

INSPECTION REPORT

OAKHAM PRIMARY SCHOOL

Oldbury, West Midlands

LEA area: Sandwell

Unique reference number: 103950

Headteacher: Mr. Philip Jones

Reporting inspector: Alan Blank
8358

Dates of inspection: 17th – 20th March 2003

Inspection number: 246330

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
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 to 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Darby's Hill Road Tividale Oldbury West Midlands
Postcode:	B69 1SG
Telephone number:	01384 254368
Fax number:	01384 458307
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr D Millsom
Date of previous inspection:	January 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
8358	Alan Blank	Registered inspector	Physical education	What sort of school is it? How high are standards? The school's results and pupils' achievements. How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9079	Ann Moss	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
7539	John Collier	Team inspector	English Music	
22805	Jo Greer	Team inspector	The Foundation Stage Art and design Design and technology	
12172	Wendy Knight	Team inspector	Science Information and communication technology	
15015	Mike Wehrmeyer	Team inspector	Geography History	How good are curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
25771	Peter Sandall	Team inspector	Mathematics Religious education	

The inspection contractor was:

Schools Inspection Unit
School of Education
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT

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London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Oakham Primary School has 419 pupils between the ages of four and eleven years and a nursery that has 60 children aged between three and four years on a part-time basis. The attainment of children on entry to the nursery is below average. The background of pupils is largely white British. There are 22 pupils who have English as an additional language, but they are all fluent and confident in English and do not require special language support; these pupils are mostly of Caribbean or Indian heritage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is 14 per cent, which is about average. There are 39 pupils on the register of special educational needs, which is below average, and four of these have formal statements of special educational need. The school received a Schools Achievement Award in 2002 for continuing improvement in its results in national tests over several years.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Oakham is a school that is improving rapidly and providing a good standard of education. Standards have risen consistently since 1998. The headteacher is leading the school well and has established a very clear direction for the future. Pupils make good progress overall because of effective teaching, especially in English and mathematics. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The improvement in standards in recent years has consistently outpaced improvement nationally.
- Overall teaching is good, especially in literacy and numeracy, and pupils make good progress.
- The management of behaviour is very good so that pupils develop good attitudes and behave well.
- The headteacher has made a very good start since his appointment. A very clear plan for school development has been established that has the support of senior staff, teachers and governors.
- Relationships within the school are very good and provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs is good.

What could be improved

- The balance in time allocated to different subjects and the organisation of teaching periods within the school's day.
- Where teaching is only satisfactory, more use could be made of assessment information to deliver lessons that reflect the different ability groups in classes more closely.

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 January 1998. Since then the school has made very good progress in the key areas of raising standards and improving teaching and learning. The key issues raised by the last inspection highlighted the need to clarify the roles of all staff, raise standards in English and improve medium-term planning. In all these areas the school has made very good progress. There is still room for improvement in the way information from assessment is used to inform teaching and to develop specific learning targets for pupils.

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
	2000	2001	2002	2002
English	E	B	C	C
Mathematics	C	C	C	C
Science	E	C	C	C

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Children enter the nursery with below average attainment overall. They make good progress in the nursery and reception classes and enter Year 1 with roughly average attainment. The school's results in tests carried out by pupils in Year 6 have shown steady improvement since the last inspection in English, mathematics and science. In most years standards are average compared to schools nationally and to similar schools. There was a slight fall back in English and a levelling off in the three subjects overall in 2002. Boys consistently do better than girls in mathematics and science, but in English their performance is about the same. In recent years boys have done better than boys nationally in mathematics and English, whilst girls' performance has been below the average for girls nationally in all three subjects. Current standards in Year 6 in mathematics and science are average compared to schools nationally and to similar schools. This is also true in English, overall, though standards in reading are above average throughout the school. These standards are reflected in the school's challenging targets for 2003. The improvement in results is similar in Year 2, a pattern of fairly consistent and rapid improvement. In 2002 standards were average in writing and mathematics and above average in reading compared to schools nationally and to similar schools. Current standards in Year 2 are the same as in 2002. Given that children enter the school with below average attainment, their achievement over time is good. The progress made by pupils who were tested in Year 2 in 1998 and again in Year 6 in 2002 was very good. In all other subjects standards are average except in information and communication technology (ICT) where they are below average throughout the school, and in geography in Years 3 to 6. Part of the reason for the lower standards in these subjects is that not enough time is devoted to them and there are weaknesses in the range and quality of resources. Improving provision for ICT is already a major feature of the school's improvement plan.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils are hard working and dependable. Pupils are confident when approaching problems. They are not put off by hard work, but have a very healthy "I can do" attitude.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Behaviour is managed very well and as a result behaviour in classrooms and around school is good. There is hardly any evidence of bullying, but when disputes arise, the school handles them very well.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils' personal development is good. Older pupils in particular are given regular opportunities to take responsibility as monitors around school. Relationships throughout the school are very good.
Attendance	Attendance levels are below the national average partly because of families taking holidays in term time.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 – 2	Years 3 – 6
Quality of teaching	Good	Satisfactory	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.

The quality of teaching throughout the school has improved significantly since the last inspection. Teaching in the nursery and reception classes is consistently good and sometimes very good. Though the teaching in Years 1 and 2 is satisfactory overall, there is a significant proportion of teaching that is good or better, especially in the teaching of basic skills in English and mathematics, where pupils' progress is also good. In Years 3 to 6 teaching is good overall and pupils' progress is good and sometimes very good. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and those who have special educational needs are well supported, often by well-trained and effective learning support assistants, but also by the co-ordinator for special educational needs. Pupils concentrate well and are not put off by hard work. In some lessons where teaching is only satisfactory, not enough account is taken of the different abilities of pupils in classes and the same activity is planned for all of them. As a result higher attaining pupils are not challenged as much as they could be. This is more common in English and science. It is very rare in mathematics, where pupils are taught in ability sets from Year 3 onwards and teachers plan very carefully for the different abilities within each group. Overall pupils' learning is good. Pupils' learning in some subjects such as ICT and geography in Years 3 to 6 is not as good as it should be, but this has more to do with resources and the time made available for these subjects. In physical education pupils make sound progress despite having too little time for the subject because teaching is consistently good. Pupils who have English as an additional language make the same progress as other pupils and do not require special support as they are fluent in English.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good in the nursery and reception, but unsatisfactory elsewhere. Too much time is devoted to English and mathematics, leaving insufficient time for some other subjects to be covered in depth. The school day, particularly the mornings, is not organised to make the most effective use of teaching time.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision is good. The organisation of special educational needs throughout the school is efficient and effective. There are an above average number of assistants, who are well trained and provide good support for pupils.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	These pupils are all fluent in English and do not require special support. The school has good procedures to assess pupils when they enter school to evaluate their needs.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Provision overall is good. Provision for spiritual and moral development is good. Provision for social development is very good. Pupils are encouraged to be aware of others' needs and to work together harmoniously. Cultural development is satisfactory overall, but there is room to expand pupils' awareness of a range of other cultures.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Pupils are well cared for. Recent improvements have made the site more secure. Pupils' personal development is monitored well and their academic progress is tracked satisfactorily. More use could be made of assessment information to inform teaching in some lessons and to generate more specific short-term learning targets for pupils.

The school works well with parents, who feel valued and included in their children's education. Parents are supportive of the school and receive satisfactory information about the work of the school and their children's progress. A new system for reporting to parents has recently been adopted and the quality of information provided varies from satisfactory to good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher has made a very good start since his appointment. A careful evaluation of the school's performance and effectiveness has been followed by decisive action and a clear vision for the future. He is well supported by senior staff and teachers who share the commitment to improvement.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Many governors are long serving and very loyal. They are familiar with the school's recent history, its strengths and weaknesses and how it has improved since the last inspection. Statutory duties are met in full.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has adopted a thorough and ongoing system for self-review that has already shaped and directed school improvement. Teaching in mathematics, English and in the reception classes has benefited from this review.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Resources and services are obtained after careful consideration of cost, quality and after-care service. Teachers, support assistants and resources are used well to promote pupils' learning. The school's use of new technology is satisfactory, but there is room for improvement in this area.

There are a generous number of support staff who work well with teachers and pupils. The school's accommodation and its resources are satisfactory overall.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils like school. • The teaching is good. • Behaviour is good and the school is well managed. • They feel comfortable about approaching the school. • The school expects pupils to work hard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few parents feel their children could make better progress. • The range of activities outside lessons.

The positive views of the school are well founded. The school is effective in all the areas raised by parents. The team feels that pupils make good progress in the key subjects of English, mathematics and satisfactory progress in most other subjects. Progress in ICT and geography could be improved.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

1 Children's attainment is below average on entry to the nursery especially in their personal, social and emotional development. Children make good progress through the nursery and reception classes so that by the time children enter Year 1 the attainment of most is roughly average in the crucial areas of communication, language and literacy, mathematics and personal, social and emotional development. This progress reflects the recent improvements made to provision in the reception classes.

Years 1 and 2

2 Results in national tests in English and mathematics have improved every year since 1998 when they were below average. The rate of improvement exceeds that of schools nationally. In 2002 standards were above average in reading compared to schools nationally and schools similar to Oakham. In writing and mathematics standards were average compared to schools nationally and similar schools. Teacher assessments in science indicated average attainment. The picture is the same in the current Year 2 with reading continuing to be above average. Pupils make good progress throughout Years 1 and 2 and their achievement is good. Because of the improvements in the provision in the reception classes, standards are likely to continue to improve. Progress in basic skills in English and mathematics is good. Boys outperform boys nationally in reading, writing and mathematics; whilst girls match girls nationally in reading and writing, they score below average in mathematics. Why boys should do so well is unclear. The picture is similar in Years 3 to 6. The inspection team did not find any reliable evidence to explain the better performance of boys. In other subjects standards are average except in ICT, where they are below average. More use needs to be made of ICT across the curriculum.

Years 3 to 6

3 The judgements of the last inspection team were that standards were average in all subjects except English where they were below average. However, in tests that followed in 1998 the results were well below average in mathematics and science. From this low baseline in 1998 the school improved standards consistently in English, mathematics and science every year until 2001. Standards fell back a little in 2002 in English and mathematics, but improved again in science; this did not constitute low achievement and was anticipated from pupils' earlier attainment. Even so, the picture of improvement in standards outstrips the improvement of schools nationally overall between 1998 and 2002 and constitutes very good progress. In tests in 2002, standards were average in all three subjects compared to schools nationally and similar schools. However, when the results of pupils who sat tests in Year 2 in 1998 are compared with their results in tests as eleven year olds in 2002, their progress was very good and well above average. Pupils' achievement is good overall in Years 3 to 6.

4 The pattern of boys doing better than girls is repeated. Boys perform better than boys nationally in English and mathematics, whilst girls perform less well than girls nationally in English, mathematics and science. The high number of male staff in these year groups does provide pupils with more positive role models than is usual, but this unlikely to explain the phenomenon. Teaching styles are often fast and rigorous that may suit more outgoing boys and in some year groups there are more girls with special educational needs than boys. The school is experimenting with a policy to raise girls' self-esteem in Years 5 and 6 and is investigating attainment in terms of gender on a regular basis, in order to understand more the differences in performance.

