

INSPECTION REPORT

LARK HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Edgeley

LEA area: Stockport

Unique reference number: 106056

Headteacher: Mrs L Bragg

Reporting inspector: Mrs J E Platt
11565

Dates of inspection: 27th to 29th January 2003

Inspection number: 246550

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Infant and junior

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 5 to 11 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Northgate Road
Edgeley
Stockport

Postcode: SK3 9PH

Telephone number: 0161 480 6295

Fax number: 0161 477 9489

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs L Turner

Date of previous inspection: February 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Lark Hill is an average sized community primary school situated in a relatively disadvantaged area of Stockport. There are 205 boys and girls on roll. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic groups and only one pupil is in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. Twenty four per cent of pupils are identified as having special education needs and this is above the national average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. One pupil has a formal Statement of Special Educational Need. The proportion of pupils moving in and out of the school during the school year is a disadvantage for the school. Overall attainment on entry to the school is well below average especially in language development, although the full range of attainment is represented. The school is involved in the Stockport Excellence Cluster and has Investors in People status.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective school that is helping pupils, despite many problems, to make at least satisfactory progress. Standards in science are above average in Year 6 and achievement is very good. From a low starting point pupils make good progress in reading and speaking and listening to reach the level expected for their age in Year 6. Achievement is satisfactory in writing and mathematics although standards are below average. Standards are improving due to good teaching. Leadership from the headteacher and deputy headteacher is strong and the school has a clear direction to raise standards. The school achieves its aim of being a happy place to learn. Pupils gain considerably in maturity during their time in school. The value for money provided by the school is good.

What the school does well

- Standards in science are above average in Year 6 and achievement is very good.
- Children get off to a good start in the Reception class.
- Teaching is good and leads to effective learning and in the best lessons there are high expectations of pupils.
- Management by the headteacher and key staff is good and action is being taken to further raise standards.
- The school provides a stimulating range of experiences, which leads to a caring and thriving community. Personal development is very good and pupils grow in maturity during their time in school.
- The partnership with parents is very good.

What could be improved

- Standards in writing could be higher throughout the school.
- Standards in mathematics and especially the achievement of higher attaining pupils.
- Standards in reading and science in Years 1 and 2.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made satisfactory progress overall since the last inspection in February 1998 although the pace has been slow. A contributory factor for this has been considerable staff changes including the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Now that staffing has stabilised many new initiatives have been put in place which are starting to have a positive effect on standards in Year 6 and this is reflected in the improvement in national test results. As yet, the effect of these improvements is less apparent in Year 2. Skills in speaking and listening have improved and are now average. Writing remains below average but every year more pupils are reaching the level expected for their age. With the introduction of new planning guidelines in science, standards have significantly improved in Years 3 to 6 and are above average although science remains an area for development in Years 1 and 2.

Other concerns have received attention. Good assessment procedures are now in place and a closer watch is kept on individual progress. Monitoring of teaching has improved and has led to more very good teaching being seen during the inspection.

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	D	E	D	C
Mathematics	B	E	D	C
Science	C	E*	A	A*

Key	
Highest 5 per cent in the country	A*
Well above average	A
Above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E
Lowest 5 per cent nationally	E*

Results of national tests for 11 year-olds rose last year and the school was identified as the most improved school in the authority. The comparison with similar schools shows the pupils are doing as well as expected in English and mathematics. In science, every pupil reached the level expected for their age, which is a significant achievement. When compared with similar schools results were in the top five per cent nationally. The school has to overcome many barriers that are affecting the school's overall performance. Not least of these is the number of pupils who leave the school or start at different times, which can disturb their learning, and the varying numbers of pupils with special educational needs. Consequently, test results have fluctuated in recent years. Nevertheless, the overall trend has been similar to the national picture.

Current standards in Year 6 are average in reading and speaking and listening and this reflects good achievement for many pupils. Although progress is satisfactory in writing and mathematics standards are below average. Pupils find it difficult to write imaginatively and to use their numeracy skills to solve problems. In response to a focus on investigation in science, standards are above average and achievement is very good. Targets for last year were exceeded. In response to the strong teaching seen in Year 6 the school is well placed to reach the suitably challenging targets set for this year.

In 2002, the results of national tests for seven-year-olds were well below the national average in reading and writing and were below average compared with similar schools. In mathematics, results were in the lowest five per cent in the country compared with all schools and similar schools. These results were lower than the previous year because the group included more pupils with special educational needs. Current standards show an improvement although remain below average. From a low starting point at the start of Year 1, overall achievement is satisfactory. However, the needs of higher attaining pupils are not met and they are underachieving. The low number reaching above average levels is bringing down overall standards.

Children in the Reception class enjoy coming to school and get off to a flying start to their education. Considering that many start with well below average attainment, their achievement is good although they do not reach the level expected for their age by the time they move into Year 1.

