

INSPECTION REPORT

HOUGHTON CONQUEST LOWER SCHOOL

Houghton Conquest, Bedford

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109458

Headteacher: Mrs M Napier

Reporting inspector: Mr C Parker
11897

Dates of inspection: 10th to 12th February 2003

Inspection number: 246910

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

© Crown copyright 2003

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	First school
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 to 9 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	High Street Houghton Conquest Bedford
Postcode:	MK45 3LL
Telephone number:	01234 740202
Fax number:	01234 740202
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr R Balls
Date of previous inspection:	12 th January 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
11897	C Parker	Registered inspector	Equal opportunities Art and design Information and communication technology Physical education.	The school's results and achievements. How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed?
14083	A B Anderson	Lay inspector		The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development. How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
19387	M Powell	Team inspector	English Music Religious education History Geography	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
20350	V Davies	Team inspector	Foundation Stage Special educational needs Mathematics Science Design technology	

The inspection contractor was:

Hugh Protherough Inspections Ltd
PO Box 396
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX15 5XJ

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Complaints Manager
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway

London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

Page

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

Information about the school
How good the school is
What the school does well
What could be improved
How the school has improved since its last inspection
Standards
Pupils' attitudes and values
Teaching and learning
Other aspects of the school
How well the school is led and managed
Parents' and carers' views of the school

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

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

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Houghton Conquest Lower is a first school for pupils aged from four to nine years. It is much smaller than average, with 100 children on roll who are taught in four classes. They start school in the term following their fourth birthday and transfer to a middle school at the end of year 4.

The pupils are predominantly of white British heritage. A very small proportion of the pupils have a mother tongue other than English, although all speak English well and do not need additional support. A small number of children are receiving free school meals. Overall, the proportion of pupils with special educational needs is broadly average; and four children have statements of special educational needs, which is a higher proportion than usual. The pupils' attainment is also broadly average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school that provides an effective education for its pupils. The teaching is good throughout the school and as a result the pupils achieve well and make good progress. Standards are well above average in English and mathematics at the end of year 2 and above average by the end of year 4. The school is well led and managed by the headteacher who generates effective teamwork and promotes a strong caring ethos. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards in mathematics and English are well above average by the end of year 2 and above average at the end of year 4.
- Standards in science, ICT, history and art are above average.
- The teaching is good throughout the school; as a result the pupils are achieving well and making good progress. They make particularly rapid progress in mathematics and English in years 2 and 3 where the teaching is particularly strong.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and interesting. It is enhanced by visits, visitors, imaginative presentation and good use of resources.
- The personal development of the pupils is strongly promoted; as a result they are very enthusiastic, interested in learning and behave well. They accept difference and are very supportive of each other.
- The school's aims and values are very well reflected in its work, and this is appreciated by parents who give the school considerable support.
- Under the effective leadership of the headteacher, the teaching team works together well to raise standards and enhance provision.

What could be improved

- The school development plan is not sharp enough and does not give sufficient information to allow the governors to monitor and evaluate its influence on standards and provision.
- Standards of handwriting and presentation are not high enough.
- The quality of marking is inconsistent.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the school was last inspected in January 1998 considerable improvements have been achieved. Standards have risen most notably in English and mathematics. The provision for, and the pupils'

achievements in, information and communication technology are much improved; consequently standards are now above average.

The assessment practices have also improved, but more consistent approaches to marking are needed to help the pupils to improve their work. Communications with parents are now good. The accommodation for the youngest children is now much improved, but the school still does not have a secure outdoor area to enable it to provide the most comprehensive curriculum for these children.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of year 2 based on National Curriculum test results.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
reading	B	B	B	B
writing	C	C	A	A*
mathematics	C	C	A*	A*

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

By the end of the foundation stage, the children are achieving the early learning goals set for them. The results of the 2002 national tests at the end of year 2 show that standards are above average in reading and well above average in writing. In mathematics they are very high and rank within in the top five per cent of schools. All of the pupils attained the expected level in all subjects. The proportion of pupils attaining higher levels was more than double the national average in writing and mathematics.

An analysis of the 2002 year 4 tests show that in all areas the pupils made good progress and achieved particularly well in mathematics. Currently, standards are above average in English and mathematics in year 4. The variation in standards with year 2 is because there are more pupils with special educational needs in this cohort. Nevertheless, there is a clear upward trend in the standards being attained and the school is successfully meeting its targets. Whilst the content of many pupils' writing is of a good standard, its presentation is not as good as it should be.