5 Current standards are average in English overall, but good in reading, and average in mathematics and science. Targets for this year are challenging, especially the number of pupils who are expected to achieve the higher level 5 in English and mathematics. Standards in literacy and numeracy reflect those in English and mathematics exactly.

6 Pupils with special educational needs make the same progress as other pupils. They are well supported by classroom assistants and their progress is monitored closely by the co-ordinator. Higher attaining pupils do well in mathematics, but could do better in some aspects of English and science if work was aimed more specifically at challenging them. Pupils who have English as an additional language make the same progress as other pupils. Their needs are assessed carefully and systems for support are in place as and when they are required. However, current pupils with English as an additional language are all fluent in English and do not need special language support. Some do have special educational needs, and these are identified and catered for appropriately.

7 Standards in other subjects are average, except in ICT and geography where they are below average. The resources for ICT are due to be improved to allow whole classes access to computers simultaneously. This is very difficult to achieve currently as the suite is small. Standards in geography suffer from a lack of sufficient time to develop skills and knowledge and some shortages in resources. Standards in physical education are maintained because of consistently good teaching.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

8 As at the last inspection, pupils continue to have good attitudes to school and learning. Parents report that pupils enjoy coming to school and this ensures that most arrive on time each morning. When they arrive, pupils are happy and look forward to their day. Pupils are polite, cheerful and eager to learn. They have a positive approach to school and try hard to meet their teachers' expectations. This was evident, for example, in a Year 5 numeracy lesson when pupils worked hard counting in decimal steps. Pupils listened well and took part eagerly in the lesson. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning were seen in many lessons, including in the classes for the youngest children. The safe, welcoming and calm atmosphere provides an environment that encourages pupils to do their best and pupils respond well. They develop good habits of working, and settle quickly to tasks. Sustained levels of concentration were observed in many lessons, as seen, for example, in a Year 1 physical education lesson when pupils persevered in completing their activities.

9 Behaviour in and around school is good overall except for a few incidents of boisterousness at playtimes. Occasionally a few pupils act in immature and attention-seeking ways in the playground. These occasional outbreaks of inappropriate behaviour are handled very well by the staff. More generally, when pupils are moving around the school and in lessons, they do so with a minimum of fuss without wasting time. There is no evidence of oppressive behaviour, bullying or racism. The school's caring and supportive climate for learning and the very good behaviour strategies used by the staff encourage pupils to get on well together and there is good racial harmony. Pupils who have special educational needs are developing confidence and positive self-esteem as they follow the good role model of their classmates. They relate well to the teachers and support assistants, developing an enthusiasm for their work and an increasing ability to concentrate. The pupils with the most severe difficulties appreciate what is done for them, and they try hard to live up to the high expectations of the staff.

10 There are very good relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and adults. Very good levels of co-operation and collaboration were noted in many lessons, as, for

example, in a Year 6 numeracy lesson where pupils worked very well in pairs. They were focused and interested in the lesson. These very good relationships were also observed in a Year 4 literacy lesson when pupils worked very well together planning a story. Higher and lower attaining pupils work well together, readily sharing their knowledge and skills, and this helps them learn better. On occasions pupils showed their appreciation of each other by giving spontaneous applause when one of them achieved well. They understand and follow school rules well and treat each other and adults with courtesy and respect. Teachers use personal, social and health education lessons to help pupils recognise their worth as individuals and to see themselves as others see them. Through these lessons, pupils develop an understanding of the impact of their actions on others, and learn to respect each other's feelings, values and beliefs.

11 Pupils' personal development is good. They readily accept responsibility for performing many tasks around the school, for example in returning registers to the office, distributing fruit and acting as milk monitors. The school council meets regularly and is valued by the pupils.

12 Attendance levels have declined since the previous inspection and are now unsatisfactory. They are below the national average for primary schools. A minority of pupils do not attend regularly despite the school's systems for promoting and monitoring attendance. An increasing number of parents are taking their children out of school during term time for extended holidays. The school is very aware of the importance of high levels of attendance and is discouraging these extended holidays when it can. It is also informing parents that these absences can have a detrimental effect on pupils' attainment, progress and personal development. There have been no exclusions in the last year.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

Quality of teaching	1998	2003
Very good or excellent	6%	15%
Good	33%	52%
Satisfactory	53%	32%
Unsatisfactory	4%	1%

13 The table above shows clearly how the overall quality of teaching has improved since 1998. Much of this improvement results from an effective cycle of monitoring, evaluating and improvement of practice. The monitoring has been carried out often by senior staff, but also by subject co-ordinators and specialists from the local education authority. Improvements in the teaching of practical skills in mathematics and general teaching in the reception classes are examples of real improvement.

14 Teaching in the Foundation Stage is consistently good and sometimes very good in the reception classes. In Years 1 and 2 teaching is satisfactory overall, but even here the teaching in over half of the lessons seen was good or better and the teaching of basic skills in English and mathematics is consistently good. In Years 3 to 6 teaching is good overall. The teaching observed in over two-thirds of lessons was good or better. This profile of teaching in Years 3 to 6 explains the fact that pupils in these years sometimes make very good progress.

15 Where teaching is very good, teachers are very well prepared, are secure in their own knowledge of the subject or topic and deliver lessons that have pace and challenge for all pupils. For instance, in a literacy lesson in Year 4, pupils wrote stories about a magic box. They then got together in small groups of pupils with various abilities to discuss the beginning and endings of their stories. The class was managed well, moving from small

group to whole class activities very efficiently. Pupils listen well and learn from each other, developing confidence in their own writing and in their ability to speak in a fairly formal situation. Similarly, in a numeracy lesson in Year 6, very good standards were achieved by higher attaining pupils as they measured and estimated the size of angles. The teacher introduced the difficult skill of using a protractor using an overhead projector and computer program. Then pupils checked each other's estimates and measurements, reinforcing their own knowledge and skills. The pace of this lesson was fast, with time targets being set so that pupils had to work very hard just to keep up.

16 In other lessons teaching and learning is sometimes only satisfactory. For instance in a science lesson in Year 5, time was not used as well as it might have been when more able pupils waited for others to finish a writing task before moving on to draw a graph of their results. Whilst pupils with special educational needs were well supported, the more able pupils were not challenged sufficiently. In the one lesson where teaching was unsatisfactory, pupils' understanding of the function of plant parts was not as clear as it should have been, and the activities did not help their learning to proceed at a satisfactory pace. There was no clear evidence of why boys should make better progress than girls overall. Some teaching styles are vigorous and fast and may suit outgoing boys more than girls.

17 Though pupils do have individual targets for learning set in the first term, more use needs to be made of the strategy to guide the development of pupils' skills by being more specific and updated more regularly, especially in English. The teaching of pupils who have special educational needs ranges from satisfactory to very good. Overall it is good. All teachers are good at ensuring that these pupils experience success in front of their peers. Class teaching is good when teachers try to draw in the weaker pupils by including them in questioning, and provide them with challenging tasks that also develop the specific skills and attitudes written in their individual plans. In class lessons few teachers use a simple reminder system to ensure that the planned targets are referred to regularly. In these lessons the work tasks do not match the pupils' needs closely enough and the teaching is only satisfactory. The impact of the support teaching programmes by the co-ordinator and support assistants is very good. The programmes are closely monitored to check for effectiveness and that they are showing measurable improvements in standards.

18 The teaching of literacy and numeracy is a strength of the school, even though some of the teaching sessions are too long. Basic skills are taught very well. Teachers are confident enough to adapt the prescribed strategies when it is appropriate. However, not enough use is made of ICT to promote learning in literacy and numeracy. The teaching in most other subjects is satisfactory. In physical education, consistently good teaching helps to compensate for the shortage of time made available for the subject and enables satisfactory standards to be achieved. Resources are used effectively.

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

19 At the time of the last inspection the curriculum was considered satisfactory in breadth and balance. However, there was above average time set aside for English and mathematics and too little time for pupils to carry out their own research. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is currently good overall, although opportunities for physical activities for children in the reception classes are restricted. Key aspects of the current curriculum in Years 1 to 6 are unsatisfactory. Too much time is given over to English and mathematics, considerably more than in most schools. This leaves the balance of time for other subjects insufficient to develop them in depth. For instance, there is not enough time available to develop the skills of ICT and geography quickly enough. The present organisation of the timetable creates two overlong sessions of literacy and numeracy in the morning, missing

the opportunity to use a third session for another subject. However, the headteacher has a strong and clear vision for a wider, more vibrant, curriculum based much more on pupils' learning than on imparting facts. The measures needed to achieve this vision are written into the school's improvement plan.

20 The successes gained from the features that are strong in the present curriculum give confidence that the staff will achieve their ambitious objectives. For instance, even in their present form the literacy and numeracy 'hours' have helped improve pupils' results in the standard tests. Teachers rightly plan these sessions flexibly to meet the learning needs of the pupils. Subject co-ordinators have created schemes of work which attempt to cover the full requirements of Curriculum 2000 in the time available. Inevitably this is at a restricted depth, and pupils do not always develop a full understanding of complex issues. Teachers now plan consistently from these schemes, and daily plans show clearly the learning objectives for the lessons. They wisely keep the subjects separate on the timetable and topics have given way to a more creative web of planned links between subjects. In the best examples skills acquired in one subject strengthen the learning in another.

21 Literacy skills are a good example. Teachers plan history and geography lessons to ensure older pupils use their note-taking ability to record evidence and observations during the lessons. Numeracy skills are not as well used. Teachers are missing opportunities to plan consolidation activities in geography, design and technology and physical education. Opportunities are also limited for ICT across the curriculum. However, there are some very good examples of using computers in geography as a research tool, and for basic skills practice for pupils who have special needs. All of these features are a distinct improvement since the previous inspection, but they are at an early stage of development, and there is no overall plan to track this new pattern of developing skills. There is no tracking of selected skills in particular year groups so that the following years can extend these skills progressively. For instance, in Year 6 pupils learn how to use the research skills they need for geography, history and science but a stronger position would be for this to be in place earlier, so that Year 6 pupils could begin to use such skills independently.

22 Other good features in the curriculum contribute well to pupils' wider learning. The school has worked on good enrichment of the curriculum since the previous inspection. There is now a good range of extra-curricular activities for pupils. This feeds valuable skills and knowledge into the classroom curriculum for sports, music and the basic skills. These are helping to raise standards in these areas. The staff monitor the fair distribution of these activities, so that all the junior years have access to at least some of them. The good links with the community are a strong stimulus for many classroom activities. Teachers feel that more use of visitors with particular expertise to share would be beneficial. Increasingly strong links with partner institutions benefit the pupils' learning, for instance one high school promoting popular sporting activities, another providing valuable expertise in academic areas. Very good induction procedures prepare the pupils well for the next stage of education. The school itself provides a sound programme for personal, social and health education, to meet the school's aim to develop well-rounded and confident pupils. The strongest feature of this is the introduction to citizenship, culminating in a very effective school council.

23 The school makes good provision for pupils' spiritual and moral development. Much thought has gone into providing opportunities for pupils to develop social skills, which are judged to be very good. Cultural development is satisfactory, as it was at the last inspection, but improvement in the other areas has been good or very good. All aspects have a clear focus in the school improvement plan, through both the curriculum and the life of the school, and this is beginning to pay dividends.