Pupils with special educational needs and those who need help because English is not their first spoken language, make good progress. Their needs are quickly identified and effective help enables them to play a full part in school life. Those who have behavioural difficulties especially thrive in this caring community.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils are proud of their school and they are interested and eager to be involved in the many activities on offer. The majority work hard in lessons.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Learning is rarely disturbed by any misbehaviour. Older pupils are mature and very responsible.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships are very good and pupils are caring and considerate towards each other.
Attendance	Below the national average. The vast majority of pupils attend well but a very small number of pupils take holidays in term time and this disturbs their learning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	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.

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good. Teaching in all lessons seen was always at least satisfactory and often better. The higher quality teaching was seen in the Reception class and in Years 3 to 6. In these classes tasks are more challenging and this increases the pupils' rate of learning.

The teaching of English and mathematics is good in the Reception class and in Years 3 to 6 and satisfactory in Years 1 and 2. The teaching of literacy skills is satisfactory overall, but teachers do not always develop pupils' writing effectively. Pupils are not always clear about how to improve their work as a result, they are not using the skills taught in literacy lessons in their independent writing. Teaching of numeracy is satisfactory in Years 1 and 2 and is better for older pupils when brisk openings challenge them to try out their numeracy skills. Teachers are good at drawing out from pupils the methods used in their calculations.

Children in the Reception class thoroughly enjoy school because of the rich variety of experiences planned for them. Every day brings something new and this greatly enhances their learning. Early literacy and numeracy skills are taught well through imaginative games and practical tasks and children are enthusiastic learners.

The learning needs of the pupils with special educational needs and those whose first spoken language is not English are fully met. Tasks match the targets in their individual education plans and classroom assistants offer sensitive help to check they participate fully in lessons. The needs of higher attaining pupils are not met in Years 1 and 2. Teachers do not always plan in enough detail for these higher attaining pupils or challenge them enough. The pace of lesson is not always brisk enough to maintain the interest of these pupils.

A key strength in the teaching is the strong and supportive management of behaviour so pupils know what is expected of them. Lessons are carefully planned and often include an interesting variety of practical activities and opportunities to work in groups that make learning enjoyable and help maintain pupils' concentration.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. Teachers plan a range of imaginative experiences that are rich and relevant to the pupils' needs. An excellent range of visits, visitors and after school activities further enrich the curriculum. Extra sessions are planned for pupils needing an extra boost and these are helping these pupils to improve. However, the timing of these sessions leads to pupils missing important parts of their literacy lessons and this disturbs learning in these lessons.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Effective help from teachers and support assistants enable these pupils to successfully take part in the same activities as others.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. Checks are promptly carried out to find out if these pupils need help. When required additional advice is sought from the local authority to enable these pupils to cope with ordinary lessons.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Spiritual development is very good and staff grasp every chance to promote pupils' self-esteem and instil in them an appreciation of the world. Very good provision for social and moral development ensures pupils consider others and know what is acceptable behaviour. Members of the Children's Council gain a good sense of citizenship and democracy. Pupils have many opportunities to learn about their own and other cultures.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Procedures for child protection and ensuring pupils' welfare are good. The learning mentor offers good help to those who do not attend regularly and this has improved attendance. The school has effective systems to track pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science. Teachers do not always make best use of information gained from assessment when planning lessons so tasks in some lessons are not matched to pupils' ability.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have a good team approach to decision making and the school has a clear sense of direction. Subject leaders effectively manage their subjects and action plans are in place to raise standards. Teaching is monitored and has improved.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactory. Governors are supportive and carry out their duties purposefully. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are not fully involved in the early stages of deciding priorities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school carefully evaluates its performance. Where concerns have been identified, improvements are considered and implemented and are starting to have a positive effect on standards.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The school uses the money it receives well and applies the principle of best value carefully when making major spending decisions.

	Specific grants are spent effectively in the school's determination to raise standards.
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PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff are welcoming and parents feel comfortable discussing any concerns.• The school is well led and managed.• Teachers expect pupils to work hard.• Every child is valued and helped to become mature and responsible.• Children are happy and enjoy school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents have very positive views of the school and raised no significant areas of concern.

The inspectors support the many positive comments made by parents. The school works hard to establish a close working partnership with parents.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards in science are above average in Year 6 and achievement in Years 3 to 6 is very good.

