

INSPECTION REPORT

ASHLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL

South Shields

LEA area: South Tyneside

Unique reference number: 108685

Head teacher: Mr PRE Grice

Reporting inspector: Miss WLR Hunter
3277

Dates of inspection: 11th – 12th November 2002

Inspection number: 246813

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:	3 to 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Temple Park Road South Shields Tyne & Wear
Postcode:	NE34 0QA
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr P Westerberg
Date of previous inspection:	March 1998

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Ashley Primary School is a large primary school situated close to the centre of South Shields. The school has a purpose built nursery for 52 children who attend on a part-time morning or afternoon basis. A Diagnostic and Assessment Centre is also part of the school, where pupils with special educational needs are referred from all over South Tyneside to be assessed before moving onto the most appropriate school for their individual needs and circumstances. This is a very popular school and it is over-subscribed. There are currently 423 pupils (212 boys and 211 girls) that are organised into two classes in each year group, although the older pupils are reorganised into different teaching groups for English and mathematics according to ability. Twenty-eight pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, representing a very broad mix. Eighteen pupils are classed as having English as an additional language but they all speak fluently and do not receive any specific support. The level of free school meals is similar to the national average but the level of special educational need in the main school is below average. When children first start in the nursery there is a very wide range of attainment but many have limited speech and language skills. By the time they transfer into reception, most children are working at levels typical of four year olds although there is still a very wide mix.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very effective school because it successfully educates pupils academically and personally. Teaching is very good and pupils develop their basic skills of literacy and numeracy well. Consequently, they reach high standards in English and mathematics. Standards in science, information and communication technology (ICT) and religious education are satisfactory but could still be even higher if assessments were carried out more carefully to direct learning further. The school encourages pupils to develop personally with the result that they have excellent attitudes, behave very well and develop very good relationships with each other. The school is led and managed very well to give very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Literacy and numeracy are taught very well. As a result, pupils make very good progress in their learning and reach high standards in English and mathematics.
- The school promotes pupils' personal development very well. It celebrates their achievements, meets their individual needs and helps them develop excellent attitudes to their work.
- Pupils with special educational needs are supported very well. The children in the Diagnostic and Assessment Centre get a particularly good deal.
- This is an outward looking school. Its very effective links with parents, the community and other schools in Europe add an extra dimension to its work and give pupils a rich and interesting range of experiences.
- The school is led and managed very well through the strong partnership between the head teacher, deputy head teacher and governors.

What could be improved

- Assessment is not as effective as it could be in most subjects. There is far too much paperwork that records what pupils have been taught and insufficient information about what they can actually do.
- The school improvement plan sets far too many targets for the current year and lacks a long-term overview of how the school plans to develop and continue to improve. It doesn't identify the school's key priorities precisely enough.

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 March 1998 and has made satisfactory progress since then. Standards in English and mathematics have continued to rise at a similar rate to most other schools and this school has successfully increased the proportion of seven and 11 year olds reaching the higher levels in the tests in both these subjects. In the case of science, however, the school has not performed so well especially last year, and standards in religious education are also not quite as high as they were in the last inspection, although still satisfactory. The school tackled the previous criticism about assessment and recording of pupils' attainment and progress but focused much more on recording to the point that assessment remains an area for development. However, there have been significant improvements in other areas of the school, such as the development of a new classroom for reception children, the establishment of a computer suite with updated equipment and the provision of an outdoor play area for children in the nursery and Diagnostic and Assessment Centre.

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	B	B	A
Mathematics	C	B	B	A
Science	D	C	D	C

Key	
top 5% of schools	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Children start in the nursery with a broad range of skills but many have limited speech and language. By the time children have finished their Foundation Stage of learning, and are ready to leave the reception classes, they are working above the levels expected in their communication, language and literacy, mathematical, and personal and social development. By the end of Year 2, pupils are working at levels above what is expected for typical seven year olds in reading, writing and mathematics, and this shows in their good performance in national tests.

The school tests pupils on a regular basis and uses these results to set challenging and appropriate targets. This is why the school's performance is improving steadily in English and mathematics at a similar rate to the national trend of improvement. The school is performing well in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6. Standards in these subjects have been above average, in relation to all other schools, for the past two years and they were well above average last year when compared to schools with a similar level of free school meals. Standards in science were not as high but this was caused the timing of the school's change from its own scheme of work to the national guidance, which meant that pupils were not prepared sufficiently to be able to try for the higher levels of the tests. This was not picked up in time because assessments are not yet effective enough in telling teachers what pupils can actually do, but a careful analysis of the test results has ensured that it should not happen again. Standards in ICT and religious education match the levels expected for 11 year olds by the time pupils leave the school but again could be even higher if assessments were more securely established.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils love being at school and thoroughly enjoy it.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils are lively and playful outside but they know when to be quiet, listen and show respect. For instance you could hear a pin drop during their one minute silence for Remembrance Day.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils are independent and responsible. They work and play very well together and genuinely care for each other.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Attendance matches the national average.

