptop computers extremely effectively when '*drawing*' very detailed fish. Many pupils access the Internet in school and at home to find information for class topics. The school is well aware of the potential dangers of pupils using the Internet and has written a comprehensive policy outlining the dangers, which it asks parents to sign. This is very good practice.
152. The very good progress made by pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language is partly due to regular, planned access to a separate suite where they practise literacy and numeracy skills on an individualised program. The school regularly monitors their progress and these sessions provide valuable information about areas of weakness that might need revision and support. The programs support the work pupils do in individual groups and in their classes and have a significant impact on raising their self-esteem as they experience regular success.
153. Pupils' attitudes to their learning and their behaviour are very good. They usually listen attentively to instructions, concentrate well and share resources. On the few occasions when they are inattentive, it is due to their enthusiasm to get started!
154. Four lessons were observed in the computer suite and the quality of teaching was good overall, despite the difficulties that the small space available poses. The teacher has good subject knowledge and plans work throughout the school that steadily develops pupils' skills. The specialist teacher is in the process of experimenting with different types of organisation to find out which is most effective, for example teaching only half the number of pupils in a class at once. This provides pupils with greater keyboard experience, but reduces the time available. When different forms of technology are used in classes they are invariably innovative and effective; for example, the pupils' use of mobile telephones to make supervised calls to numbers they had found in a directory added a definite '*edge*' to their research. The clever use of technology in history and geography lessons was judged to be very good in those lessons.
155. The subject is well managed and offers the co-ordinator many opportunities to expand the range of work that pupils do. The school's long term planning for information and communication technology is sound. The subject policy and termly plans provide a clear focus for increased use of technology across a range of subjects.

MUSIC

156. Standards of attainment are in line with national expectations at the end of Year 6, as they were when the school was previously inspected. Lessons were only timetabled during this inspection in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 classes. It is too early in the school year to make a judgement about attainment at the end of Year 2, or compare it with the previous inspection where standards were considered to be above average. Additional evidence has been collected through discussions with teachers and pupils and a scrutiny of teachers' planning files. A specialist music teacher visits the school for one day a week to teach music to each class on a rotation basis. Class teachers teach their own class music at other times.
157. Music features strongly throughout the school for a number of reasons. It is used very effectively in lessons to set a calm working atmosphere or to stimulate pupils' creativity during lessons such as art or creative writing. Although music is not the main focus in these lessons, it is rarely mentioned in terms of its composer or content to increase pupils' knowledge and understanding of different types of music. Singing in assemblies is lively and enthusiastic and a very good range of visiting instrumental teachers and school clubs add to pupils' opportunities to experience musical activities. Pupils who learn instruments often use them in their class music lessons and occasionally perform to the whole school. The school has a unique arrangement with Technics Panasonic, which has supplied the school with a very good range of keyboards and opportunities for tuition for a large number of pupils.
158. Teaching in the two lessons taken by the music specialist was good. Pupils concentrate well and generally enjoy what they are asked to do. In one of the lessons however, the activity had gone on for too long and some pupils became restless and lacked concentration. The music teacher has very good subject knowledge and thoroughly develops pupils' musical vocabulary through questioning. She pays close attention to detail and ensures that pupils have the correct posture for singing and playing. There are good opportunities for pupils to use their musical skills to work in groups to compose and record their music. In one of the lessons the volume of this was too loud for pupils to be able to hear what their own group was playing or saying. Discussions with pupils show that they frequently perform to each other and listen to and evaluate each other's performances critically. Planning is good and provides opportunities for teachers to assess what pupils have learned through clearly identified targets and expectations. There are good opportunities for pupils to experience the music of different cultures through Indian and African dancing and music. Co-ordination of the subject is satisfactory.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

159. Standards at the end of the juniors are above those expected. This is a considerable improvement since the previous inspection. Standards in line with expectations have been maintained for 7-year-olds. Despite the absence of any grassed area on site, all areas of the National Curriculum are taught, including swimming lessons at a local pool. The school is unusual in that it plans short physical exercise sessions as a means of revitalising pupils during the day in order to maintain their concentration. This often involves a quick '*burst*' of physical energy to music between lessons. Physical movements progress in complexity as pupils get older. Pupils enjoy these sessions and say that, '*They are fun and make us think harder*'.
160. Pupils are encouraged to reach their physical potential through a number of well-planned opportunities. In lessons they work well as individuals and as members of a team, developing the spirit of sportsmanship and fair play, and increasing their self-esteem.