24 Both religious education lessons and acts of corporate worship offer opportunities for reflection and many involve stories containing moral issues. Assemblies are carefully planned to provide clear themes that build pupils' understanding, and there is an increasing emphasis on 'circle time', where pupils discuss issues that affect them. The revised aims of the school relate well to the development of all areas of pupil life, and the school's ethos is such that all pupils are able to play a full part. The reflective comments of pupils, particularly older ones, indicate that these aspirations are having a positive effect.

25 The school's code of conduct is clearly displayed, and often referred to by teachers as a way of motivating pupils. There is a strong emphasis on the value of community spirit, and pupils are well aware of how their actions can affect others. The school is very clear about the values it promotes and the high expectations it has of its pupils. House points are used effectively by teachers to encourage good behaviour, and pupils move around the school sensibly, for example when changing classrooms for mathematics. There is a very caring attitude, particularly where pupils have special needs, and the school works hard to raise pupils' self-esteem.

26 Pupils' social development is a clear strength of the school, which is well fostered for all pupils. It is obvious in lessons, where teachers make good use of partner and group discussions, encouraging all pupils to contribute their ideas. Charitable efforts engage the pupils directly, whether through putting on a concert to raise money or delivering harvest gifts themselves. The school council is effective and pupils and staff alike respect its decisions. Pupils have increasing responsibility as they move through the school. The 'Praise' assembly attended by inspectors was not only very happy and enjoyable, it also showed how much the pupils celebrate the success of others.

27 Cultural development, while broadly satisfactory, has not really moved on from the findings of the previous inspection and continues to feature in the current school improvement plan. There are good opportunities for pupils to appreciate local and wider culture, through theatre and museum visits and a very effective residential visit based on 'the arts'. This is complemented by good opportunities for pupils to express themselves in their work, either through writing, art, drama or music. However, there is little evidence of educating pupils for life in a multi-cultural society, other than through religious education, and discussion with pupils suggests that even this is not working very well.

28 The school has good systems for planning that ensure all pupils have equal access to the curriculum. The staff have become even more committed to inclusion since the previous inspection. The co-ordinator for special needs has shown commendable foresight in assessing the school site in terms of problems of access. The curriculum has been modified in effective ways to meet the needs of particular pupils. A few pupils are placed in a lower year group for some lessons in basic skills, if that suits their aptitudes better. Other pupils are placed in a higher set for mathematics if they have a stronger leaning in that area. The provision overall for pupils who have special educational needs is good. The teachers draw up education plans for individual pupils to ensure that their targets are well focused and their learning of basic skills is well supported. These plans are now of a consistent quality in both key stages. The school is alert to the needs of gifted and talented pupils, and has begun to plan well to cater for their requirements.

29 However, in the teachers' day-to-day planning the matching of tasks to ability is not always effective. The link between the assessment of pupils' attainment and the planning of the next steps in learning is not as close as it might be. The strong model of special needs planning, where precise assessment of pupils' progress immediately feeds into the next work activity exactly matched to the pupil's needs, is not as evident in subject planning. Often the selected activities lack the element of challenge necessary for brighter pupils. The

school is engaged in developing a programme much more closely linked to the wide range of different styles of learning that suit particular pupils best. In this planning the staff consult the pupils themselves more frequently than most other schools do.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

30 Pupils continue to be well cared for by the staff, as they were at the last inspection. Parents and pupils appreciate this good provision. All pupils are valued and the school's good ethos promotes good racial harmony. There are very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour and for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour. The senior management team ensures that there is a shared understanding by all members of staff of the necessity to promote consistently the guidance given in the school's behaviour policy, and to follow the very good strategies for rewarding good behaviour. Teachers and learning support assistants make a significant contribution to providing a caring atmosphere and a safe and calm environment for all pupils, both in and out of lessons. Good behaviour is encouraged in ways that make sense to the children. Playtimes and lunchtimes are well supervised. The occasional outbreaks of boisterous and thoughtless behaviour by a few pupils who act in immature and attention-seeking ways are handled very well.

31 The school has appropriate procedures for assessing and recording pupils' progress in all National Curriculum subjects from Year 1 to Year 6. These include checklists, tracking records against expected National Curriculum levels and progress books (recently introduced) which include pieces of work for English, mathematics and science from each term. The school's marking scheme is usefully linked to the planned learning objectives to help pupils to improve. Information from these procedures is used appropriately to check on pupils' progress in tested subjects, to set for mathematics and to identify pupils with special educational needs and particular gifts or talents. The tracking data alerts staff to pupils who are not making expected progress and need support to do so. Some suitable individual targets are also identified, and agreed with parents, through reference to assessment data.

32 However, data is not always sufficiently detailed for use in planning work to match the needs of different pupils, especially higher attaining pupils, in most subjects. There is not enough consistency in the individual targets in relation to what pupils need to learn for advancement towards the next National Curriculum level. Some pupil reports have up to 15 targets, while others carry a few vague ones such as effectiveness of recording. Work done in progress books is not regularly annotated to indicate to pupils what they do well, and where they need to improve. Moreover, tasks are often identical for all pupils so that higher attaining pupils are not able to show what they are capable of achieving at best, while lower attaining pupils make many errors or show misunderstandings and cannot prove what they can do.

33 The school has developed a bank of diagnostic tests to help it identify pupils who have special needs. The policy is for early intervention, and pupils are monitored as early as the nursery class. The staff monitor progress closely using examples of pupils' work to record progress. The co-ordinator summarises the individual's progress regularly in a useful, succinct document known as an event history. For pupils whose special needs are more demanding the co-ordinator uses very precise testing, known as 'P' scales, to chart the very small learning steps in pupils' learning. The school has developed very good links with specialist support agencies. These work to the benefit of the pupils and promote very good progress and guidance on behaviour. Pupils who have English as an additional language are assessed early on so that if there is a need for specific support, this can be arranged. The current group of pupils are all fluent in English and do not require special support, but the school is already aware that in its next intake this will change and support has already been arranged for these pupils.

34 Procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal development are good. Although no formal profiles for the personal development of each pupil are kept consistently across the school, pupils' personal development is monitored effectively. Staff know pupils well and respond sympathetically to them, taking good account of any personal circumstances that may affect their learning and general well-being. Teachers give good praise and encouragement during lessons, and achievements, large and small, are all celebrated. Circle time is being used to help pupils express their thoughts and feelings and to learn to understand about themselves and others. The school provides good opportunities for pupils to take responsibility by acting as monitors, helping younger pupils during playtimes and representing their classes on the school council.

35 Attendance levels have declined slightly since the last inspection and are now below the national average. A minority of pupils do not attend regularly despite the school's systems for promoting and monitoring attendance. The school follows stringent procedures for registering pupils each day and there are clear procedures for following up any absences. However, an increasing number of parents are taking their children out of school during term time for holidays and some of these are extended. The school is very aware of the importance of high levels of attendance and it is discouraging these extended holidays when it can. The school is now working closely with the education welfare officer in monitoring attendance figures much more rigorously. It is also informing parents that these absences can have a detrimental effect on pupils' attainment, progress and personal development.

36 There are good procedures in place for child protection; a teacher is named as the designated person in charge. Staff receive appropriate training to enable them to keep up to date with aspects of first aid. There is a comprehensive health and safety policy and regular risk assessments are carried out. The school has systems in place to ensure that pupils only have access to appropriate sites when using the Internet.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

37 The school fosters positive views among parents. They value its caring attitudes and are satisfied that their children make good progress. They believe teachers know their children well and that secure, personal relationships help pupils to succeed. Parents at the parents' meeting and those responding to the questionnaire stated that their children like school and those seen during the inspection said their children are eager to come. They say that the school expects their children to work hard and achieve their best and is helping them to become mature and responsible. All parents expressed confidence in the new headteacher.

38 A small minority of parents do not feel well informed about how their child is getting on, and a few feel that the school does not work closely with them. The inspection team found that the school works closely with parents in their children's education. There are regular parents' meetings and an open door policy whereby parents can approach members of staff at any appropriate time if they would like to discuss their child. The end-of-year reports to parents, although satisfactory, are inconsistent in the quality of information they contain. They do not all contain a judgement about the progress of the pupils in relation to expectations and the targets are imprecise. Too much is written about what has been done rather than what has been achieved by the pupils.

39 The parents of pupils who have special educational needs value the commitment of the staff who care for their children. The school has sought to build up an increasingly close relationship with the parents, who are all invited to the important review meetings. The

parents are now involved in the procedures at every stage. They find the school's information very helpful, particularly easing the worries they have about an unfamiliar process. The co-ordinator plans to extend this aspect, for instance by introducing parents to a new counselling service for pupils who feel worried or stressed by the pressures of success in national tests.

40 Some parents were dissatisfied with the amount of homework that their children receive but the inspection team found that the homework given across the school was generally satisfactory.

41 The inspection team agrees with the positive views of the vast majority of parents. It judges that the school works closely with parents and is actively trying to involve even more parents in the life of the school. Parents speak very highly of the good, informal links with the headteacher and staff. They see the links as a two-way process ensuring pupils' interests are to the fore. They are now given information on the curriculum and topics that their children will be studying. The school prospectus and governors' annual report to parents and newsletters are informative.

42 Parents' involvement in the work of the school is satisfactory. A few parents come in to help with reading and general classroom duties, mainly in the classes for the younger pupils. The parent-teachers' association (FOOSA) is a dedicated, hardworking group of people who have raised a large amount of money to fund, for example, laptop computers, an art group and a science week. The parent governors make a valued contribution to school life.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

43 The current headteacher has been in post for approximately 15 months and has already demonstrated very good leadership qualities. Obviously several initiatives and changes have yet to reach fruition but some have already resulted in success and improved provision. The new school improvement plan was formed after a whole-school analysis of provision involving senior staff, teachers, governors, and parents. Ideas were also taken from the already formed and very effective school council so that pupils' views were represented too. The new plan provides a clear and achievable structure for change that is driving and monitoring school improvement. Several improvements have involved the local education authority in order to provide objective analysis and a number of positive changes have resulted. For instance, in the summer term of 2002 a thorough look at the curriculum and practice in the reception classes was carried out. The changes that have been implemented in teaching and curriculum have resulted in the good provision observed during the inspection. Analysis of the teaching of investigative skills in mathematics again resulted in a more practical approach being adopted that is already leading to better standards and a richer learning experience for pupils. Finally, as part of the evaluation of overall provision, curriculum leaders have been provided with opportunities to observe their subjects being taught in every year group. This has given them with a clearer picture of whole school provision in their subjects and extended their own professional development.

44 There is very much a team feeling about the senior management in the school. The deputy headteacher works closely with the headteacher and they represent a consistent and strong leadership team. The senior management team has representatives from each phase¹ of the school. They are clear about their duties and responsibilities, something that was not the case at the time of the last inspection. Throughout the senior management team and the teaching staff there is a drive to continue to improve standards and there is an

¹ The phases are a) nursery and reception, b) Years 1 and 2, c) Years 3 and 4, and d) Years 5 and 6

awareness of the fact that the breadth of the curriculum could be widened without compromising this drive.