Pupils' excellent attitudes to their work are a key factor in their effective learning. They try hard, want to do well and are really proud of what they achieve. For example, pupils glowed with pride when they talked about their work on display around the school and showed examples of their successes in their record of achievement files.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are taught very well. This is why pupils make particularly good progress in English and mathematics and reach the high standards they do. Teachers set clear objectives at the start of each lesson and explain these, in child friendly language, so that pupils know precisely what they are trying to achieve. This is an effective way of setting high levels of challenge that also involves the pupils in checking their own progress in lessons. Teachers' use of questions during lessons is a key strength that helps them guide pupils through their learning step by step. In this way they make sure that they meet the needs of all pupils, from those with special educational needs who may require some extra help and support to the more able pupils who work well independently.

Teachers plan their work carefully to make sure that their lessons are interesting and move at a fast pace to hold pupils' attention. They also use homework particularly well, which is carefully structured to link to what pupils have done during their lessons and to feed into the next step of their learning. In English, mathematics and science, pupils are then tested regularly to check how they are getting on. However, in other subjects, once they have completed sections of their work, teachers then put a lot of time and effort into recording what they have done rather than by checking what pupils have actually achieved. This means that their records give a general picture of which topics have been covered but do not give clear enough indications of what pupils can actually do. They also tend to focus too much on the schemes of work that teachers use to support their planning rather than on the expected outcomes for children at the various stages of their education. This means that assessments, and the ongoing marking of pupils' work, are not being used as well as they could be to let teachers know how individual pupils are getting on and what they need to do next. This is one reason why standards in science, ICT and religious education could be higher.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. Pupils get an interesting range of experiences and older pupils in particular have plenty of opportunities to take part in extra-curricular clubs. The curriculum is strengthened by links with other schools in Europe, links with industry and business and support from parents and the local community.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Pupils have clear and specific targets matched to their individual needs. They receive well-focused support and regularly use specialist computer programs to help them learn. Children in the Diagnostic and Assessment Centre get very good support and attention.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Spiritual development is promoted well. Pupils are encouraged to share their thoughts and reflect on their personal feelings. Provision for moral, social and cultural development is very good. The school's good curriculum supports pupils' understanding of different cultures around the world. Its European and industrial links help to broaden their understanding and make them aware of different features of life beyond their own.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. This is a caring school where pupils know that they are valued and appreciated. In subjects where tests are not taken on a regular basis, however, the assessment of pupils' performance is not secure enough yet to make the impact it could on their learning.

The school's curriculum offers pupils plenty of opportunities beyond what is typically expected. This helps to develop their personalities as well as their academic work. For example, the school's involvement with other schools in Germany and Austria has encouraged pupils to think about how to communicate, while work on the Mayor's Award scheme has given older pupils lots of practical and team-building experiences to support their personal skills. An atmosphere of care and trust pervades the school and pupils respond very well to this by saying, "everybody is nice to each other".

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the head teacher and other key staff	Very good. The senior managers work very well together to lead and manage the school effectively. There are very good relationships among staff that underpin their work and support their commitment to do well for the pupils.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors are very supportive and rightly proud of the school. They fulfil their responsibilities well and take a keen interest and involvement in the school, although some bits of the prospectus are misleading and the governors' annual report to parents has a few gaps.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Test data is analysed very thoroughly to spot patterns and trends and then appropriate action is taken.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The head teacher and chair of governors successfully attract funds for the school from a range of sources and this money is used very well to support pupils' learning and widen the experiences offered to them. The principles of best value are firmly embedded and followed.

The head teacher and deputy head teacher are a very strong and effective partnership. They know where the school's strengths lie and what needs to improve although these key priorities are not identified clearly enough in the school improvement plan. This means that, occasionally, the school follows external advice, which is not always the most appropriate choice. For instance, the sudden change to following the nationally recommended science curriculum led to some gaps that caused standards to dip slightly last year, when the school's existing curriculum would have covered the topics in sufficient depth. Similarly, the school's 'ticky-box' recording systems add an unnecessary burden of paperwork on teachers that do not support pupils' learning and get in the way of assessing what pupils know, understand and can do.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school. • The school has high expectations and their children do well. • The school is well led and managed to make sure their children make good progress. • Their children learn to behave well. • The school is welcoming and they are happy to voice their ideas, opinions or concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents would like to be kept better informed about how their child is getting on. • Some parents feel that there are not enough activities outside lessons or that their children cannot get access to them because there are waiting lists.