1. Standards in Year 6 are above average and this represents very good achievement for many pupils.
2. The results of national tests for 11 year-olds in 2002 were well above the national average. When compared with similar school they were in the top five per cent in the country. Every pupil reached the average standard and this is a significant achievement and especially represents very good progress for pupils with special educational needs. More than half of the pupils exceeded the level expected for their age and this was well above the national average. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good and has been brought about by:
 - more detailed planning guidelines with a focus on skills to be developed;
 - effective management with teaching monitored and advice shared with colleagues to improve teaching;
 - additional support sessions provided which include revisiting previous science test papers to show pupils how to tackle the questions;
 - extra help in the science tests for pupils with literacy difficulties so that their literacy skills do not hold back their performance in science.
3. Pupils in Year 6 have reaped the benefits of these changes especially the focus on investigation and they enjoy the practical aspects of the subject. In the lesson seen in Year 6, pupils quickly grasped the idea that some substances can be changed and then changed back to their original state whereas the change in other substances is irreversible. Teaching is very good with high expectations and good subject knowledge. Pupils rise to the challenge and accurately use scientific terminology in their explanations. For example, one pupil worked out the reason for sand not dissolving and explained, *water molecules are too small to hold the sand particles* and another *sand particles are too heavy*. Learning is enhanced by the teacher's use of everyday comparisons to link the aim the lesson to the pupils' own experiences. The penny dropped for one pupil as he exclaimed, *it's a bit like a tea bag*, showing a clear understanding of the purpose of filter paper. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are challenged to think for themselves and work out their own ideas. The teacher listens carefully to their questions and then leads them on to answer them themselves through describing what they can see and what this means. By the end of the lesson, pupils had a good understanding of the processes of filtration and evaporation. All are confident putting forward their ideas because they know the teacher values their input. Higher attaining pupils are confident at drawing conclusions from their findings.
4. Standards in other aspects of the curriculum are also above average. Pupils relate science to their everyday life as they appreciate how rotting takes place and the importance of cleanliness. The focus is clearly on learning through first hand experience and this was very evident in the detailed work on light. This shows a thorough understanding of how light travels from a given source and through investigation pupils have used their numeracy skills to calculate how the size of the shadow is affected by the position of the light source.

5. Teachers enhance the formal curriculum with a science week that includes all classes. A display of investigations is set up and parents were very impressed with the work their children had completed.

Children get off to a good start in the Reception class.

6. Children enter school with a range of experiences but overall attainment is often below the level expected for this age range especially in language and communication skills. In response to good teaching and a very stimulating range of experiences, children make good progress although they do not reach the early learning goals¹ by the time they leave the Reception class. Teacher and support staff make an effective team with a secure knowledge of the needs of this age range. They know when to stand back and encourage independence and when to step in and offer help. This very effectively builds up children's confidence and greatly enhances their learning. This approach is especially beneficial for the children with special educational needs and those in the early stages of speaking English. All staff keep a watchful eye on these children to see they are fully involved in all activities. Careful records of progress are kept and activities planned to cater for their needs. This enables them to make good progress.
7. Children enter the class happily and are keen to find out what exciting activities are planned for their day. This is because the teacher and support staff provide stimulating tasks that capture the children's interest so that they are eager to learn. During the inspection the focus was on celebrating the Chinese New Year and every opportunity was carefully thought out to enhance the children's understanding of another culture. The role-play corner was an attractive Chinese restaurant where children happily took on the role of cook, waitress and customer. This greatly enhances their social skills as they learn to share and play alongside other children. Support staff play a full and active part in all activities. The cooking of Chinese food was enjoyed by all as children learn the names of different vegetables, practise cutting and discuss how the food changes when it is heated.
8. Children recognise that writing has a purpose because there are ample opportunities to practise their early writing skills. Few can write words, other than their names, but enjoy making marks and using a few letters in their attempts at menus and writing thank you letters. Books are readily available and the teacher uses these effectively to introduce children to reading skills. Children take books home regularly and enjoy talking about their favourite stories. Most recognise pictures help to tell the story and a few are reading some frequently used words. Letters and their sounds are taught well and children are starting to recognise them in words although many are not yet able to link them together to tackle new words.
9. Every opportunity is grasped to extend children's understanding of numbers. They fish for ducks with numbers on, make numerals out of dough and practise matching shapes and colours. When cooking the classroom assistant expertly extends the children's knowledge of shapes as a child identifies a triangle and then spots, circles and squares. Most children, including those with special educational needs, can name these shapes correctly. A review of books shows that most can count from 1 to 7 although they have difficulty writing these numerals. With pictures to help most are starting to understand the idea of more by adding an extra picture and then

¹ Early learning goals are the expectations for most children to reach by the end of the Reception class. They refer mainly to achievements children make in connection with the six areas of learning recommended for this age range.

counting again to find the answer. Lower attaining children make good progress from their low starting point and are learning to recognise numbers to five. Children are less confident counting beyond 10 or using their skills to solve practical problems.

10. Other aspects of the curriculum for this age range are similarly stimulating to enhance learning. Children enjoy experimenting with water and with effective adult help start to understand about floating and sinking. Visitors make learning very relevant to the children. During the inspection the nurse told them about her duties and then extended their knowledge of their bodies as they listened to their heart beating through a stethoscope. They learnt about the importance of cleanliness. One *doctor* explained *I am wearing gloves because of the germs*. The teacher has high expectations and children are encouraged to give care and attention to their work. For example, they are taught to draw plans of their shape pictures and boats before they make them and then refer to them to see if they have achieved what they set out to do. Creative skills are developed imaginatively and tasks allow pupils to experiment. This can be seen in the imaginative pictures created by blowing through straws and the attractive collages using leaves and twigs collected on a walk. Ample opportunities are available to practise cutting, sticking and painting.
11. This combination of good teaching and variety of carefully planned activities means that children get off to a flying start to their school life.

Teaching is good and leads to effective learning.

12. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. In the 16 lessons seen teaching was very good in seven lessons, good in three and satisfactory in the rest. No teaching was less than satisfactory and this is an improvement since the last inspection. The best teaching seen was in the Reception class and in Years 3 to 6 when the great majority of teaching was very good. In these lessons, the brisk pace of teaching maintains pupils' interest and leads to much new learning.
13. A positive feature in the great majority of lessons is the genuine concern teachers and support staff have for their pupils. Pupils are eager to contribute in class discussions because they know their ideas are valued. This is especially valuable for the pupils with special educational needs and those whose first spoken language is not English who play a full part in lessons. Work is set for these pupils that matches the targets in their individual educational plans and enables them to make good progress. Teachers and classroom assistants work together as a team and this enables lessons to run smoothly. The overall quality of planning is good and makes it clear what pupils are to learn in lessons. In the very good lessons in Years 3 to 6, teachers share these with pupils and they have a clear understanding of the purpose of their tasks. The conclusions of these lessons are very good as teachers return to the focus of the lesson and check that all have fully understood. This was very evident in Year 6 and the next lesson was adjusted because it was clear that a few pupils needed further practice.
14. In most lessons teachers have a good understanding of the subjects they teach and ask probing questions that revise and extend pupils' understanding. It is teachers' enthusiasm for scientific investigation and their understanding of the subject that has led to improvement in standards in Years 3 to 6. Teaching of English and mathematics is satisfactory in Years 1 and 2 and good in Years 3 to 6. Teaching for the older pupils is more challenging and expectations are higher in these years.

Tasks are provided that allow pupils to apply their skills in a range of activities. This greatly enhances their learning and achievement increases as pupils move through the school.

15. A positive feature of many lessons is the variety of methods teachers use to make lessons interesting. In the Reception class and in Year 1, the use of puppets captures pupils' interest as they learn new letters and their sounds. Most lessons include opportunities to work in a group or with a partner and this has greatly increased pupils' speaking and listening skills. These skills are also increased by the opportunities for role-play in most classes. Year 1 have a castle and in Year 5 pupils have been given the freedom to build a space station. These activities successfully promote pupils' social skills as well as their conversational skills.

Management by the headteacher and key staff is good and action is being taken to further raise standards.

16. The headteacher provides purposeful leadership. She has been effective in uniting the staff and sustaining the friendly atmosphere in the school. Soon after her appointment she quickly realised the school needed to focus more on assessment and sharpen the focus on raising standards. She has successfully managed the introduction of systems to evaluate the school's performance and track individual progress. This has successfully resolved a weakness identified in the previous inspection. As a result, the school now has a clearer picture of standards and of the progress of individual pupils.
17. The deputy headteacher shares her expertise as a very good teacher as well as providing very effective support for the headteacher. Together they combine their skills to focus on providing the best for the pupils. Parents consider the school is well led and managed.
18. In response to the previous inspection the role of subject leaders for English, mathematics and science has improved. Management of these subjects is now good because subject leaders have more opportunities to find out about standards in their subjects. This effective evaluation of performance leads to detailed action plans and clear action to raise standards. This has been very effective in science where the weakness in investigation has been resolved with the introduction of new guidelines and opportunities to share good practice. Teachers give more attention to practical activities and standards have risen significantly in Year 6.
19. The management of the needs of pupils with special educational needs and those who need help because English is not their first spoken language is good. Assessment information is used promptly to identify these pupils and to draw up individual plans that include specific targets to meet their needs. Classroom assistants and teachers plan work to match these targets and progress is closely monitored. As a result, progress is good because work builds effectively on prior attainment. When necessary external advice is sought to ensure these pupils are receiving the most suitable help.
20. More attention is now given to monitoring teaching and this has improved especially in Years 3 to 6. There remains scope for this good practice to be shared with colleagues. Performance management has been successfully introduced and has led to training provided to match both individual needs and the needs of the school. Good attention is given to staff development. This includes training for classroom

assistants and midday assistants so that their help is most effective. This plays a major part in the smooth running of the school and the happy atmosphere maintained throughout the day. A recent review of the school's Investors in People status reported the school continues to meet the standards required for this status.

21. The improved assessment procedures are providing the school with a wealth of assessment information. The school is now making good use of this information to evaluate the school's performance and to predict targets for the future. This information is also being used to tackle identified weaknesses. This can be seen in extra support provided for Year 3 pupils because the group performed poorly in the national tests. The school is well aware of the weakness in writing and has organised training and writing workshops to offer more guidance to staff.
22. The school's plan for improvement is clearly focussed on raising standards. Current targets include numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology and these are based on the subject leaders' audit of standards in their subjects. Financial planning is good and is linked to identified priorities. The plan is easy to follow and action is often very practical, such as to introduce new reading help guidelines for parents. The school has many new initiatives in place to raise standards. These changes are now starting to reap benefits in standards in Year 6 but have not yet filtered through to Year 2. However, with the strength in management the school is now well placed to further raise standards.