Standards in science, information and communication technology, history and art are above average throughout the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	The pupils are enthusiastic, enjoy learning and approach their lessons positively.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Most pupils listen attentively to their teachers and move around the school in a quiet and orderly manner. Their behaviour in the classrooms, at breaks and at lunchtime is almost always good.

Personal development and relationships	Relationships in the school are very good. The pupils are tolerant and support each other both in the classroom and on the playground.
Attendance	The school's attendance rate in 2001/2002 was broadly in line with the national average.

Although behaviour is good overall, a tiny minority of the pupils sometimes present challenging behaviour in lessons, which can cause disruption to the learning of others.

The older pupils willingly take on extra responsibilities, for example, helping tidy up the dining hall after lunch. The school council affords the pupils good opportunities to contribute ideas towards the running of the school. They do so in a mature and responsible manner.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Reception	Years 1 – 2	Years 3 – 6
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Good

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

The teaching is good. The lessons are well planned and purposeful, and the teachers set out clearly what it is they want the pupils to learn. Literacy and numeracy are well taught and as a result the pupils develop their skills and knowledge at a good rate; the teaching of these important areas is very strong in years 2 and 3 where the pupils make rapid progress. The school generally meets the needs of the pupils well and includes all groups in lessons by modifying tasks, providing specific resources and by supporting individuals. The teachers regularly mark the pupils' work, but in some cases the marking is superficial and does not help the pupils to improve their work.

The pupils learn and achieve well. In most lessons, they listen attentively. They show a good deal of independence and the older pupils persevere when they encounter a problem. Co-operation and collaboration are fostered and used effectively to enhance the learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad, balanced and interesting. It is enhanced by imaginative presentation, visits, visitors, and good use of resources.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The pupils with special educational needs are well supported by their teachers and the support assistants. Most pupils play a full part in class lessons and make good progress towards the targets set for them.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The pupils who speak English as an additional language are bi-lingual and are making good progress in all areas of their work.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The pupils' personal development is good. Considerable emphasis is also placed on their moral and social development, which results in independence, co-operation and very good relationships. The provision for the pupils' cultural development is also good.
How well the school	The school has good arrangements to ensure the health, safety and

cares for its pupils	welfare of the pupils.
----------------------	------------------------

The school works well in partnership with parents. Termly newsletters and other information keep the parents well informed. The vast majority of the parents are very pleased with the work of the school.

The improved resources for information and communication technology are being used to provide a growing range of opportunities for learning across the curriculum. This is possible because of the thorough and effective teaching of information and communication technology skills.

The foundation stage curriculum has been implemented very well, but the absence of a secure outdoor area restricts the range of activities the teachers can provide beyond the classroom.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher leads the school effectively and places a strong emphasis on working with the teaching team to continue to make improvements in standards and provision.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are very aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They make regular visits to find out for themselves how well the school is doing and consult with parents and pupils to get their views.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school analyses the results of national and school tests thoroughly to ascertain how well it is doing. The governors compare its performance with that of other schools both nationally and locally.
The strategic use of resources	The resources are being used effectively to provide additional support in the classrooms, to improve the information and communication technology facilities and to enhance the fabric of the building.

The accommodation is used effectively, there are sufficient teachers, good levels of classroom support and the resources are of good quality. The school has greatly benefited from the new library area and computer suite.

The school is working well to bring about improvements. However, the development and improvement plans do not provide sufficient information for the headteacher and governors to monitor progress towards the targets that are set. Moreover, the plans do not enable them to evaluate the effect that the plans have on the provision made for the pupils and the standards they attain. In many respects, the governors are using the best value principles well, for example, to compare the school's performance and consult with parents. However, they are not able to challenge the effectiveness of school improvement because they have insufficient information to ascertain whether or not the resources allocated to this important activity have been used to maximum effect.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The good progress that the pupils make. The good behaviour and the sensitive way the pupils are managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The information they receive about how their children are getting on. Safety outside the school.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The good teaching.• The pupils are well supported, particularly those with special educational needs.• The great care of the school takes of the pupils. | |
|--|--|

The inspectors agree with the many positive comments made by parents. The parents are clearly concerned about safety outside the school gates. The school is working with the appropriate authorities to minimise the risks and is presently seeking to move the school gates to create more space in which the parents can meet their children.