Parents think very highly of the school and are right to do so. Inspectors agree with all their positive views and comments. Parents are wrong to criticise the information they receive about their individual children – the annual reports written by teachers are perfectly satisfactory and there are sufficient opportunities for parents and teachers to meet. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities but,

because these are so popular, many are full with waiting lists. However, pupils get ample educational visits and other experiences beyond the typical curriculum in many schools.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Literacy and numeracy are taught very well. As a result, pupils make good progress in their learning and reach high standards in English and mathematics.

1 The school is performing very well in English and mathematics. This is the result of very good teaching in both these subjects. Pupils are taught in their own classes in the early part of the school but then move into different ‘sets’ in the older classes. This reorganisation means that pupils are working in groups with other pupils of similar abilities. The deputy head teacher does not have responsibility for a specific class in the school but takes on a teaching role for some of these sets. Because this adds an extra teacher into the equation, it means that the number of pupils in most sets is lower than the normal class sizes. This is effective because it gives teachers more time to work with individual pupils during lessons and to really get to know how well each child is doing and where they may need extra help.

2 Teachers follow the guidance in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and plan their lessons carefully to make sure that work is pitched correctly for the pupils. Consequently, the basic skills of literacy and numeracy are taught very well throughout the school. Teachers set clear objectives, which they share with the pupils at the start of each lesson in child friendly language that is easily understood. In this way, pupils know precisely what they are trying to achieve and are able to keep a check on how well they are progressing during their lessons. For example, in a literacy lesson, Year 1 pupils obviously understood that they were learning why it is important to write clear sets of instructions that are in the right order. This was explained very well by the teacher at the beginning of the lesson when she tried to prepare some cereal and pupils laughed at the thought of her pouring the milk first, saying “you haven’t got a bowl – the milk will spill all over the table”. When pupils moved on to write their own sets of instructions, for activities such as making hot chocolate or jam sandwiches, they remembered how important it was to keep checking the order of their instructions to make sure that they got it right and didn’t make the same ‘mistake’ as their teacher.

3 Teachers make good links between literacy and numeracy and other areas of the curriculum. This makes their lessons interesting and helps pupils to understand the importance of the key skills of literacy and numeracy in other areas of their work. For instance, in a Year 5 literacy lesson on a similar theme of writing instructions, the teacher used an example from work pupils were doing in design and technology. In this instance, pupils took their literacy work to a much a higher level by looking at sequences of instructions to make a paper doll. As well as checking their use of appropriate language and imperative verbs, they actually tested their instructions practically to evaluate them before editing to reach their final version. During the lesson there were spontaneous gasps of pleasure from the pupils as they worked practically to construct the dolls, which helped them realise how concise and specific instructions gave them a much better chance of success. By the end of the lesson, pupils had grasped why it is essential to be able to write accurate instructions for others to follow, saying “you’ve got to be sure to get your instructions right to make the arms go right to the edge”.

4 Teachers use resources well to catch pupils’ interest and attention, and make particularly good use of ICT to support their work. For example, in a Year 6 numeracy lesson the teacher used a laptop linked to a projector and interactive white-board to help remind pupils how to calculate the perimeter of shapes. This visual stimulus helped pupils to understand how to split an awkward shape into more manageable parts using ‘invisible lines’, which the teacher represented by drawing dotted lines on the board. The interactive nature of this work meant that pupils could see the effects

immediately but also showed them what happened if they made a mistake, such as sectioning the shapes incorrectly. ICT was also used effectively in a literacy lesson for a small group of Year 3 pupils with special educational needs. In this case, each pupil had their own programme of work on different packages on the computers that were matched to their particular difficulties. For example, one pupil worked on matching the outline shape of words and letters, while another picked out words that had the vowel combination 'ie' in them.

5 Teachers are confident and have good knowledge and understanding in English and mathematics. This means that they are secure enough in what they are doing to veer from their planned activities if pupils ask questions or their work takes them naturally in other directions. For example, in a Year 4 lesson where pupils were using the 'grid' method to set out their calculations and multiply two 2-digit numbers, some pupils started experimenting and realised that they could use the same method for other combinations. This was picked up well by the teacher who encouraged these pupils to solve problems, such as 5×499 , in this way. This is an effective way of setting high levels of challenge that encourage pupils to think and learn for themselves.