45 Many of the governing body are established and long serving. They meet all their statutory responsibilities in full. These governors are very familiar with improvements that have taken place since the last inspection and they have played their part in helping these to happen. Governors are well led and they are kept informed through both formal meetings and less formal links with individual classes. Several governors work in school on a voluntary basis and are very familiar with its work. Governors are keen to obtain value in the purchase of services and resources. For instance, a thorough evaluation of provision for ICT led to a clear need to add to the existing suite in order to promote ICT across the curriculum. The decision to aim for a set of laptop computers was made. Several firms were invited to tender and make presentations to governors and staff. The one eventually chosen did not reflect the lowest quotation, but included both higher quality machines and better after-care service. The school budget is monitored closely using independent specialists who provide regular and reliable information to senior staff and governors. Larger schemes are budgeted for and imagination has been used in sourcing funds for items such as an all-weather sports surface.

46 There is a clearly defined system for the evaluation of the school's performance. This is structured to include each subject and area of school provision but in a manageable and sensible time framework, and this is established as part of the ongoing work of the school. The school has an effective policy for promoting race equality, though more could be done through the curriculum to promote pupils' understanding of other cultures.

47 The management of special educational needs is very good. The co-ordinator has established a complex but effective timetable of support in and out of the classroom. The co-ordinator initiates and manages the training of the support staff very well. Their expertise is growing steadily. Many are developing specialist knowledge and skills in a particular aspect of special needs. The communication between co-ordinator, special needs assistants and teachers is very good, and an ethos of teamwork has been built up. Under the strong leadership of the co-ordinator the staff are encouraged to take on initiatives that bring them ever closer to identifying the learning styles that will benefit pupils most. The co-ordinator's process of critical evaluation of the provision is very good, and he is currently studying the best use of support staff in lesson introductions. The administration of paperwork is efficient. The co-ordinator monitors progress carefully. Working closely with the special needs governor, he prepares reports to the governors about value for money being provided. The view of the inspection team is that special needs provision gives very good value for money, but the school has yet to establish its own benchmarking for what constitutes very good and excellence at Oakham.

48 The school has an appropriate number of teachers and above average numbers of support staff who are both skilled and well informed. Support staff work closely with teachers supporting pupils and helping lessons to run smoothly. The accommodation is satisfactory and has some strengths, such as a separate dining room. There are also some shortcomings. The library and ICT suite are small. The playground for older pupils is small so that pupils' access to play at lunch times is restricted. Facilities for outdoor play in the reception classes are unsatisfactory. Several window frames and wooden surfaces have crumbling paint, giving the school a dilapidated appearance that does not do justice to the education that is being provided. Resources are satisfactory in most subjects but there are some specific shortages in ICT and geography.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

49 To continue the improvement in standards and to improve the quality of education provided in Years 1 to 6, the school should:

Reorganise the school day and reallocate the time provided for different subjects to:

- improve standards in information and communication technology and geography;
- provide greater opportunities for investigative work in science;
- increase the time for other subjects, such as physical education, that are currently given a low proportion of curriculum time.

Paragraphs : 2, 7, 18, 19, 78, 82, 88, 105, 110, 116, 123.

Improve teaching and learning even further by providing more precisely for different groups of pupils in some classes, especially higher attaining pupils in English and science by:

- using the results of assessments to inform teaching more frequently.

Paragraphs :16, 17, 21, 29, 32, 77, 92, 94.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	73
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	42

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	11	38	23	1	0	0
Percentage	0	15	52	32	1	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)	30	419
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	NA	57

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	1	39

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	22

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	23
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.5
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.6
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
	2002	33	24	57

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	30	30	30
	Girls	22	22	21
	Total	52	52	51
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	91 (86)	91 (88)	89 (86)
	National	84(84)	86 (86)	90 (91)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	30	30	30
	Girls	22	21	22
	Total	52	51	52
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	91 (81)	89 (79)	91 (79)
	National	85 (85)	89 (89)	89(89)

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
	2002	26	30	56

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	18	22	24
	Girls	22	22	25
	Total	40	44	49
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	71 (78)	79 (80)	88 (88)
	National	75 (75)	73 (71)	86 (87)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	19	21	24
	Girls	21	22	24
	Total	40	43	48
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	71 (77)	77 (83)	86 (86)
	National	73 (72)	74 (74)	82 (82)

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

Ethnic background of pupils**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	369	0	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	11	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	7	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	19	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	0	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	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)	16
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	30
Average class size	30

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	254

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	30
Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	75
Number of pupils per FTE adult	10

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	2
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.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2
	£
Total income	1027004
Total expenditure	994314
Expenditure per pupil	2281
Balance brought forward from previous year	1530
Balance carried forward to next year	34220

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	360
Number of questionnaires returned	52

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	62	33	6	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	64	25	9	2	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	40	51	0	0	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	42	47	7	2	2
The teaching is good.	53	41	0	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	46	44	6	2	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	72	24	2	0	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	40	56	0	2	2
The school works closely with parents.	47	43	4	2	4
The school is well led and managed.	52	43	4	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	31	31	12	2	24
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	53	44	3	0	0

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

50 Children enter nursery at the beginning of the term after their third birthday. Children spend up to five terms in nursery. Most children in nursery transfer to reception in Oakham Primary School. Almost all children in reception have attended some form of pre-school provision.

51 Children attend nursery either mornings or afternoons. Reception children attend full time. Induction procedures for children entering the nursery are good. Parents are pleased at how their children settle in and enjoy school.

52 Nursery accommodation is good. Indoor accommodation is spacious and attractive. There is a separate painting area and separate quiet area. The nursery has its own cloakroom, toilet and kitchen areas. Outdoors there is a secure play area with hard and grassed surfaces. Furniture and resources are generally in good condition and sufficient.

53 Reception classrooms are spacious, light and attractive, with good displays supporting learning and celebrating children's work. An additional room is used very well as a role-play area arranged to support topics and learning in the main classrooms. Equipment here is good. There is no designated outdoor play area nor appropriate large outdoor play equipment. This is unsatisfactory. Whilst children have access to nursery large outdoor play equipment it is generally not big enough for reception children so further development is limited. Other learning resources are sufficient and in good condition.

54 Staffing levels are appropriate. The nursery has a qualified early years teacher and two support assistants. Reception classes have a qualified teacher each, a classroom support assistant and a qualified support practitioner. Teaching is usually good in nursery. It is always good and often very good in reception.

55 There are good opportunities for exchange of information with parents at the beginning and end of each session. The nursery also has a useful parents' information board with details of the current topic and phonics being taught, as well as other helpful notes and leaflets.

56 The curriculum is appropriate in each year and reflects the six areas of learning for children in Foundation Stage. Planning is done as a team to ensure that work in reception builds on that covered in nursery. Nursery planning does not always specify the nature of activities and children are not always made aware of how they can explore equipment. Play activities in reception are clearly planned and shared with children. This good practice would be even better if adults kept a more careful record of which activities children have chosen to ensure that they all participate in all the opportunities provided. Assessment procedures to record children's attainment and progress are still being developed.

57 Since the previous OFSTED inspection there has been good improvement. A local education authority review in 2002 raised a number of concerns and made important recommendations. There has been good progress since then.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

58 Children enter nursery with personal, social and emotional development below that expected for their age. Good attention is paid by all staff to encouraging children to become independent in dressing themselves and dealing with their own hygiene. Children make good progress and quickly learn the routines and what is expected of them. They learn to play well together, take turns and share. Children learn to treat toys and equipment sensibly and to use resources correctly. Children concentrate on activities for a reasonable length of time. Most make independent choices when given free choice; a few younger children are still indecisive and sometimes drift. When this happens adults guide them to an activity and engage with the child, encouraging him or her to participate. In larger group activities children learn not to call out. Staff are patient with children and encourage good behaviour, giving praise. Children's success is celebrated.

59 The good work in nursery is continued in reception. Most children remember not to call out but put up their hands. They conform well to the expected routines and behaviour. Children work well in groups, often engaging in co-operative activities. Children concentrate well on their tasks. They are interested in their work and pleased with their achievements. Behaviour is very good. Children understand what is right and wrong and why. They understand the consequences of their actions and words on others. Teaching, learning and progress are good in both years.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

60 Children enter nursery with communication, language and literacy levels generally a little below those expected for their age. Good opportunities are provided for children to develop speaking and listening skills. Staff engage in extended conversations with children during activities, encouraging them to talk and describe what they are doing and experiencing. New concepts and vocabulary are introduced regularly to them. During whole group time and story time children are encouraged to listen to the adult and each other. Good progress is made so most children reach the expected level by the end of nursery. Very good emphasis is placed on early reading and writing skills so good progress is made. Children are introduced to a wide range of reading materials. They tell the story by 'reading' pictures and begin to understand that print carries meaning. They are introduced to phonic sounds and begin to distinguish the initial sound of familiar objects and recognise the letter shape. Children trace over the letter shape and begin to copy it. A few more able children begin to write their own name independently.

61 Children begin reception generally at the expected level for their age in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Children make good progress in all aspects of communication, language and literacy so that by the end of reception all children have at least a basic sight reading vocabulary. Most children have reached the expected level for their age, whilst about a third have exceeded it and are reading suitable material fluently, with good expression. They use their knowledge of letter sounds well to read unfamiliar words. Teaching in reception is good and often very good. The formal literacy strategy is implemented imaginatively. Aspects are adopted throughout the day to support other lessons besides English so children do not spend too much time sitting on the carpet. Good emphasis is placed on correct letter formation, so handwriting development is good. Most children achieve the expected level, with over half writing simple captions independently and the most able beginning to write sentences independently.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

62 Mathematical development of children entering nursery is generally below that expected for their age. Incidental opportunities to practise counting are always used well such as when the register is taken or when children are tidying equipment away. Activities for free choice do not always include mathematical equipment or games. Opportunities to join in singing and action number rhymes are sometimes missed. At the time of the inspection there was no direct teaching of mathematical concepts or number; this is unsatisfactory. Progress in counting, number recognition and comparing simple measures could be improved through more direct teaching.

63 Children begin reception with mathematical development below expectation for their age. Counting, number recognition and writing, and one-to-one understanding are taught effectively. Children are introduced to addition through combining sets and to subtraction by partitioning sets. Most of this is through practical activities. Children compare length, weight and size and record simple data in block pictographs. The actual mathematical content of tasks is not as clear or as focused as it could be in some sessions, but teaching overall in reception and nursery is sound. Progress is satisfactory in groups where an adult is directing the task, but unsatisfactory in independent groups where children do not always understand the task or spend too much time colouring in and too little on mathematics.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

64 Children begin nursery with a sound knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Topics are well chosen to develop their knowledge and understanding further. Children enjoy nursery programs on the computer and develop satisfactory control of the mouse. Good opportunities are planned through the free choice activities for children to explore floating and sinking in the water play; they compare differences in how wet and dry sand behaves. Role-play is used very effectively to extend knowledge; for instance during the inspection, an optician's shop had been set up with a reading chart, spectacles, binoculars and different magnifying lenses because the current topic was 'seeing with our eyes'. Adults engaged very well with children so they compared the view through different ends of the binoculars and investigated a box of natural materials with the lenses. Storybooks, craft activities and visits or visitors all contribute to these topics. Teaching and progress are good.