161. Working safely is a major feature of all lessons. Pupils have learnt to carry equipment correctly and cordon off areas that could cause a hazard, for example the hall staging. When working they instantly obey the teacher's instructions. Teachers praise pupils for their sensible attitudes. All pupils concentrated well and used lesson time to the full. No games lessons were seen, but in discussion with pupils, it was clear that they develop a good range of ball skills. They often play mini games, know the official rules and talk of sportsmanship and fair play. A good range of extra-curricular sporting and dancing activities supports and builds upon the start given to pupils in physical education lessons.
162. Pupils in the infants work enthusiastically in gymnastics and immediately respond to the teachers' instructions. They co-operate well with each other and thoroughly enjoy the tasks to successfully achieve the lesson target. Most 7-year-olds remember to use the space around them well and can link their movements into a simple sequence. The well-planned and sound teaching in the infants is challenging, allowing pupils to work independently and demonstrate unselfish co-operation in sharing apparatus. Pupils have good opportunities to evaluate their performances and they carry this out thoughtfully.
163. The teaching is good in the juniors. Teachers continue to have high expectations of pupils acquiring skills and techniques. In an excellent dance lesson in Year 6, pupils showed how height, body control, space, exaggerated movements and facial expressions could improve the ways in which they developed movements to depict a river flowing at various stages on its journey from source to estuary. Their movements became more and more imaginative and exciting as the teacher gave the groups time to practise and perfect. Every pupil clearly understood the importance of their individual part in the overall effect. The evaluations of their own and other groups' performances were mature and sensible.
164. School sports teams enjoy playing in local competitions and the school has good links with West Bromwich Albion Football Club. The subject is well managed and well resourced, with a good range of up-to-date equipment.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

165. Pupils' standards of knowledge and understanding at the infant and junior stages are in accordance with those expected in the Sandwell Locally Agreed Syllabus. This judgement is based on the lessons observed, scrutiny of last year's written work and discussion with teachers and pupils. The previous report also found that pupils' standards were satisfactory.
166. In a good lesson in Year 2, pupils considered the meaning of '*Mothering Sunday*'. They had very recently visited a Victorian mansion and the context of the lesson was a story about two children working as servants in such an establishment. They explored the kinds of emotions they would have felt in being separated from their parents, and on being reunited during a holiday such as Mothering Sunday. The discussion was thoughtful and relevant with all pupils anxious to contribute. Pupils also described what kind of present or treat they would give their mothers on this day. This was a good development of their speaking and listening. The teacher skilfully introduced the Christian idea of the church as a family, caring for its members.
167. Written work in the infant classes last year showed a satisfactory range. Pupils described their special places and people. They wrote well about celebrations comparing wedding ceremonies in different faith traditions and the meaning of the Diwali festival. '*Diwali means a row of lights to celebrate good triumphing over evil.*' They described celebrations in their own families; for instance, a new baby and the Christian celebration of Easter.

168. Discussion with pupils in Year 6 revealed that they have a sound knowledge of the major Christian festivals, and can collectively piece together the events of the Easter story. They understand the significance of the parables and miracle stories of Jesus and recount examples with some accuracy. Muslim pupils in the group gave good accounts of their beliefs and religious practice to which the others listened carefully and respectfully. One pupil quoted from the Qur'an in Arabic.
169. Last year's written work is wide-ranging and original making a good contribution to pupils' literacy development. There is satisfactory coverage of the religions being studied in the syllabus: Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and Hinduism. A good feature of the writing is their response to the second attainment target of the syllabus 'learning from religion'. Pupils in Year 5 wrote their own parables, for example '*The girl that didn't know how to share*' and '*The bully who was bullied*'. The strong influence of pupils' literary skills is evident in the high quality of the writing of these stories and poetry stimulated by a visit to the local church. For example, an extract from an atmospheric poem:
'The lectern stands proudly on the stage
Shuddering as it is met by the Holy Book
THE ECHOES OF THE CREAKING DOOR REACH THE ALTAR'
170. There is also evidence of pupils' consideration of moral issues such as the injustice of third world poverty and starvation and the abundance of food in the rich countries. This theme was developed in a sound Year 3 lesson on the theme of harvest festival. What would happen if the harvest failed as it often does in some countries? Pupils offered thoughtful answers. In considering the production of a loaf of bread they worked out a list of those who should be thanked, including God who sends rain and provides growth. Sitting in a circle, pupils read out their ideas. A receptive atmosphere supported by quiet music provided a strong spiritual experience for the pupils. These aspects show good improvement since the last inspection, which criticised a lack in the teaching of the application of religious principles to everyday life.
171. Teaching in the lessons observed was sound or better. From the evidence of the written work and discussion with pupils the overall quality of teaching is at least sound and often good or better. In the lessons seen and in discussions, the pupils showed a genuine interest in religious ideas and were anxious to contribute to discussion. Teachers' knowledge and understanding are at least satisfactory and are underpinned by a good scheme of work drawn up by the co-ordinator. Formal assessment is not yet fully operative but the school plans to introduce it. Planning is thorough and teachers make good use of a range of resources. The previous report noted a lack of resources. The school has since built up to a satisfactory level its range of artefacts and materials appropriate for the curriculum. Teachers use background music well to support an atmosphere of learning and reflection. The lessons observed were well paced and managed, had a practical base and drew from the pupils' thoughtful insights and responses. They made good contributions to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The curriculum is supported and enriched by visits to local places of worship and visitors to the school including local clergy, Islamic and Hindu parents. The co-ordinator monitors teaching and learning thoroughly, as well as teachers' planning on a two-year cycle and this is helping to raise standards.