Currently, the parents receive an annual written report and have opportunities to meet with their child's teacher to discuss progress. In addition, those parents who attended the pre-inspection meeting stated that the teachers were always happy to talk with them either before or after school about any concerns they have about their child's progress. The arrangements for keeping parents informed about their child's progress follow the pattern commonly found in most schools. The inspectors judge the current position to be entirely satisfactory.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. By the end of the Foundation Stage, almost all children attain the early learning goals in all areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum. Pupils of all abilities are making good progress.
2. The results of the 2002 national tests at the end of year 2 show that standards were above average in reading, well above average in writing and very high in mathematics. All of the pupils attained the expected level in all three subjects. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher levels was more than double the national average in writing and mathematics. When compared to similar schools the results are above average in reading and in the top five per cent in writing and mathematics. The results in 2002 were an improvement on the two previous years and show a significant advance since the school was last inspected. The school sets itself appropriate targets and has been successful in achieving them.
3. The very good results in mathematics derive from the development of a whole school strategy under the guidance of the mathematics co-ordinator. Consequently, well above average standards are currently being maintained in year 2. Similarly successful initiatives to raise standards in the content and structure of the pupils' writing have produced standards that are also well above average in year 2. Overall the pupils are achieving well and making good progress.
4. There is some variation in the performance of boys and girls from year to year, but there is no pattern of predominance. The school monitors the progress of the small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language. These pupils are bi-lingual and they are making good progress in line with other pupils. Overall, the pupils with special educational needs also make good progress throughout the school. This is linked to careful target setting in their individual education plans. Progress in lessons is good because the work is well matched to the pupils' particular needs and abilities and the class teachers and learning support assistants give good support.
5. The results of the year 4 tests in 2002 show that most of the pupils reached the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics and that a significant proportion exceeded it in reading and mathematics. The headteacher analyses all of the test results to make sure that the pupils are making good progress. Between year 2 and year 4 last year, the pupils' progress significantly exceeded expectations most notably in reading and mathematics. The weakest area was spelling, but pupils still made the progress expected over the two-year period. Overall this represents good progress. Currently, standards in English and mathematics in year 4 are above average. The discrepancy in standards between years 2 and 4 is due to the higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs in year 4.
6. The content and structure of writing is a strong feature of the pupils' work. However, their handwriting and the general presentation of their work are not as good as they should be. **This is an issue for improvement.**
7. The pupils' are making much wider use of their information and communication technology skills, which are now above average. Standards in science, history and art are also above average.

8. Since the school was last inspected, there has been a considerable improvement in the overall standards being attained and the achievement of the pupils. This is because the teaching is good and the demands and challenges placed upon the pupils motivates them to learn effectively. This is most noticeable in years 2 and 3 where the pupils are making rapid progress, particularly in mathematics and English.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

9. The majority of the pupils have positive attitudes to the school. They arrive promptly each morning and are keen to start the day's activities. They quickly settle down in registrations, assemblies and in class. Children of all ages consistently demonstrate positive attitudes to their work. They are very enthusiastic, motivated and eager to learn. The pupils are attentive to their teachers, willingly ask and answer questions, and freely offer their own ideas and opinions. The pupils with special educational needs like school and most respond well to their teachers. The vast majority of parents agree that their children are happy at school.
10. Throughout the school, the standards of behaviour are good. The teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and the majority of pupils themselves have high expectations of the sort of behaviour that is acceptable in the school. The children move around the school in a quiet and orderly manner and their behaviour in the classrooms, at breaks and at lunchtime is consistently good, and sometimes very good. However, a tiny minority of children can present challenging behaviour in lessons, which causes disruption to the learning of others. When this occurs, the teacher has to spend a disproportionate amount of their time with them rather than teaching the rest of the class. There were no signs of either bullying or isolation of individual pupils. There was one fixed-term exclusion in the year prior to the inspection and another one during the current academic year. However, nearly all parents agree that behaviour in the school is good.
11. The relationships in the school are very good. The pupils relate very well to their teachers, to other adults and also to one another. They are polite and well mannered. Children of all ages work very well together in the classrooms and play happily together in the playgrounds. They collaborate well, share resources, take turns and listen to each other. The vast majority of the children consistently show respect for their teachers, each other and the environment. The pupils with special educational needs are well integrated in all activities and their difficulties are understood and respected by the other children.
12. The pupils' personal development is good. They are learning a good range of social skills that are helping them to become well-rounded individuals. In the classrooms, most pupils willingly take responsibility for their own work, and many children were observed working independently. The older children willingly take on extra responsibilities, for example, by helping to tidy up the dining hall after lunch. The school council affords the pupils opportunities to contribute ideas towards the running of the school, and they do so in a mature and responsible manner. The pupils go out of school on a good range of educational visits and encounter an appropriate range of visitors. The school supports local and national charities, and the pupils are learning to be aware of others less fortunate than themselves. They have recently organised a successful 'Blue Peter Bring and Buy Sale'. Most parents agree that the school is helping their children to become mature and responsible.
13. The attendance rate at the school is broadly in line with the national average. Absence is mainly due to either illness or medical / dental appointments. There is no unauthorised absence.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