65 Teaching in reception is very good. Big Books are used well as a source of information for topics. Children learn about their senses. Much of their learning is carefully planned to integrate all areas of learning. During outdoor structured play activities children used magnifying lenses to investigate minibeasts and seed cases in the grass. Role-play and activities in the extra classroom are planned to extend learning. Visits and visitors to school also enhance their learning. Computers are used effectively to support all areas of learning.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

66 Children begin nursery at the expected stage of development in creative development. Most children know the names of primary colours and about half know more than these. Children have good opportunities to use different media to create pictures using paint, modelling materials and collage. Portraits and people painted by children are of a good standard. They use construction sets to build railway tracks and enjoy completing jigsaw puzzles. There are good opportunities for role-play as described above. A good range of untuned percussion instruments is available but these are usually one of a number

of free choice activities. More structured opportunities would improve children's appreciation of music making.

67 Children in reception enjoy singing a range of songs including children's hymns of praise. They sing in tune. Children's artistic skills continue to develop and much of their work is of a good standard. They use an increasing range of media and equipment. Role-play contributes significantly to children's progress in developing their imagination. A particularly valuable asset is the spare classroom which is developed by the support practitioner. The focus changes weekly and all children spend time in the room each week. During the inspection the theme was 'Ben's birthday' to link with the Big Book text for the week, *The Giant Sandwich*. Children wrapped presents for Ben, wrote the gift tag, made a birthday card, wrote a party invitation, made party hats, laid the party table and prepared jam sandwiches. In addition a post office was set up to post the cards, sort and deliver them. As well as the enjoyment children derive from the activities, they consolidate speaking, listening, writing, reading and number skills as well as increasing their general knowledge. One afternoon children used their senses to describe ice cubes in the water trough, some of which were in the shape of letters for them to identify by feel as their eyes were covered. This is imaginative practice, carefully planned with the teachers to enhance classroom learning. Overall teaching is good in both the nursery and reception classes

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

68 Children enter nursery with physical skills at least at the expected level. They climb, run and pedal with confidence. When moving in the hall they do so with appropriate awareness of space and move about without colliding. About half the children hold pencils and paintbrushes correctly. Emphasis is placed on encouraging children to use the correct hold. Children use scissors and glue with care. Ball skills are appropriate for their age. Teaching is satisfactory, but more attention could be given to encouraging children to develop skills during outdoor play rather than just observing that they play safely. Children know that their heart beats faster when they run around and that it is important to warm up their muscles before exercising.

69 They are very confident when using the outdoor fixed equipment to climb and balance. Children make good progress and show delight at their increasing achievement. They make little progress in pedalling, steering and balancing on bicycles because they lack appropriate equipment and have to use the nursery tricycles and scooters.

ENGLISH

70 Standards currently in Year 2 and in Year 6 are average for English overall but reading standards throughout the school are above average. This represents good overall progress for the pupils because they enter school with below average standards. It is a considerable improvement on results in the national tests in 1998 that followed the last inspection. Standards then were below average standards for the seven and the eleven year old pupils. As a result of the last inspection, the school was required to address the issue of attainment in English and this has been done successfully. Standards have risen, particularly in reading.

71 Most pupils listen carefully to their teachers and classmates, though some in Years 1 and 2 find this difficult. Teachers, however, are good at regaining their attention when concentration wanes. Speaking skills across the school are average. Most pupils are confident about speaking, though some say very little during discussions, preferring to sit passively. Boys often dominate these discussions and, since national tests reveal that boys

have performed better than girls over recent years, particularly the eleven year olds, it is important that teachers ask girls to respond to questions, even when they do not put their hands up to answer. Year 2 pupils usually convey their thoughts clearly. A boy, for example, carefully explained how note-taking is different from writing a story. Year 6 pupils state opinions forcefully, for example when giving examples of the good features of their school. However, they find it more difficult to put feelings into words. Some teachers fail to encourage better speaking skills. Occasionally, as in Year 6, the teacher asked a pupil to speak up so that everyone could hear, but this is not common. Nor do teachers regularly correct grammatical mistakes or encourage pupils, particularly the younger ones, to speak in sentences.

72 Standards of reading are above average in Year 2 and in Year 6. Pupils make good progress from the time they enter school and they are encouraged to develop strategies for tackling unknown words. Phonics are taught well, particularly in the early years, and most pupils attempt to sound out words that they do not know by sight. As they get older, they begin to break up words into syllables to work out the parts and blend them together again. Nearly all pupils enjoy reading and are confident about tackling challenging texts. A more able boy in Year 2, for example, fluently read a book by his favourite author – Roald Dahl – and incorporated good expression when reading speeches. Average pupils are not always as expressive when reading aloud, partly because they have to look closely at the words in order to read accurately. Nevertheless, understanding of the text is secure and one girl was able to predict what would happen in the rest of the story. Less able pupils find it more difficult to work out unknown words but most use initial sounds to help them. One pupil, for example, knew the *ac* of ‘across’ and, with help, he read it successfully.

73 By Year 6, some pupils are competently tackling demanding texts such as *Lord of the Rings*, talking knowledgeably about the style in which the story is written and about the author’s intentions when using particular vocabulary. All pupils express a preference for a particular author with J K Rowling and Jacqueline Wilson receiving most votes. Average pupils read accurately, often self-correcting mistakes when a sentence does not make sense. Occasionally, a word such as ‘hoarsely’ has to be given and its meaning explained. The range of reading ability is not as wide as in some schools and, though lower attaining pupils are sometimes less fluent because they have to stop to tackle unknown words, one pupil successfully built up the difficult word ‘contemptuous’ even though he did not know what it meant. Most pupils read regularly at home but the home reading diaries are not well maintained generally through the school. There are sufficient books for pupils to have a reasonable choice but some prefer to bring books from home because there is a lack of new, good quality fiction, especially for the older pupils. They complain that new books are not looked after properly and sometimes disappear and this has been reported to the school council. Most pupils understand how to use the classification system to find a particular book in the library and how to use the contents or index page to find specific information. The main library, however, is small and can only house a small group of pupils to carry out research on the spot. The library for the younger pupils is housed in a corridor and is essentially a storage area for the books that pupils need to borrow for classroom work or for reading at home.

74 Standards of writing in Years 2 and 6 are average but pupils make good progress throughout the school because they are given ample opportunities to write freely and in a good range of styles. Consequently, they produce a good volume of work and understand the features of writing stories, poems, reports, letters, instructions, diaries and plays. Work is usually neatly presented and often incorporates colourful illustrations. There is a pride in the work and displays around the school testify to this. Some pupils in Year 2 join their letters and produce writing that is consistent in size. By Year 6, most have developed a fluent, legible style and pupils are used to writing in ink. The more able pupils in Year 2 write

lengthy stories that follow the correct structure. Punctuation is good, with speech marks and apostrophes being used correctly. Sentences are extended by using words such as 'and' and 'so'. This is not always apparent in the work of the majority of pupils who, in the main, write simple sentences with conventional openings and endings to stories. However, they are correctly punctuated with good attempts to spell unusual words such as 'submarine' (subreen). Spelling becomes more of a problem for the less able with common words like 'some' being misspelt (sum). These pupils often miss out full stops too. One pupil used 'and' continuously as a substitute for the full stops. The story contained a stream of ideas but it lacked structure.

75 In Year 6, there is some impressive written work. The more able pupils write in paragraphs. They incorporate complex sentences in their writing and use punctuation, such as the semi-colon, correctly. Evocative vocabulary conjures up vivid images as in "Arrows fly like eagles across golden fields". Average pupils also try to use unusual words, successfully incorporating a variety of alternatives for 'said' when writing speeches but not always managing to sustain ideas when sentences become complicated. Pupils who find writing more difficult have greater success with factual accounts than with imaginative tracts. For example, some writing about 'How Plants Grow' is clearly written but, in a story, difficulties with punctuating speech are evident and spelling proves tricky, for example, 'gon', 'stoped' (stopped) and 'smilling'. Nevertheless, nearly all pupils are confident about their writing and are prepared to 'have a go'. They have positive attitudes in their lessons and generally behave well and work conscientiously. Literacy skills are very well promoted in other lessons, particularly in history, science and religious education. In Year 4, for example, shepherds are interviewed about Jesus' birth and in Year 5, information about the water shrew is written up following research in books. As part of their study of the Victorians, Year 6 pupils write a letter of complaint about the plight of working children: "The work is back-breaking, lots of children die or get seriously hurt and the pay is extremely low". Computers are used satisfactorily, mainly to present work attractively, using the word-processor. Occasionally, as in Year 2, text is edited using the computer, but re-drafting is usually done in books. Writing is regularly planned throughout the school and pupils know of the need to improve work once the first draft has been completed.

76 There is good provision for pupils with special educational needs who generally make good progress. Teaching assistants are regularly deployed to help these pupils in lessons and they are effective. For example, good support is given to a younger pupil with language difficulties so that, after half an hour, he is confident about reading out his story. The co-ordinator for special educational needs sometimes works alongside the teacher to help pupils. In a Year 6 lesson he gave very good encouragement to a group of pupils looking at the arguments for and against banning cars in cities, helping them to express their ideas orally before writing anything. The current group of pupils who have English as an additional language are fluent in English and do not require special support. They make the same progress in English as other pupils and their attainment reflects the full range that is found throughout the school, including some achieving above average standards.

77 Teaching is good overall across the school. Lessons are well planned and most teachers explain to pupils what it is that they are expected to learn. This is not always expressed in child-friendly language and the practice of writing this 'learning objective' into books is time-consuming, but pupils are able to focus on the matter in hand. Teachers use resources effectively and promote the learning of basic skills well. For example, in Year 1, before reading the Big Book, the teacher checked that pupils could identify the title, author and illustrator and encouraged them to predict the story by looking at the pictures first. In a very good lesson in Year 4, the teacher kept up a brisk pace, insisted on high standards of behaviour and challenged pupils to develop their stories about a magic box by planning each section carefully. Not all teachers manage to maintain a brisk pace. Some talk for too

long and pupils' concentration wanes. Not all cater for the different needs of their pupils. In many of the lessons seen during the inspection, all pupils pursued the same activities although an adult often supported the least able. The higher attaining pupils were rarely set an extra challenge and they achieved satisfactory results mainly because of their own motivation. Test results last year for the eleven year olds showed that the number gaining the higher level (level 5) was below the national average. The school predicts that this will rise this year to average levels but there is a need to plan work that precisely meets the needs of these more able pupils. A strong feature of teaching is the quality of marking in most books. It is supportive and is often used to point out to pupils what they must do to improve. Some teachers are beginning to set targets for improvement. For example, in a Year 4 book, the teacher wrote 'Target – set out your work in paragraphs' because the pupil had written a lengthy but continuous story.

78 Of the available time for teaching each week, about one-third is devoted to English. This is more than is found in most schools. Literacy lessons often last longer than an hour and some pupils, particularly the younger ones, find it difficult to maintain concentration. Nevertheless, the National Literacy Strategy has proved effective in raising standards and it is properly delivered. Guided reading for groups of pupils, however, is not regularly planned within the literacy lesson in some classes. Time is provided each week to allow pupils to practise their extended writing and Year 1 pupils are regularly encouraged to write their news. These measures are promoting good progress in writing. In addition, national initiatives² to target particular groups of pupils for extra help are also promoting good learning. In an Early Literacy Support (ELS) session with Year 1 pupils, a very skilled teaching assistant helped them to recognise and write the letters *b* and *d* and to know the names and the sounds of the letters.