6 Teachers' use of questions during lessons is a key strength that helps them guide pupils through their learning step by step. In this way they make sure that they meet the needs of all pupils, and that pupils understand what they have achieved and what they still need to work at. For instance, at the end of lessons teachers regularly ask questions such as, "what did we learn today?" or "well – did you learn what we planned?" Pupils respond in different ways, for example Year 1 pupils held up their thumbs if they thought they had succeeded, put their thumbs down if they felt they hadn't grasped the point of the lesson, or wiggled their thumbs in the air if they felt they were still a little unsure. The very good relationships between teachers and their pupils also help create an atmosphere in lessons where pupils are really keen to learn and do well. For example, in a literacy lesson where Year 3 pupils looked at extracts from Alan Shearer's biography, the teacher joked with pupils about the choice of footballer, which they found very amusing.

7 Teachers use homework particularly well. From their first days in nursery, children are encouraged to take books and 'story sacks' home to share with their families, and structured programmes of reading and spelling are introduced as they get older. Homework is carefully planned and structured to link to what pupils have done during their lessons and to feed into the next step of their learning. For example, following their work on looking at styles of writing used to recount past events, Year 3 pupils were asked to think of a range of words about 'time' to prepare them for their extended writing lesson the next day.

8 English and mathematics have been given a high priority in the school and this is paying off in terms of its standards. Both subjects are being led and managed very well, with the head teacher and deputy head teacher working alongside the subject leaders to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and the standards being achieved. Lessons are observed regularly and the outcomes of these visits feed into the school's self-review process and help identify future training needs for staff. Pupils are tested regularly to check how they are getting on in both these subjects, and this information is used well to make sure that they are in the right teaching sets and that they are making the progress expected.

9 The school's performance is improving steadily in English and mathematics at a similar rate to the national trend of improvement. However, standards in these subjects have been better than in most schools for the past couple of years. In fact, the school's results were above the national averages in English and mathematics in both 2001 and 2002. Last year's results were well above average in both subjects when compared to schools with a similar level of free school meals.

The school promotes pupils' personal development very well. It celebrates their achievements, meets their individual needs and helps them develop excellent attitudes to their work.

10 The school holds a strong belief that pupils' personal development is just as important as their academic achievement. This is obvious from the minute you walk through the door, when the caring and supportive atmosphere hits you. Pupils love being at school and thoroughly enjoy it. They try hard, want to do well and are really proud of what they achieve. Consequently, pupils develop excellent attitudes to their work and this is a key factor in their effective learning.

11 The school's commitment to personal development starts in the nursery. Here, children are encouraged to become independent and to take responsibility for their choices and actions at a very early age. For example, at the start of each session, children have to decide which activities they want to do and plan out their work. They learn to share with each other and to take responsibility for getting the equipment and materials they need, but to also put them away at the end of the lesson. Children in the reception classes build on the very good relationships and social skills that they bring with them from their time in nursery. They begin to recognise 'people who help us' by colouring pictures of a nurse, policeman and fireman, and think about themselves and their world, for instance by writing and drawing pictures of their 'quiet places', such as "under my bed".

12 The curriculum supports pupils' personal development very well. The school has a strong personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme and uses 'circle time' well to give pupils time and opportunities to explore their own thoughts and feelings and to think about the effect of their actions on others. For example, a Year 5 pupil explained that this time was used to think about "if we have done anything in the past and if we can do anything about it now". A large display in the hall shows that pupils have represented their thoughts in words and pictures, classifying them into 'good' and 'bad' feelings, then setting the aim for this year as: "to be a school of smiles, peace and friendship". Cross-curricular projects and initiatives, such as work on 'Rainforests' in Year 6 help pupils to develop an understanding of social, moral and cultural issues by considering the impact of human actions on the environment. This work was shared very effectively with other pupils and parents during a class assembly, where a younger pupil could hardly contain his excitement, exclaiming "Cor! Cool – it's just like the Discovery Channel." Weekend visits to Baldersdale, contributing to the Mayors Award scheme, and residential visits for older pupils to Thurston Outdoor Centre, positively support the development of social and team building skills.