The school provides a stimulating range of experiences which leads to a happy and thriving school. Personal development is very good and pupils grow in maturity in their time in school.

23. The curriculum is varied and includes a good balance of academic, creative and physical experiences. As a result, teachers plan relevant and exciting activities that stimulate pupils' interest and have a significant effect on their learning. This is an obvious strength in the Reception class and there is always a buzz of activity and a sense of excitement in lessons. The focus of the curriculum is on learning through first hand experiences. This is very evident in many lessons throughout the school and has especially led to a significant improvement in science. For example, the opportunity to design and make a switch captured the attention of the pupils in Year 4 and led them to a good understanding of the need to create a circuit if the switch was to work.
24. Teachers plan, following the guidance in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and nationally recommended plans for science and this leads to pupils developing skills in the correct sequence.
25. There are many planned opportunities to enrich the curriculum. Very good examples include the science week and the opportunity to dress up as a character in a story as part of book week. A wide range of visits supports the curriculum very well. This is extended to a residential visit to Abersoch and Caernarfon for the older pupils in the school which is especially effective in increasing pupils' self-confidence. Visitors include people from the local community to share their experiences as well as organised groups to advise older pupils about their personal safety.
26. The school gives good attention to the needs of pupils with special educational needs. Careful planning and a focus on learning through first hand experiences suits the needs of these pupils and enables them to play a full and active part in all the

school offers. Additional sessions in literacy, numeracy and science are organised to give a boost to pupils who start to lag behind in these essential skills. These are proving to be effective especially for the older pupils. However, the timing of some sessions is leading to some pupils in Years 1 and 2 missing important aspects of other lessons and this is having an adverse effect on learning in these lessons.

27. Teachers give willingly of their time to provide excellent opportunities for pupils to take part in an extremely wide range of very high quality extra-curricular activities. These include gardening, baking, sport, art and an opportunity to learn to speak French.
28. The school provides extremely well for pupils' personal development. Many posters around the school declare that the school is a *happy place to learn* and this is evident in the daily life of the school. It is promoted through the very good opportunities carefully planned to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
29. Spiritual development is very good and is promoted by all and staff and pupils appreciate the talents and efforts of others. This greatly increases self-esteem and pupils' eagerness to take on board new ideas and willingness to improve. Teachers use questions effectively and encourage pupils to think for themselves and so encourage their curiosity and desire to find out more. This was seen in a very good numeracy lesson in Year 6. Pupils were challenged to explain how they had solved a problem and then to go that step further to find a pattern in their answers. This led to much new learning. Pupils are encouraged to value the natural world especially their own school environment. Children in the Reception class appreciate the growth of the vegetables in their garden as well as the noise made as the wind blows the chimes that they have put in the trees. The entrance to the school sets the scene for a school which encourages pupils to reflect on what is important not only to them but to others in the world. A sensitive display on special memories includes symbols to remind pupils of important events for different faiths as well as photographs of their favourite pets, friends and toys. School assemblies develop a feeling of belonging to a community. Pupils are encouraged to take part and in the singing of *Make me a channel of your peace* a genuine feeling of spirituality was experienced.
30. Moral development is extended in many aspects of the curriculum. In Circle Time² pupils have opportunities to learn how their actions can affect others. Pupils who have difficulties with their behaviour have individual education plans with a focus on self-control and staff take time to discuss this with pupils. Procedures for behaviour are very clear. The Larky system, which leads to pupils gaining points and awards for being caring, busy and clever, is appreciated by all. Pupils wear their Larky badges with great pride. This system is very effective in pointing out to pupils that they can make decisions about the way that they behave in school. Older pupils take part in formal debates that examine fairness and justice in today's society. Many have very strong opinions about the current political situation including the threat of war and how people's actions can affect the lives of others.

² During Circle Time pupils discuss a wide range of personal and general issues. All pupils agree that no interruptions should occur and only one person speaks at a time. Respect for other pupils' views will occur at all times and therefore pupils feel confident that they can talk with ease and free from any form of interference or interruption from other pupils.

31. The school's provision for social development is very good. Staff provide excellent role models for the pupils in the friendships they share with each other and the courteous way they converse with their pupils. *Please* and *thank you* are common phrases in the school and pupils extend this to visitors. A polite *sorry about that* as a pupil walks through the classroom is evidence of the pupils' friendliness as well as their genuine concern for others. Pupils have opportunities to exercise leadership as members of the school council. This is taken very seriously by all and pupils have to present their ideas to other pupils to earn a place on the Children's Council. They decide on their own motto and currently it is, *only my best is good enough for me*. The group is involved in making decisions about the school, such as which charity to support and how to spend money in school. This has led to many charities being helped, including child victims of crime and the Blue Peter water supply for the Third World.
32. Friendliness is very evident in the school and is summed up on the notice on the door to Year 6, *please feel free to enter quietly*.
33. Pupils have very good opportunities to learn about their own culture as well as the richness of other cultures. There are many attractive displays of art in the school. These often reflect the styles of famous artists. For example, the work in Year 2 in the style of L S Lowry compared with the bright colours and designs in the style of Jackson Pollock. Classical texts are studied in literacy lessons. Pupils in Year 6 recognise that the language in *The Midsummer Nights Dream* is different but still enjoyed the story. In Year 5, pupils have made very imaginative fabric tapestries after reading *A Christmas Carol*. Discussions show a clear understanding of the moral of this story. Visitors and visits extend pupils' understanding of other cultures. For example, an Indian visitor shows the children in the Reception class how to make chapatis and they are to visit the local Chinatown as part of their celebration of Chinese New Year. Photographs of children in Romania, opening the gifts the pupils from Lark Hill had so kindly sent to them, extend their understanding of the wider world. Pupils in Year 5 have made attractive Islamic prayer mats as part of their study about this faith. The Samba music club is very popular and pupils appreciate music from different cultures.