79 The co-ordinator leads the subject well. She has used the expertise of the local authority's literacy consultant wisely to help her in her monitoring role. Together, they have recently identified a particular problem with the planning format and, after consultation with colleagues, a new system is being tried. It is entirely satisfactory and is being used well by teachers to evaluate their lessons and to make notes about pupils who do not achieve or who exceed the level of learning that is expected. Formal assessment systems are good. Tests are regularly administered so that standards and progress are monitored. However, there is very little close analysis of the elements within the test that pupils find easy or difficult so that weaknesses can be addressed or targets set for the improvement of groups of pupils or individuals.

MATHEMATICS

80 Inspection evidence indicates that current standards in mathematics are similar to the national average for pupils aged seven and eleven. This is the same as the results in the national tests in 2002, and matches the school's own assessment of the present Year 2 and Year 6 pupils. As the pupils start school with relatively limited mathematical skills they make good progress. Standards achieved by pupils in Years 2 and 6 have risen year on year at a faster rate than those nationally, representing good improvement in mathematics overall. When results in tests taken by Year 6 pupils in 2002 are compared with their results as Year 2 pupils in 1998, their progress is seen to be very good.

81 Girls at Oakham Primary do not do as well as boys in mathematics and they perform less well in tests than girls nationally, while boys do better than boys nationally. Lesson observation, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with teachers and pupils provide no

² Additional Literacy Support (ALS) for pupils in Years 3 and 4 and Early Literacy Support (ELS) for Year 1 pupils.

obvious explanation, leaving an anomaly which should be an area for further reflection and analysis by the school.

82 Pupils in Years 1 and 2 receive consistently good teaching. They are given tasks that challenge their thinking, but with sufficient guidance to tackle them successfully. For example, Year 2 pupils investigating division are carefully grouped so that they are building on their understanding. Lower attaining pupils, as well as getting extra help from the teacher, have well-planned activities that involve the use of practical apparatus, whereas more capable pupils work more theoretically, confidently explaining that division is the opposite of multiplication. However, some lessons are too long, lasting as much as 75 minutes. Pupils find it difficult to concentrate for this length of time, and a shorter lesson would encourage both pace and focus.

83 Pupils' books show that they make good progress over time, and that they are encouraged to form their numbers correctly and present calculations neatly, thereby aiding accuracy. In conversation, they show sound knowledge of mathematical concepts and also enjoyment as they try to solve puzzles and explain how they work things out. They work enthusiastically, sharing resources and helping each other.

84 The picture for pupils in Years 3 to 6 is similar, although not so consistent. There was greater variety in the quality of teaching seen; though good overall it ranged from sound to very good. Lessons, as well as pupils' books, suggest that the best teaching is in Years 5 and 6, although there is some good teaching in all year groups. Pupils cover a wide range of mathematical concepts and generally show good understanding. They are taught in ability sets, which helps teachers to target work at suitable levels. Within these sets there is also evidence that pupils are given different work that helps pupils of all abilities to make good progress, including those with special educational needs.

85 Attention is paid to all aspects of mathematics, and there are good examples of pupils investigating patterns, such as the 'Fibonacci' sequence of numbers, or the way numbers increase when a design such as a cross is extended. This emphasis on thinking as well as learning is evident when pupils are talked to. They can remember and use their knowledge to answer questions, but they also tackle unfamiliar topics in a logical and thoughtful way. They would benefit if more of their problem solving were related to realistic tasks. There is some use of accurate measurement in design and technology, but little evidence of using mathematical skills in science, for example, where pupils could produce graphs and calculations in a realistic context. There is work in pupils' mathematics books on compass direction, but no application of this knowledge when studying geography. Opportunities to use computers to improve understanding or display information are not fully exploited.

86 Teachers have other strengths that contribute to pupils' success. Planning is careful and thorough. There were occasions during the inspection where it was changed because pupils did not progress as quickly as expected, showing good use of teacher assessment. Relationships echo the ethos of the school and are good or very good, so that little time is wasted managing pupils. Expectations are generally high and teachers use effective methods that help pupils learn, as in a Year 6 lesson on angles where very good use was made of ICT for pupils to demonstrate their understanding to the whole class. Areas for development include the consistent use of correct mathematical vocabulary, and the use of display to support, celebrate and challenge pupils. There is little about mathematical vocabulary or methods on classroom walls, or evidence of pupils' work or investigations, and no interactive problems to set them thinking. The writing of lesson objectives into books every lesson, sometimes in language that many pupils do not fully understand, takes time that would be better spent on developing other skills.

87 The leadership of the co-ordinator is good and has helped to lift standards across the school. The evaluation of teachers' planning has led to changes that have rightly increased the focus on pupils' mental and oral skills. Work in books is monitored, and she has seen all classes taught and obtained a reliable picture of mathematics across the school. Pupils are regularly tested and their progress tracked; more use now needs to be made of this information to set targets for attainment, wherever possible involving the pupils themselves, so that they know what they need to do to improve. The subject is well placed for continued improvement.

SCIENCE

88 By the end of Year 2 and Year 6, standards are average overall. This reflects results in the 2002 national test and teacher assessments. However, pupils' skills in investigating and applying science do not always match their knowledge and understanding. Pupils in Year 2 and 6 have reasonable factual knowledge, and undertake the practical work they are set satisfactorily, but are not necessarily able to apply what they have learnt to other situations, work systematically and record and interpret results independently. For instance, although pupils in Year 6 have recently studied conduction of heat and electricity in their lessons, when asked to classify a selection of materials only the highest attaining pupils suggested these criteria, and in practice even these pupils were unable to sort the materials accurately. Most were only confident about sorting by external appearance such as rough and smooth. Year 6 pupils are still recording in simple tables similar to those which Year 2 pupils use, and they seldom interpret data from graphs. Throughout the school most pupils draw pictures rather than diagrams. There is very limited evidence of pupils initiating investigations themselves. Nevertheless, Year 6 pupils know the principles of fair testing and make sensible predictions, for example about which materials will dissolve. They know about the heart as a pump, and understand how pulse rate is affected by exercise; they know the function of the skeleton. They understand how materials can change from solids to liquids and gases, and can identify ways to separate different materials. Pupils know the parts of a flower and their functions in reproduction. All pupils make steady progress, those with special educational needs and limited literacy skills being suitably supported by adults so that they can complete the work set for the class. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected levels³ has increased significantly since the last inspection.

89 Year 5 pupils know which factors need to be kept the same to make their test fair, for instance when experimenting with using a greater number of ice cubes to keep drinks cool for longer; they produce a line graph of their results with help from the teacher. Pupils in Year 4 make appropriate predictions about what will happen to substances like butter, wax, sugar, jelly and chocolate when they are heated, before carefully observing the changes as they are heated and cooled. Year 3 pupils identify basic parts of a flowering plant, and give the functions of some of these, such as the root.

90 By Year 2 pupils make simple electrical circuits and know what happens if the circuit is broken. They identify parts of the circuit which might break and say why the bulb will not work. They understand that electricity can be dangerous if not handled correctly, and how mains electricity is brought to their homes. Year 1 pupils understand that some materials are better than others for waterproofing.

91 Although the test results do not show higher attaining pupils underachieving, written work and lesson observations indicate that some pupils could progress faster. Most work is the same for all pupils, and is usually closely controlled by teachers. There are few

³ Level 2 in Year 2 and level 4 in Year 6.

opportunities in lessons for these pupils to think beyond the task set, design their own investigations or apply their knowledge more widely. Though pupils are permitted to choose their own ways to record results, teachers do not give feedback on how successful this has been or share ideas with the rest of the class. In Year 4, for instance, a pupil asked whether he could record his observations of melting substances in a table. He was praised for his suggestion, but when the table proved to have too few columns for the purpose he received no advice on how to amend it to make it more useful. In Year 5, pupils who were ready to draw the graph of results had to wait unnecessarily, although the mathematical skills of the higher attainers were sufficiently secure for them to have attempted to do it independently. Test results show that girls do less well than boys. In some lessons boys are more willing to contribute to discussion and to experiment; they are more confident in these lessons and make better progress.

92 Science is soundly taught over the long term as it was at the time of the last inspection. The strengths identified then have been maintained, and precise lesson objectives have been introduced in response to the criticism made. Teaching and learning in a significant number of lessons during the inspection were judged to be good, but also one was unsatisfactory. Teachers manage pupils well and organise work efficiently, which enables them to let pupils take an active part in a range of practical activities. In Year 1, for instance, the teacher had prepared and organised resources, which she and the classroom assistants distributed as required. Meanwhile pupils filled in a simple recording sheet independently using the displayed words which were needed to complete it. Teachers are also effective at introducing and consolidating factual information so that pupils learn well. Teachers question pupils effectively. They also introduce and use the relevant technical vocabulary and often display the key words on the classroom wall for constant reference so that pupils use them in their answers and written work. In the best lessons, expectations of pupils are high and a brisk pace is maintained so that pupils have to concentrate and work hard. However, on some occasions pupils have to wait until the slowest member of the class is ready before moving on, even if pupils are only copying the learning objective from the board. On these occasions pupils are not as productive as they could be.

93 In the least effective lessons and over the longer term, shortcomings in teachers' subject knowledge hinder progress, particularly in investigative skills. Teachers' planning for the development of skills, such as increasing complexity of tables, interpretation of graphs and active encouragement of pupil-initiated work, is often relatively weak. As a result, pupils record predictions after conducting the activity, and do not learn to draw scientific diagrams precisely. Marking is not always effective so scientific vocabulary is not accurately spelt or correctly used. Graphs are not always appropriate for the data collected, or are drawn on the lined paper in the exercise book, not only making them difficult to construct but also inaccurate. Misconceptions are not always dealt with, and results are sometimes incomplete when conclusions are written so pupils do not actually learn to use and question their results. Nevertheless, teachers are good at making work relevant to the children's daily life such as uses of electricity in the classroom in Year 2. In Years 1 and 2, work is also effectively integrated to elicit greater understanding, as in work on light and dark which involved emotions about darkness and a study of nocturnal animals as well as light sources. This approach also contributes positively to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development with opportunities to wonder at the world, consider environmental issues and work co-operatively.

94 Pupils' literacy skills are actively and effectively promoted in science. Pupils regularly write well-structured and clear accounts of science work, having been taught to do so systematically in Years 1 and 2. Non-fiction texts such as the Big Book on electricity in Year 2 are used to promote reading. Numeracy skills are not used as effectively, although pupils do use measures and draw graphs from time to time. ICT is rarely used to support science

work, though it is used to download information from the Internet. Although there are sound procedures for assessing pupils' progress in science, they do not include a systematic or detailed breakdown of skills in investigating and applying science, and are not used to plan challenging work for higher attaining pupils. A newly appointed co-ordinator has rightly identified the need to develop scientific enquiry, which was criticised by the last inspection, and is due to monitor provision. Science provision is enhanced by lunchtime revision classes for Year 6, and a component of the residential visit for Year 5 involves science fieldwork.

ART AND DESIGN

95 Pupils throughout the school achieve average standards, but their ability to discuss and interpret works of art is better than this. Pupils make good progress through the school. They have good opportunities to experience a wide range of materials. They are taught a good range of skills and techniques and learn about different artists' work before producing their own work in a similar style.