13 Literacy makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development. For instance Year 5 pupils have written about why friends are special, identifying characteristics such as "thoughtful", "funny" and "generous", while Year 3 pupils have created a collage of character conversation using speech bubbles to describe the features of different characters in their playscript, such as "honest", "helpful" and "vain". Religious education also contributes very well to pupils' personal development. Examples of work in Year 4 show that pupils understand that there are other people in the world who suffer. For example, one pupil wrote: "When I say the Lord's Prayer I think about the people in all parts of the world who are in need." Similarly, pupils in Year 6 have chosen their own words to express feelings, such as "hatred", "frustration", "boredom" and "fear" and have shown a good level of maturity in the way they tackled such personal issues.

14 Assemblies make a very strong contribution to pupils' personal development. Music is used very well to give pupils time to sit quietly and to think and reflect on their own feelings and actions. In an assembly held on Remembrance Day, pupils were reminded about the sacrifices people had made for them and then sat in silence, many with their heads bowed and eyes closed, for a minutes silence. The absolute silence and sense of calm was a testament to the excellent attitudes and very good behaviour of the pupils, with even the youngest reception children joining in respectfully.

15 Pupils learn to think about others less fortunate than themselves and give readily to charities. For instance, the school raised a considerable sum of money to following the tragedy of 9/11 last year and regularly gives to charities such as NSPCC, Salvation Army and a local Hospice. Pupils have sponsored a young girl in Cambodia and displays show regular correspondence between them about their lives and on special occasions, such as birthdays.

16 Staff value the children's achievements and this shows through the careful way they present pupils' work in high quality displays around the school. Pupils themselves take great pride in their

work. Each child has a personal 'record of achievement' that is a well-presented record of their successes, both inside and outside school. These include samples of work chosen by the pupils themselves plus their own evaluations of how well they feel they are doing and ideas for how they would like to improve. This shows a growing sense of pride and responsibility and helps pupils become aware and involved in their own learning. By the time they are ready to leave the school, pupils have developed a sense of self-worth and have become confident and articulate members of society.

Pupils with special educational needs are supported very well. The children in the Diagnostic and Assessment Centre get a particularly good deal.

17 The school makes very good provision for pupils with special educational needs. The nursery shares a purpose-built building with a Diagnostic and Assessment Centre that is an integral part of the school. This is very well managed and resourced to provide an effective learning environment for pupils who need careful and sensitive support. Other pupils with special educational needs are integrated into classes throughout the school, and their needs are met very well by the class teachers, support staff and by programmes of withdrawal to work in small groups.

18 The Diagnostic and Assessment Centre is used by the local education authority as a base to refer children for an assessment of their individual needs. Pupils are initially placed at the Centre for short periods of time, such as six weeks, but some stay longer to give a chance for their progress to be monitored and evaluated before they are placed at the most appropriate school for the rest of their education. For instance, pupils are often referred to determine whether they have learning difficulties, why their behaviour is aggressive, or whether they have emotional difficulties that are affecting their learning. The staff at the Centre then have the job of assessing each pupil's problems, setting objectives for them to work towards, and working with other agencies to determine whether the pupils should continue in mainstream schools with suitably adapted programmes of work or whether they would benefit from more specialised education. Some of the pupils in the Centre ultimately have statements of special educational needs and move on to schools that are geared up specifically to meet their requirements, such as Hearing Impaired Units, Language Units or schools specialising in moderate learning difficulties, but others benefit so much from the intensive support they receive that statements are not required and they go back into mainstream primary schools.

19 The Diagnostic and Assessment Centre is managed by a highly experienced teacher, who is a member of the school's senior management team and is also the school's child protection co-ordinator. Additional teaching and support staff make up a strong and effective team that is committed to the small number of pupils in the Centre. There are usually no more than six pupils at any given time, with four staff, which means that each child receives a lot of individual focused attention. As a result, the quality of the teaching is very good and very personalised to each individual's needs. The Centre works on a similar principle to the nursery, where the children themselves are actively involved in planning and evaluating their own work, which is matched either against the areas of learning for young children or the National Curriculum, depending on the most appropriate stage for the development of each child. This means that pupils' personal and social development is constantly being reinforced and they are learning to be independent but to also work and interact positively with others. The pupils are easily excitable and take some time to settle at the start of each session but, once they have been reminded of the routines to follow, they know that they have to think carefully about their choice of activity and have to be able to explain and give reasons for what they do. Inevitably, because of the nature of some of their difficulties, some pupils do not settle sufficiently and can even become disruptive on occasions, but these instances are handled extremely well by the very skilful management of their behaviour, where the staff reinforce the boundaries and re-establish the routines they are expected to follow. As a result, these pupils usually achieve good levels of success in their chosen activities, which boosts their confidence and self-esteem.