The partnership with parents is very good.

34. Parents have very positive views of the school and raised no significant concerns. The vast majority hold the school in high regard and value the very positive relationships with staff, who they feel they can approach with confidence for help or advice.
35. Parents are especially pleased with the information they receive from the school. This is detailed and tells parents the topics being taught. Parents respond with resources and artefacts and these make learning more enjoyable. Reports to parents are good and tell parents clearly about the progress their children are making as well as identifying targets for improvement.
36. Parents, carers and grandparents give good support to the school. They help in lessons and especially give good attention to hearing their children read at home. This greatly enhances children's enjoyment of books. The Friends of Lark Hill are a small but hardworking group. As well as raising funds for the school they organise social events which are well attended and increase the community feeling in the school. The school strives to provide additional events for parents that extend their own knowledge as well as celebrating successes in the school. For example, parents

were very appreciative of the opportunity to visit the science display that included many investigations and practical activities. The workshops offering advice in managing children's behaviour had a good response from parents.

37. The school welcomes parents and carers into school and this develops a positive partnership between school and home. All are involved in their children's learning and this is very effective in helping pupils to learn more effectively in school and at home.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Standards in writing could be higher throughout the school.

38. Although the majority of pupils are making satisfactory progress standards in writing are below average in Years 2 and 6. In Years 1 and 2, the higher attaining pupils are not sufficiently challenged and are underachieving. This is not the case in Year 6 where teaching is more challenging and the number of pupils reaching above average level is in line with the national average.
39. The results of national tests for seven-year-olds in 2002 were well below the national average. When compared with schools with a similar intake, results were below average suggesting pupils were not doing as well as they should. However, more pupils are reaching the level expected for their age albeit many are only just getting there. In 2002, results dropped because 30 per cent of pupils were identified as having special educational needs. The current Year 2 pupils are working at a higher level although overall standards are below average. No pupils are identified as reaching standards above the level expected for their age and this is holding down the overall performance of the school.
40. Most pupils in Year 2 are able to express their ideas in writing although few show sufficient confidence to do this at any length. Pupils recognise different styles of writing and have made satisfactory attempts at writing instructions for a game and include numbered points and lists. Handwriting is legible but many mix upper and lower case and letters are not always correctly formed. The school has introduced a new policy to teach joined-up writing as soon as children start in Reception, but as yet, this is not being insisted upon in free writing. Spelling shows a secure knowledge of letters and their sounds and most are using this in their spelling of new words. This extends from *cum* and *bac* from the lower attaining pupils to *looct* for the higher attaining pupils. A common weakness is the lack of imaginative vocabulary. Average and lower attaining pupils depend too heavily on spoken language and are too dependent on *and* to extend their sentences. The standard of punctuation is below that expected for their age. Pupils are not sufficiently capable of using full stops and capital letters to mark out their sentences.
41. The lack of success lies in teachers not always sufficiently challenging pupils and missing opportunities for pupils to practise writing independently. This can be seen in the overuse of photocopiable worksheets to teach letters and their sounds that are not effectively extending writing especially for the higher attaining pupils. Examples of their work include too much colouring in of pictures after completing a simple task often including copying words. Similarly, in lessons seen, tasks led to pupils copying words off the board and this failed to extend their writing skills.

42. National test results in English for 11 year-olds show more improvement than the results at the end of Year 2. Results were below the national average but were in line with the average for similar schools. Reading is included in these test results and standards are higher than in writing. Good progress is made in reading in Year 3 to 6 and achievement is good. However, writing remains below average although achievement for the majority of pupils is satisfactory. The proportion of pupils moving in and out of the school often adversely affects the school's overall performance as it is difficult for some of these pupils to catch up to the level expected for their age.
43. Handwriting in Year 6 shows that many pupils present their work neatly although they have not yet achieved a fluent, joined-up style of writing. Most are more confident writers and have written in a range of styles and are improving their skills of structuring their writing. Many use paragraphs correctly and higher attaining pupils successfully introduce dialogue to develop their characters. However, writing often lacks flair and many pupils lack the ability to make their writing interesting for the reader. This is often linked to pupils' limited experiences and the school tries hard to overcome this with visits, visitors and the use of debate and drama. Writing is more imaginative when the focus is more on creativity. For example, in their poems a pupil writes *thick, black hair glimmering in the moonlight*. Teaching and learning are good and tasks are challenging and more pupils each year are exceeding the level expected for their age. The higher attaining pupils show maturity in their writing and include phrases such as, *he stood in disbelief, he couldn't believe his eyes*. This work is correctly punctuated including commas in sentences and lists. The overall weakness of the average and lower attaining pupils is caused by their the inability to transfer the skills taught in literacy lessons to their independent writing. Although pupils are taught to plan their work, insufficient emphasis is given to editing and encouraging pupils to spot and correct their own errors. Pupils have group targets that identify what they need to do to improve but teachers do not refer to these sufficiently in lessons or marking. As a result, the targets are not having as much effect on writing as they should have.