96 No lessons were observed during the inspection because of timetabling arrangements. It is not possible to make a judgement on the quality of teaching. Examples of pupils' work were available and a discussion was held with a group of older pupils.

97 Year 6 pupils said they enjoyed art and design. They also described how art is a good way of expressing feelings and emotions. They described how this could be achieved through colour, texture and form. When asked to describe, compare and contrast several reproductions of famous artists' work they did so intelligently. They described the mood in a Degas family portrait using the colours, position, posture and gestures in the painting. They also recognised the importance of such paintings to tell us about life in the past. When describing reproductions of contrasting sculptures, again pupils expressed their responses intelligently. They recognised the strength in a Michelangelo sculpture of Moses and contrasted this with the gauntness of a Giacometti Walking Man suggesting that this showed a victim of war. They enjoyed talking about modern sculptures by Henry Moore and Brancusi.

98 Sufficient time is given to art and design despite the high proportion given to English and mathematics. In addition to timetabled lessons pupils enjoy the contribution of artists in residence; examples of lively work produced during these events are evident around the school. During their final year pupils spend a week at a residential centre where the focus is on the arts. This is a very valuable experience and enables pupils to spend more time on larger creations. Each term one whole day is given over to the arts when pupils in two year groups rotate between different activities. A recent innovation is a holiday competition and during half term the theme was 'spring flowers'. Nearly a hundred entries were displayed in the entrance. They included many aspects of art-paper sculpture, collage, painting, colouring, models and computer art. In some cases parents and children had enjoyed working together on their project.

99 The subject leader is enthusiastic, proactive and innovative. She has maintained the profile of the subject through the extra-curricular activities and her own enthusiasm. She has ensured that pupils' artwork is valued by maintaining good displays throughout the school. In addition to the activities mentioned above she also arranged a 'gallery sale' where every pupil had a work of art framed and displayed. These were sold to parents and friends. In all these ways art contributes well to pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development. The subject leader has compiled a useful portfolio of examples of work from each year group. The work included detailed annotation so it provides a useful record of work undertaken and standards achieved, and a resource for teachers. There is also a comprehensive

photographic record of other work and displays. The action plan includes achieving a better use of ICT including acquiring a digital camera.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

100 Attainment in Year 2 and Year 6 is average. Pupils make good progress through the school in the skills of evaluating and designing. Progress and attainment in making products, particularly joining skills, are unsatisfactory. Throughout the school pupils rely far too much on sticky tape for joining materials, particularly paper and card. Consequently attainment in this aspect is not as well developed as in most schools.

101 As only a few lessons were observed during the inspection, it is not possible to make an overall judgement on the quality of teaching. Teaching in the two Year 4 lessons observed was very good. In these lessons pupils designed a lamp for a chosen purpose or person. Teachers encouraged pupils to think carefully about whom the lamp was for and how it would be used. Pupils discussed these issues in pairs and recorded them in draft form. Pairs of pupils shared their ideas and made constructive comments to each other. Ideas were shared with the whole class and the teacher. Teachers questioned pupils well to extend their thinking where appropriate. Pupils were given time to prepare detailed labelled designs for their lamps. The pace of these lessons was brisk, and pupils were eager to engage in the task and use their knowledge of electricity and electric circuits derived from science lessons. Teachers engaged well with individual pairs during the planning and designing stages, questioning pupils effectively but not imposing their own ideas. Pupils produced some interesting ideas such as a lamp for an electrician or plumber using a rechargeable battery to avoid trailing flexes and a table lamp in a flower shape with dimmer switch and changeable colour filters for a friend's bedroom. The quality of design drawings was good; these included measurements, materials and equipment needed. Pupils refined their designs as they thought through and discussed their plans.

102 Pupils in infant classes were making wheeled vehicles from boxes. These vehicles included axles with wheels which rotated. Most joins were made using sticky tape. In discussion with teachers it transpired that they were unaware of how to make joins using hinges, tabs or triangles with holes to connect the axles. They also said that the glue available would not stick boxes with printed surfaces.

103 The subject leader has held the post for some time, but lacks confidence in the subject. He and other teachers would benefit from in-service training in basic skills. The overall scheme of work provides for an appropriate range of experiences including food technology, textiles and different mechanisms. A recently adopted assessment sheet for recording ongoing skills development will provide useful information over time when it has been implemented fully.

GEOGRAPHY

104 Standards are average in Year 2, but standards in Year 6 are below average. Year 2 pupils are competent at recognising the difference between human and physical features of localities, but accept sources as they are given and do not ask questions about them. The pupils make satisfactory progress. Year 6 pupils use their literacy skills well in finding information, note-taking and beginning to write structured reports. However, they lack a sufficient depth of understanding of a range of geographical skills, mostly those that are mathematics based, like scale and co-ordinates in mapping.

105 Provision for geography has improved since the previous inspection. The new structured planning scheme allows teachers to regard geography as a subject in its own

right. The co-ordinator has been careful to include all the required elements from Curriculum 2000. However, the strong focus on literacy and numeracy means that there is only limited time available for geography. So, while in individual lessons pupils often make good progress, over time their progress is unsatisfactory.

106 The quality of teaching in Years 1 and 2 is satisfactory. The teachers and classroom assistants give good support to pupils who have special educational needs, and to other groups. They use resources such as maps and illustrations well, to engage pupils' interest and to give a clear picture of the locality known as the island of Struay. The pupils therefore mostly have a positive attitude to geography. The teachers do not give sufficiently challenging work to the brightest pupils, who sometimes can become restless and talkative. Pupils tackle the worksheets willingly, but these often have a limited space for writing, so that they spend more time drawing and colouring than putting their thoughts into words.

107 The quality of teaching in Years 3 and 4 is good. The teachers use question and answer sessions particularly well to draw out the pupils' ideas and experiences. They focus on technical vocabulary and teach pupils key words on which to base their understanding. So Year 3 pupils knew that the seasons were connected with the tilt of the earth, and bit by bit worked out that meant one pole has continuous daylight and the other continuous night. Teachers encourage pupils to use and develop their speaking skills effectively. "Tell the whole class clearly" prompts Year 5 pupils to increase their reasoning powers in comparing water supply in different countries. Year 6 pupils use the computer effectively as one of their sources for research. The teachers create very good learning conditions where pupils are able to select their own topic for enquiry, on the theme of 'Rivers'. With clear guidance from the teacher the pupils begin to structure the format for their report writing. They behave very sensibly as they move around the classroom finding information. The girls are even more confident than the boys, as they flick through their past notes to select the appropriate piece of information. While they have a good supply of useful reference books, the staff lack good large-scale maps, and the nature of the atlases actually hinders the pupils in their work.

108 The co-ordinator has undertaken a valuable review of the subject. This has highlighted the need to monitor the older classes more closely, in order to gain a secure measure of standards. This implies the need for a well-moderated, displayed, portfolio of assessed work. She sees this being linked to a planning format that shows what standards would need to be in each year, to ensure that pupils move from satisfactory to good progress, and to enable Year 6 to move securely into level 5 work.

HISTORY

109 Standards are average in Years 2 and 6. Year 2 pupils have a sound knowledge of a range of famous people and about the Fire of London. They are not as strong in interpreting why or when things happened in different historical periods. Year 6 pupils have a satisfactory understanding of social life in Victorian times and are beginning to reason why events happened as they did. However, they have a quite weak sense of chronology and place the start of Queen Victoria's reign in the 1940s, and the Romans in the middle of the Tudors.

110 The school has adopted a new planning scheme since the previous inspection. In it the co-ordinator has rightly tried to give coverage of the full programme of study to meet the requirements of Curriculum 2000. It allows teachers to plan clearer lesson objectives, and concentrate more closely on historical skills. This enables pupils to make sound progress in lessons, but somewhat less than satisfactory throughout their years in school. Good work in Years 5 and 6 enables pupils to reach satisfactory standards by the time they leave, but pupils' experiences are not as rich as they should be. This is because the time allocated to

history does not allow teachers to go deeply enough into the subject and make the skills and knowledge secure. The way the time is allocated in blocks, rather than regular weekly lessons, means there are gaps when pupils have time to forget facts and dull the skills they have acquired. The teachers and classroom assistants give good support to pupils who have special educational needs. They make good progress because they are developing their writing skills also.

111 Although no actual lessons were observed, the work in the pupils' books suggests that the quality of teaching is satisfactory. Teachers' medium-term plans are good and lay out clearly the skills and knowledge they intend to cover. Their lesson plans identify the materials and methods they will use to create sound learning conditions, as pupils find out information for themselves. Teachers in both key stages make good links with literacy in helping pupils learn the different ways in which history can be recorded. For example, Year 2 pupils studied eye-witness accounts of the Fire of London, and put their learning into the form of letters, diaries, charts and paintings. Year 5 pupils wrote what it felt like to be a Spartan soldier at the battle of Marathon. Year 6 pupils made detailed notes from a database of Victorian census material, but are not yet confident in writing these up independently as an extended report without considerable help from the teachers. This is a good example of the computer as a useful learning tool, but generally it is underused for history.

112 Teachers take care to provide a wide range of sources for the pupils to study, although the school's own stock of artefacts is limited. Some resources, such as timelines, are not sufficiently in evidence around the school. Teachers make the distinction clear between original sources and accounts at second hand. Despite the enthusiasm of the teachers, the pupils, particularly the brighter ones, are not yet raising their own questions about the past. This suggests that the questioning approach needs to be embedded lower down the school, and that the higher attaining pupils need challenging extension tasks in lessons. Teachers assess pupils' progress with a basic end of year achievement record, but this is not feeding into targets to enable the school to get some of the Year 6 pupils confidently into level 5. The co-ordinator's monitoring of the lower school has given her a good grasp of standards for younger pupils. Her action plan includes the monitoring of the older classes, and the introduction of a system of moderating standards. This will give teachers, and pupils also, a consistent view of standards, particularly if displayed as part of the classroom learning environment.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

113 Standards are below average overall, although pupils' word-processing skills are broadly average throughout the school. The school has rightly identified the need for better facilities and these were due to be installed within the month following the inspection. During the inspection most of pupils' timetabled ICT lessons were taking place in a cramped, uncomfortable suite containing just eight computers, so that half of each class had to work on laptops set up in a corridor which is a busy thoroughfare. Although one computer was available in most classrooms for use on other occasions, there had also been problems with some of these machines just before the inspection. The difficulties of the resources and the greater demands of the latest ICT curriculum have resulted in less satisfactory standards than at the time of the last inspection. In some lessons pupils are acquiring the skills commensurate with their ages but they have not had sufficient time using ICT to make the expected progress in all aspects of the curriculum because of the constraints of the accommodation. All pupils make similar progress, although pupils with special educational needs who use ICT to support their development of literacy skills often make better progress in word processing.

114 Year 6 pupils are able to plan the first part of a *PowerPoint* presentation selecting effects appropriately to support their geography work on rivers. However, their choices are restricted to those they can recall from previous experience as, for practical reasons, their lesson takes place in the classroom with no access to a computer. They have used simple spreadsheets to calculate the price of multiples of goods, and entered data in a simple database but there has been no development or further application of these skills. Pupils have used word processing including borders and selected features such as underlining to produce newspaper reports. Year 5 plan a classroom using a modelling program. They have produced a simple table, not involving calculation, using spreadsheets and made a collage of pictures downloaded from the Internet to support work on the planets in science. In word processing they are able to add pictures and word art and use devices such as bullet points to make their work clearer. Year 4 pupils produce a poster on lions using text boxes and changing font, size and colour for effect. They have had some very limited experience of recording temperature and enlarging and reducing images. In the current year the only evidence of work on ICT skills in Year 3 is word processing, and changing colour, font and size. A significant number of pupils in Years 3 to 6 are still uncertain about using the keyboard. Pupils' skills in controlling and programming instructions are weaker than in most schools.