20 There are a number of pupils in other classes in the school who have also been identified with special educational needs. Each of these pupils has an individual education plan that gives clear and specific targets matched to their individual needs. These plans are written very well and identify precisely what needs to be done to help each child move forward in their learning. The targets are usually linked to literacy and numeracy, and are picked up well by the class teachers as they plan their lessons. For example, in a science lesson in Year 6 the teacher prepared specific sheets to help the pupils with special educational needs record their observations so that their literacy skills did not affect their ability to articulate their scientific ideas.

21 Pupils with special educational needs are taught very well alongside their peers in classes, and are supported well by the setting arrangement in English and mathematics, and by withdrawal in small groups for specific work, such as literacy. In withdrawal sessions, they receive well-focused support and regularly use specialist computer programs to help them learn. As a result, the pupils respond very well and are keen to show that they can succeed. For example, in a literacy-based withdrawal session, a group of Year 3 pupils eagerly joined in a competitive game where they had to correctly pronounce words on flashcards, reinforcing their understanding of a 'silent e' and 'aw' letter combinations. At the start of this session, they got most of them wrong but, by the end, the pupils not only recognised and correctly read words such as "pine" as "fawn" but they also began to suggest some of their own, including "miner" and "shawl".

22 Pupils with special educational needs are included in all aspects of the life and work of the school. The older pupils help at playtimes as part of the Mayor's Award scheme and pupils from the Centre take part in assemblies and other school events. These pupils also join some lessons, such as art and design, as part of an integration programme prior to their transfer back into mainstream schools following their time in the Centre. The inclusive nature of the school means that all pupils benefit from the chance to work and play with other pupils, sometime less fortunate than themselves, and therefore learn to respect each other's differences.

This is an outward looking school. Its very effective links with parents, the community and other schools in Europe add an extra dimension to its work and give pupils a rich and interesting range of experiences.

23 Parents think very highly of the school and are keen to send their children to it. As a result, the school is very popular and is over-subscribed. In fact, many parents live outside the school's natural catchment area but still choose to send their children here.

24 Parents support the school very well. For instance there is nearly a full turnout when parents are invited to attend meetings and consultation evenings with teachers. About one-quarter of parents help in school on a regular basis, supporting teachers in classrooms, providing additional help with the preparation of materials, supporting extra-curricular activities and accompanying pupils on school trips. Parents also take an active part in supporting the school financially. For example, a group of parents climbed the three highest peaks in UK to raise £4,500 for the school a couple of years ago to contribute towards the development of a new reception classroom. The school uses its parental contact very well to support the curriculum. For instance, those parents who work in local industry are encouraged to help the school form links with their companies and to broaden pupils' knowledge of the world of work.

25 Parents are kept well informed about the work their children are doing and play an active role in supporting the school's use of homework. In this way they make a good contribution to their children's learning. Parents of children with special educational needs are kept very well informed and are encouraged to work in partnership with the school to get the best for their children. In the same

way, parents of children with special gifts, such as a musical talent, feel that the school recognises this and tries its best to provide activities that nurture and develop them.

26 Parents' views and pride in the school can be summed up by a statement made at the end of their meeting with inspectors before the inspection. One parent remarked: "we are proud to give something back to the school and are always willing to support in any way we can", which was met by spontaneous and unanimous agreement from all other parents present. As far as parents are concerned, this school is doing a very good job for their children.

27 The school has a very strong and well-deserved reputation for its work with the community. It has a long-standing commitment to developing pupils' knowledge and understanding through a 'work related' curriculum. To achieve this, the school has forged links with many local businesses and encourages visitors to the school to work with the pupils. For instance, artists, writers and poets visit the school to support pupils' work to the point that the school has seen recent success by having a runner-up in a national story writing competition, having poems published in a Young Literacy Competition, and being classed as 'the best Primary entry' in a European Magazine. The school's success in these areas is shown by its achievement of an Education/Business Link Quality Award, and also by winning other accolades, such as a Barclays Bank Award for setting up a small business.

28 The school has developed strong links through its work with other schools here and abroad. For example, older pupils have worked in conjunction with students from a High School in Newcastle to develop an outdoor playground area for children in the reception classes. Pupils have experienced visits and joint projects with schools abroad, such as Austria and Germany, and some teachers have benefited from an exchange programme with teachers from a school in the Netherlands. For the past few years the school has had an active involvement in the 'Comenius' project, which is a European funded initiative aimed at forging links and partnerships between schools in Europe. A bright and vibrant tapestry in the school's entrance foyer depicts the history and culture of the different schools contributing to the project. The school's commitment to this initiative has led to recent recognition of its work by being the first primary school in UK to be invited to be a founder member of a newly formed International Academy for Primary Education, based in Dortmund.