Standards in mathematics and especially the achievement of higher attaining pupils.

44. Although pupils are making satisfactory progress overall, standards are below average. In the 2002 tests for seven-year-olds, the overall performance was well below average when compared to all schools and similar schools. The results were in the lowest five per cent in the country and show that pupils are not making sufficient progress. The number of pupils exceeding the level expected for their age was well below average. The results of national tests for 11 year-olds have varied from above average to being below average in 2002. Very few pupils reached the higher levels in 2002 and this held down the school's overall performance. When compared with similar schools a more positive picture emerges and results were average and show pupils are doing as well as expected. The lack of consistency in performance, especially of the higher attaining pupils, makes it difficult to get a clear picture of the overall trend in results. However, the number of pupils reaching the level expected for their age has steadily risen over the last three years. Targets for last year were exceeded and the school is well placed to reach the current target that will bring the school closer to the national average.
45. Current standards in Year 2 are below average. From a low starting point the majority have achieved satisfactorily but few pupils are reaching above average standards. Planned tasks for the higher attaining pupils do not provide sufficient challenge. As a result, these pupils do not make the progress they should.

46. Pupils in Year 2 know their numbers to 100 and can understand place value. They are gaining in confidence counting in twos and tens but have limited knowledge of counting in fives. Pupils understand odd and even numbers and know even numbers can be shared equally. They solve simple addition and subtraction sums. The lower attaining pupils needing a number line as help to count on and count back using numbers to 20. Pupils of all levels of attainment struggle to use and apply their mathematical knowledge and understanding in different situations. When a few pupils worked with an inspector they found it difficult to give the number which was 10 more than 63 or 10 less than 38. In other examples, their ability to explain their methods is not well developed. Pupils understand the properties of two-dimensional shapes. Higher attaining pupils showing knowledge of pentagons, hexagons and octagons, while lower attaining pupils are able to sort shapes according to the number of sides but are not yet sure of the names of triangle and rectangle. Teaching is satisfactory and most pupils are learning at a satisfactory rate in lessons. However, the pace is not always fast enough because tasks are not closely matched to pupils' ability. Some examples were too hard for the lower attaining pupils whereas the higher attaining pupils found work insufficiently challenging and so are not reaching the level of which they are capable. This was seen in the lesson on shapes when the higher attaining pupils were ready to move on to new learning rather than colouring in the shapes.
47. The rate of learning improves in Year 3 to 6 because teaching is better and in Years 5 and 6 is very challenging and learning is good in these classes. The school's overall performance is often held down by the number of pupils who move in and out of the school during the school year and it is difficult for the teachers to enable these pupils to catch up and reach the level expected for their age. Many pupils have unsettled home situations that make it difficult for them to work as well as they might. Taking these factors into consideration the overall achievement is satisfactory and is good for many pupils who manage to overcome many barriers to reach the level expected for their age. Lessons start with a lively practice of mental mathematics. Many multiply and divide by numbers up to 10. Lower attaining pupils manage with smaller numbers. When solving problems the average and above average pupils use a variety of methods in their calculations. Lower attaining pupils find it more difficult to decide which operation is required in mathematical problems or how to check for accuracy. In response to effective teaching pupils in Year 6 quickly grasped the relationship between fractions and decimals. Most understand that a half is the same as 0.5 and with prompting from the teacher are able to explain their calculations. A review of pupils' work shows most pupils can cope with other aspects of mathematics at the level expected for their age although few are working at the higher levels especially in work related to shape and space. Although the school has identified group targets for pupils these are not reinforced in lessons so pupils are not always clear about how to improve their mathematical skills.

Standards in reading and science in Years 1 and 2.

48. In 2002 the results of national tests and teacher assessments at the end of Year 2 were well below the national average in reading and science. Compared with similar schools standards are below average. However, every year has seen a gradual increase in the number of pupils reaching the level expected for their age. The number of pupils exceeding this level is low and this is holding down the school's overall performance.