115 Year 2 pupils have used a graphics program to draw pictures involving geometric shapes and free line drawing. They have colour filled backgrounds and shapes and some pupils have used other programs such as Spray Can. The majority of pupils can save and print their own work, some with adult assistance. In word processing they can edit text by inserting spaces and putting in full stops and changing letters to capitals. Year 1 pupils have created a creature using the line, colour change and background colour fill icons on a graphics program and have imported pictures using Clip Art. In their lesson, which took place on one computer in the classroom, only a few pupils had any actual practice at these skills.

116 Teachers make the best use of the limited accommodation, and teaching in ICT is sound. Instructions and demonstrations are used appropriately to set up the activities so that pupils know what to do, and prompt sheets are provided to enable them to be independent subsequently. As far as possible, interventions with pupils conducting tasks are timely (it is not always possible to see which pupils need help) and adult support is used appropriately to ensure they are. Pupils are generally productive, and concentrate on the task in hand. However, not all teachers are vigilant about ensuring pupils share the computer fairly, and as a result some pupils – usually less confident girls – do not actually do much of the work. Different work is rarely planned for higher attainers, even if they have access to computers regularly at home and are very confident users. Assessment systems are not detailed enough to provide information on pupils' current ICT skills. The decision to conduct some lessons in the classroom with access to one computer for demonstration, or no computer at all, is usually appropriately taken. However, ICT is not regularly used to support work across the curriculum to help mitigate pupils' lack of practice. Some good examples were seen, such as pairs of pupils word processing their writing in a Year 6 literacy lesson. However, too many lessons in which ICT could have been useful did not include it, such as writing a set of instructions in a Year 3 literacy lesson. Once the new equipment is available, this is a priority for the school in order to improve pupils' progress.

117 The co-ordinator, who was absent during the inspection, has monitored provision during the last school year and identified some of the strengths of the teaching. Weaknesses in the provision in ICT form a major part of the school improvement plan. The place of ICT across the curriculum and the balance between aspects of the subject itself are under review.

118 The ICT curriculum is enhanced for older pupils by the opportunity to attend an extra-curricular computer club.

MUSIC

119 As at the last inspection, standards are average across the school and pupils make satisfactory progress. However, the music specialist has left the school and each teacher is now responsible for his/her class music. Not enough lessons were seen to make an overall judgement about teaching but, in the three that were seen, it was at least satisfactory. There are two co-ordinators who work well together. They are enthusiastic and are available to help colleagues who may lack confidence. A new commercial scheme of work has just been introduced and is being evaluated. It provides teachers with very helpful guidance and a CD of music that enables them to plan and deliver their lessons effectively. A recently introduced assessment system will enable teachers to judge the standards that pupils achieve at the end of each year.

120 All aspects of music are covered. Pupils regularly sing in assemblies and they have a repertoire of songs and hymns that they enjoy. Singing is good throughout the school. It is lively, rhythmical and tuneful. Words can clearly be identified and the tone of singing usually reflects the mood that they conjure up. When the younger pupils created a somewhat harsh tone, they quickly changed when the teacher encouraged them to "sing sweetly". The members of the choir, who meet during a lunchtime each week, perform vibrantly, for example when singing an African song in two parts that included movement and instrumental accompaniment.

121 Pupils in Years 1 and 2 regularly listen to music and explore the mood that it creates. A collage inspired by Britten's *Sea Interludes* provided evidence of this. Year 6 pupils have taken this further and have listened to *Rhapsody in Blue* to identify when the clarinet glissando occurred. Progress in this aspect of music is satisfactory as is the development of composing skills. Simple graphic scores have been produced in Year 2 to accompany a calypso. In a lesson in Year 3, pupils created rhythmical phrases for a 'Space Shuttle Rap' and performed them accurately to a taped accompaniment. From an early age, pupils learn the elements of music. Those in Year 1 explored high and low sounds in an effective lesson using differently pitched voices to sing *Twinkle, twinkle little star* in the style of Father, Mother or Baby Bear. By Year 4, pupils understand how to create an 'ostinato'; those in Year 5 explore the 'dynamics' in music and Year 6 pupils identify a 'crescendo' in a composition by Thomas Tallis.

122 Teachers use resources well. The computer was used to play the CD that accompanied two of the lessons seen and performances are regularly recorded on cassette tapes to provide evidence of the activities undertaken and to enable pupils to evaluate the work of their classmates. However, pupils do not use computers, for example, to compose music. Resources are barely adequate and there are insufficient tuned percussion instruments. However, there are good opportunities outside lessons for pupils to learn to play instruments. An impressive number are learning stringed instruments. Three pupils in Year 2 were observed playing their violins and showed obvious enjoyment and careful attention to correct technique. Similarly, two older girls produced rich sounds from their double basses. Recorder groups operate in each year group in the juniors and the treble recorder is taught as well as the usual descant. Pupils regularly perform in the community, for example at music festivals and for older people at Christmas. Music too plays a significant part in school productions and is contributing well to the pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development. Those in Year 6 say that they have particularly enjoyed

composing 'Firework Music' during a recent 'Phase Day'⁴ and are looking forward to the musical element of their residential visit this year which will focus on 'The Arts'.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

123 Standards are average throughout the school, as they were at the time of the last inspection. However, since 1998 the amount of time available for physical education has been reduced and standards have only been maintained because of the quality of teaching, which is consistently good. The school is aware that the time available for physical education is below average and is insufficient to promote good progress or to reach higher standards.

124 Pupils do receive sufficient opportunities to swim, generally in Years 4 and 5. This experience enables most pupils to reach the national target of 25 metres and many pupils exceed this by some margin. Several pupils in Year 6 explained how they were members of external swimming clubs and were able to swim very long distances in several strokes as well as competing in interclub galas. Standards in other areas of physical education are satisfactory.

125 Two lessons in which pupils developed bat and ball co-ordination were observed in Year 5. In both lessons the teaching and progress made by pupils were good. In both lessons there was a good structure of warm-up followed by a series of activities that improved pupils' skills in keeping a ball under control using tennis rackets. Having established individual control, pupils were asked to work in pairs to develop rallies, learning how to work together. Good use was made of targets, with teachers encouraging pupils saying, "Now try to get to ten without a break." One pupil who was especially talented managed to keep the ball in the air for 130 continuous hits and then when working in a pair managed a rally of over 30 shots. However, the overall attainment was average.

126 In a dance/drama session in Year 4 pupils responded very well to African music, using their bodies to make shapes and to develop sequences. The teacher showed real skill in identifying new ideas and used one pupil who was sitting out of the lesson to spot interesting ideas and developments so that he was involved and felt part of the lesson.

127 In a gymnastics lesson in Year 1, pupils displayed above average control in their movements and were able to use small apparatus very imaginatively. The range of movements, dismounts from apparatus and overall quality of work reflected the quality of teaching that was well informed and meant that very good control was maintained throughout.

128 Pupils respond well in physical education, clearly enjoying the freedom and opportunities to use their bodies. Provision in lessons is extended through after-school clubs in football and netball, and even before school when a teacher from the local secondary school comes to teach a pre-school fitness club. Discussions with pupils in Year 6 reveal that opportunities for competitive sport are limited currently both within school and against other schools. Along with the development of the curriculum to provide more time for physical education, the profile of physical education and sport in general needs to be raised significantly. The school is in the process of developing an all-weather games surface.

⁴ A day when pupils visit different teachers and pursue activities usually centred around the arts – music, art, design and technology and dance, for example.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

129 Standards in religious education are similar to those found at the last inspection. Only two lessons were observed, in Years 5 and 6, but discussions with pupils and the scrutiny of work from all year groups suggest that pupils' attainment is average, indicating satisfactory improvement. The co-ordinator has developed a good overall plan for delivering religious education, using the locally agreed syllabus, government guidelines and the school's own development units. While this gives a broad range of faiths to study, and there is evidence of this in pupils' work, pupils in both Years 2 and 6, while clear about Christianity, are limited in their knowledge and understanding of other world religions.

130 Pupils make satisfactory progress over time, but their achievement is uneven. This is due both to the amount of work expected and to the quality of teaching. There is a very positive start in Year 1, with a wide range of activities that pupils respond to very well. The quality of writing is high, with lots of original work and the opportunity for pupils to use their literacy skills, and teachers mark the work in a helpful and positive way. There is much less work in Year 2 books, and while it is of good quality, pupils talking about it are only confident about the Christian aspects. They know that Jesus told stories, and understand the moral of the 'Prodigal son', for example. They also explain the significance of the main events in Jesus' life, such as his death and resurrection: "Your body dies but your spirit goes to heaven". However, although they drew hands with Rangoli patterns on them, they do not remember why, or relate it to Hinduism and the celebration of Diwali.

131 There is a similar picture for older pupils. The work in their books covers the Hindu and Muslim religions, and there is some good comparison in Year 3 of the symbols used in these faiths with those of Christianity. In the same way, the Bible story of creation is contrasted with that told by the Australian aborigines. Pupils in Year 4 write for a variety of purposes, for example 'interviewing' the shepherds at Jesus' birth, diary entries for the Last Supper, or telling about Palm Sunday as a member of the crowd. In Year 6, pupils are encouraged to think and investigate, listening to music and producing pictures to convey their emotions, or researching the key features of different religions as a group before reporting back to the class. In Year 5 the work is not consistent. In one class the writing is mainly original, often with a thoughtful focus on pupils' personal reaction to religious beliefs; while pupils in the other class produce plenty of work, it is virtually all copied by all the pupils, whatever their level of attainment.

132 Talking to pupils in Year 6 suggests that this wider coverage of different faiths is fairly recent. That said, they have an encouraging attitude to the subject, showing sound basic knowledge and an ability to look beyond the factual. They understand prayer as a way of talking to God, and that people do this for a variety of reasons, and that meditation is a way of concentrating and focusing thoughts. When asked why prophets from different faiths tell us to beware of riches, they offer "greed", "too much focus on money", "losing friends" and "forgetting about religion and what's important".

133 The two lessons seen, in Years 5 and 6, confirm that pupils are often encouraged to think and investigate. Pupils in Year 5, having considered the different types of writing in the Bible, tried to decide which bits Christians would regard as literally true, and which are stories to help people understand. In Year 6, pupils consider different communities, showing good understanding of the responsibilities and benefits this involves. For example, 'to work as a team' is a responsibility that leads to the benefit of 'teamwork': sophisticated thinking for an eleven year old! In both lessons pupils were encouraged to work in small groups or with partners, which helped speaking and listening skills as well as social attitudes.

134 There are now sufficient resources and artefacts to support the curriculum, an improvement from the previous inspection. There are still too few opportunities for pupils to learn at first hand about other faiths and places of worship, either through visits out or visitors to the school, and this is an area that the school needs to address.