29 The school's outward looking approach means that pupils get a very broad range of learning experiences. They benefit from links beyond the normal curriculum but also get a lot out of being involved in projects that support their work on topics in the classroom. For instance, Year 6 pupils are extremely proud of their current work on 'Rainforests', which has been supported by their involvement in a pilot project 'Seed to Saw' with three other schools in the North East of England. Similarly, other pupils have taken part in a special project on 'Biscuits' where they undertook market research, made choices about the resources and equipment they needed, calculated costs and produced advertising materials. This type of work supports pupils' academic learning at the same time as strongly promoting their social and cultural development, as well as broadening their awareness and understanding of life beyond South Shields.

The school is led and managed very well through the strong partnership between the head teacher, deputy head teacher and governors.

30 The school's effectiveness and high performance is attributable to the very good leadership and management stemming from the strong partnership and shared commitment to improvement between the head teacher, deputy head teacher and governors.

31 The head teacher and deputy head teacher have complimentary skills that together create a strong and effective upper management layer. The non-class based role of the deputy head teacher is

a key factor in the success of this partnership because it allows her to work in tandem with the head teacher on all aspects of school development and to therefore have a secure and first-hand understanding of the school and its work. This strength of shared knowledge means that the weaknesses identified in the school improvement plan are not impacting detrimentally at the top levels in the school, although the information in this document is still too broad and cumbersome to be relevant to many of the other staff. The senior management team is extended with other key staff, who provide very good support for the head teacher and deputy head teacher, and are helping to underpin the school's development and to drive improvements and initiatives in their areas of responsibility. The subject leaders also take their responsibilities very seriously and hold themselves accountable for the quality of work undertaken and the standards reached by the pupils. This strong team identity mirrors the way the head teacher and deputy head teacher work in a complimentary and collaborative partnership.

32 The head teacher leads the school very well. He sets a clear educational direction for staff to follow and is constantly looking for ways to develop and extend the opportunities offered to the pupils. He is a strong ambassador for the school and works hard to raise its profile and reputation, locally, nationally and abroad, by seeking to be involved in new and exciting educational initiatives and by forming partnership to help bring additional money, support and expertise into the school. The deputy head teacher is a very effective manager. She supports the day-to-day running of the school very well and is an excellent role model for the teaching and relationships expected in all classes. Her involvement in key projects and initiatives, such as 'Comenius', gives status to this work in the school and encourages other staff and pupils to be involved.

33 The governors are thoroughly involved in the life and work of the school. There is a very well informed and articulate governing body. Governors are enthusiastic and supportive and, with a thriving selection of committees, they inject a strong critical edge to their discussions and dialogue with the school. They take their responsibilities seriously and are keen and active members of the school community. Governors regularly visit the school and have a good knowledge of how it is performing, and why. This helps them discharge their duties well, although there are some minor omissions in the school's statutory documentation, namely the prospectus and governors' annual report to parents.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Assessment is not as effective as it could be. There is far too much paperwork that records what pupils have been taught and insufficient information about what they can actually do.

34 In the last inspection, the school's assessment procedures were criticised in most subjects and attention was drawn to the fact that there was insufficient information recorded about what pupils could do in order for teachers to be able to report accurately to parents. As a result, the school put into place a number of paper-based systems to tackle this issue. Many of these systems rely on teachers ticking boxes that do little more than record the topics and areas of the curriculum that pupils have covered. Consequently, these systems have become cumbersome and time consuming and still do little to identify pupils' attainment or track their progress.

35 Teachers use short-term evaluations and assessment of pupils' learning very well in lessons by using very good questioning skills linked to the objectives that are clearly defined at the start of each lesson. In this way, their immediate assessments are very effective and the pupils themselves are actively involved in evaluating and checking their own learning. The school's analysis of its own performance in tests is also very good. There is a wealth of data available that is sifted and summarised effectively to help teachers and subject leaders to pinpoint what they need to look at more carefully in the future. For instance, this is how the school quickly picked up what had happened by

the change of curriculum in science last year, and also identified how to stop it happening again. However, the school's use of assessment falls down in the middle layer between the immediate evaluation of learning in lessons and the formal testing of pupils in subjects such as English, mathematics and science. When teachers mark pupils' work they do not pay sufficient attention to matching it against the statements and levels published in the National Curriculum, or Agreed Syllabus for religious education, to gauge whether pupils are working at levels appropriate to their ages. As a result, pieces of work in subjects such as ICT and religious education have little meaning when the pupil could be working at a level appropriate to a seven year old, but the same end product could just as easily be relevant to work of a eight or nine year old, depending on what the child actually did to get to this finished point. Teachers' marking rarely indicates how well the pupils have actually done or what they should do next to improve and, when they transfer this information to the current 'ticky-box' recording systems, teachers are simply confirming what pupils have been taught rather than indicating what they have actually achieved.