49. Current standards in Year 2 show the improvement has continued although remain below average. Considering this group of pupils started school with a low level of attainment, overall achievement is satisfactory. However, the number of pupils who are working at above average levels is low in both reading and science and these pupils are underachieving.
50. Most pupils are well launched into the school's reading scheme books and can tackle a simple text making good use of the pictures. For example, a pupil deciphers *wrapping paper* after looking closely at the picture and then exclaims *oh yes, it is a silent w*. Teachers in Years 1 and 2 build well on the good introduction to letters and sounds that takes place in the Reception class. The average pupils who read to the inspectors changed *stuff* for *things* because he knew the sound *th* makes. Pupils who read to the inspector could explain the events in the stories they were reading but a few read without sufficient understanding and were unable to answer questions about the text. Few have favourite authors and higher attaining pupils do not read widely. Overall teaching is satisfactory but the organisation of the literacy hour is not always as effective as it could be. Teachers are not always recording what is happening in the guided reading session to identify how pupils are progressing in their reading. Pupils miss important parts of the literacy hour as they are withdrawn from the lesson for additional reading help with a classroom assistant and this disrupts their learning. For example, in Year 1 a group of pupils missed the introduction that included teaching a new letter sound. When the pupils returned to the lesson the task they were set lacked challenge and the conclusion had limited relevance to them. On occasions, these groups of pupils are too large and so the effect of additional support is weakened. This was the case in Year 2 when a group of eight pupils read with the classroom assistant and then completed a task of filling in missing words that had limited impact on pupils' reading skills.
51. The science co-ordinator is providing effective management that has led to improvements in Years 3 to 6 and is aware from monitoring of standards that more attention needs to be given to recording investigative work in Years 1 and 2.
52. Pupils in Year 2 are aware of the dangers of electricity following a video about electrical safety. They know that electricity makes appliances work and can name these appliances in school but they are less sure about how the electricity reaches the appliance. Few use scientific language in their responses. A review of pupils' books shows all aspects of the curriculum receive attention. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and teachers are following the new planning guidelines and this is enabling more pupils to reach the level expected for their age. Pupils sort materials according to their properties describing them as *rough, smooth and squeaky*. Through investigation they have found that a battery is the source of power in a torch. Pupils understand the effect of heating, as for example on an egg, bread and a potato. Teaching is not fully extending the higher attaining pupils who are underachieving and this is holding down the school's overall performance. For example, in the lesson seen in Year 2, the pace of the lesson was too slow and the higher attaining pupils completed the same task as other pupils. This did not give them a real opportunity to show what they knew about electricity and safety. Insufficient opportunities are provided for these pupils to predict their findings and then record them in different ways.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

53. In order to raise standards and improve the quality of education the governors, headteacher and staff should:

(1) Raise standards in writing throughout the school by:

- implementing the school's handwriting policy;
- giving more attention to the skills of drafting and editing in Years 3 to 6;
- checking that pupils transfer the skills taught in literacy lessons to their independent writing;
- ensuring pupils do not miss important parts of literacy lessons;
- providing more challenge for the higher attaining pupils in Years 1 and 2;
- making more reference to pupils' individual targets so that they know how to improve their work.

(2) Raise standards in mathematics throughout the school by:

- providing more opportunities for pupils to use their numeracy skills in problem solving;
- ensuring that pupils are aware of what they need to do to improve;
- making sure higher attaining pupils in Years 1 and 2 are set work that extends their learning.

(3) Raise standards in reading and science in Years 1 and 2 by:

- encouraging pupils to read more widely and checking that best use is made of classroom assistants to raise standards;
- providing more opportunities for pupils to record their findings in science;
- checking that higher attaining pupils have opportunities to be involved with tasks which will enable them to reach higher levels.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	16
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	16

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	7	3	6	0	0	0
Percentage	0	44	19	38	0	0	0

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

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)	Na	205
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	Na	51

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	Na	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	Na	50

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	6

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	12
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	16

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1

National comparative data	5.4
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National comparative data	0.5
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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	18	19	37

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	14	13	12
	Girls	13	14	14
	Total	27	27	26
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	73 (80)	73 (86)	70 (97)
	National	84 (84)	86 (86)	90 (91)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	13	13	14
	Girls	14	16	16
	Total	27	29	30
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	73 (74)	78 (91)	81 (91)
	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	15	13	28

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	9	11	15
	Girls	10	9	13
	Total	19	20	28
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	68 (54)	71 (69)	100 (62)
	National	75 (75)	73 (71)	86 (87)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	9	13	15
	Girls	9	12	13
	Total	18	25	28
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	64 (52)	89 (72)	100 (73)
	National	73 (72)	74 (74)	82 (82)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

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

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
196	0	0
0	1	0
2	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
6	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	9.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21
Average class size	26

Education support staff: YR– Y6

Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	169

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

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

Financial information

Financial year	2001/02
	£
Total income	466,347.00
Total expenditure	432,519.00
Expenditure per pupil	1,957.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	20, 221.00
Balance carried forward to next year	22,102.00

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	3
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	3
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0.4
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	205
Number of questionnaires returned	29

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	52	48	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	76	21	3	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	66	28	0	0	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	52	34	10	0	3
The teaching is good.	79	17	3	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	66	21	10	0	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	86	14	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	76	24	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	52	48	0	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	79	21	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	66	34	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	69	24	0	0	7

Percentages are rounded to the nearest integer and may not total 100.