The school improvement plan sets far too many targets for the current year and lacks a long-term overview of how the school plans to develop and continue to improve. It doesn't identify the school's key priorities precisely enough.

36 The school improvement plan is a comprehensive but unrealistically ambitious document. Over 100 targets have been identified for the current year, many of which are 'maintenance' issues that are not fundamental priorities to the school's future development or improvement. Specific issues for different subjects are clearly identified but the criteria against which the success of the school's actions will be judged are sometimes too vague and link more to what the school provides for the pupils rather than the impact of its actions on educational outcomes, such as pupils' learning and the standards they reach. Provisional costs are identified for most targets but there is little information about where these figures come from or how the cost-effectiveness of these actions will be measured and evaluated.

37 The head teacher, deputy head teacher and governors clearly know where the school's immediate priorities lie and what needs to be done but this is not reflected sharply or precisely enough in the school improvement plan. This in itself is not a problem in that the school is performing well and everyone is committed to continuing improvement, but it does mean that some of the school's key priorities are difficult to identify in its documentation and their thrust is diluted by the scale of the number of targets identified. In addition, the school improvement plan is only a one-year plan, which means that it does not have a longer-term strategic overview of the areas likely to be priorities for the school in the near future. This has occasionally led to instances where the school has felt the need to respond to advice and guidance from external sources that has not always been the best course of action for it to take, such as changing the science curriculum mid-way through a year.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

38 To improve the quality of education, and raise standards even further, the school should now:

- (a) Use assessments more effectively to help teachers identify what pupils know, understand and can do, and to subsequently raise standards even further, especially in science, ICT and religious education. Do this by:
 - improving the quality of teachers' marking;
 - putting a greater emphasis on noting the assessment of pupils' achievements rather than recording what they have been taught;

- paying greater attention to the expectations and levels published in the National Curriculum and Agreed Syllabus for religious education to match pupils' attainment to their ages and gauge their standards more accurately.
(Paragraph 34, 35)

(b) Make the school improvement plan a more effective part of the process to support the school's long-term development by:

- making sure that the school's key priorities are carefully identified;
- setting a realistic number of achievable targets;
- identifying outcomes that can be measured and evaluated in terms of their impact and effect on pupils' learning and standards.
(Paragraphs 36, 37)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

20

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

19

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	1	12	7	0	0	0	0
Percentage	5	60	35	0	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 five 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)	26	423
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	0	74

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	4
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	0	33

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	18

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	13

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.2
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	0.5

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	29	28	57

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	26	26	28
	Girls	28	27	27
	Total	54	53	55
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	95% (88%)	93% (88%)	96% (92%)
	National	84% (84%)	86% (86%)	90% (91%)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	28	27	28
	Girls	27	26	26
	Total	55	53	54
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	96% (88%)	93% (93%)	95% (90%)
	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	32	27	59

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	26	27	29
	Girls	21	19	23
	Total	47	46	52
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	80% (86%)	78% (80%)	88% (91%)
	National	75% (75%)	73% (71%)	86% (87%)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	25	27	29
	Girls	22	20	24
	Total	47	47	53
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	80% (86%)	80% (82%)	90% (77%)
	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	404	0	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	4	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	8	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	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0
Any other ethnic group	7	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)	20
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21
Average class size	30.2

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	182

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	26:1
Total number of education support staff	1

Financial information

Financial year	2001 – 2002
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	£
Total income	1,039,463
Total expenditure	1,038,796
Expenditure per pupil	2,340
Balance brought forward from previous year	25,647
Balance carried forward to next year	26,314

Total aggregate hours worked per week	32.5
Number of pupils per FTE adult	13

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)	1
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	481
Number of questionnaires returned	122

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	74	21	3	1	2
My child is making good progress in school.	64	30	3	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	62	35	2	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	34	49	4	0	12
The teaching is good.	67	30	1	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	43	43	11	3	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	68	26	4	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	75	20	1	0	4
The school works closely with parents.	55	34	7	3	2
The school is well led and managed.	75	22	2	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	69	30	0	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	40	32	7	3	18