14. The teaching is good. All of the lessons seen were at least satisfactory, most were good and some were either very good or occasionally excellent. The lessons are well planned. The teachers are very clear about what they want the children to learn, and they ensure that a good pace of learning is maintained throughout the lessons. They provide tasks that challenge and interest all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs. In most lessons, there are high expectations of the pupils' behaviour and effort, although occasionally some children talk when they should be listening to others. Nevertheless, they respond well and are learning effectively.
15. The teaching in the foundation stage is good. The youngest children relate very positively to their teachers because they are provided with a very good range of well planned activities. The teacher manages the provision very well ensuring there is a good balance between the adult led activities and opportunities for the children to choose for themselves. The activities are of very high quality and generally great fun. The teaching team make detailed assessments and ensure that all children are very well challenged in their learning. As a result, the children have a very positive introduction to school.
16. In years 1 to 4, English and mathematics are particularly well taught. The teachers have a secure knowledge of the literacy and numeracy strategies, which they are using very effectively to plan their lessons. They make it very clear to their pupils what they are going to learn and what they are expected to achieve. They motivate and interest the pupils, by posing probing questions and demanding thoughtful answers. This was evident in year 2 and 3, where the teaching is particularly strong, when the teacher used a lively sound and movement game to consolidate key mathematical vocabulary.
17. Right across the curriculum, the lessons are well structured and the classroom assistants are well briefed and deployed. The teachers are making increasing use of information and communications technology in their teaching, for example, by using the internet to find out about artists or the Vikings, the digital camera to capture the landscape around the school and the digital microscope to look closely at materials in science. However, they are aware that they could make further use of a range of technology in their teaching.
18. The school meets well the requirements of the statements of special educational needs and the individual educational plans of the pupils because teachers understand how to present work at the correct level for each child. In all classes, the teachers use the individual education plans well to set precise targets and plan the activities necessary to achieve these targets within a short time span. This engenders good progress.
19. The marking of the pupils' work is inconsistent. In some cases, the teachers' comments indicate how the pupils can improve their work, but in other instances they are rather superficial. Moreover, even when the teachers do indicate the need for further practice and improvement their comments are not consistently followed up. The school should adopt consistent approaches to the marking that help the pupils to improve their work. **This is an issue for improvement.**
20. The teachers take note of those pupils who have either exceeded or fallen short of expectations in lessons. They use this information to good effect when planning subsequent lessons and in focussing individual support where it will be most effective. This is generally the case in regard

to the individual education plans for the pupils with special educational needs. These plans contain clear targets and good records of how well the pupils are working towards them. Homework is well organised and the vast majority of parents are happy with the arrangements.

21. The pupils are making good progress in their acquisition of knowledge and skills because they are well taught and the teachers' expectations are high. The pupils apply themselves well to the tasks they are set, work hard in lessons and complete a good volume of work. They are interested and happily enter into discussions with their teachers who value their contributions, encouraging them to ask questions and play a full part in the lessons.

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

22. The school provides its pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum. It meets the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum and the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. Since the last inspection, the programme of study for information technology has been thoroughly reviewed and now provides an appropriate range of learning experiences. The curriculum for the foundation stage is well planned to cover the six areas of learning. However, the provision for outdoor activities is still constrained because the area adjacent to the classroom is not yet designed to facilitate this. The school recognises this fact and plans are in hand to promote more effective use of the outdoor environment. The teachers plan well to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils. For example, the pupils study the art of other European countries, and in religious education they gain a sound understanding of some of the commonly held beliefs and practices of world faiths, such as Judaism, Hinduism and Islam.
23. The strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy have been the centre of recent curriculum development work within the school. This has raised attainment considerably in the children's writing and their mental mathematics. The teachers' planning now includes appropriate objectives that are made clear to the pupils at the start of each lesson. National guidance has strongly influenced the planning of topics for each foundation subject. Full account is taken of the fact that there is currently a mixed year 2 and 3 class straddling two key stages. This ensures that work is not repeated. Similarly, the planning ensures that the higher attaining pupils are adequately stretched and that those requiring additional help undertake work that enables them to make good progress. This is a prominent and successful aspect of the curriculum for writing, particularly in the year 2 and 3 class.
24. The provision for the pupils with special educational needs is good. They are well catered for in literacy and numeracy lessons, and have good access to all other parts of the curriculum, including the extra curricular activities. The learning support assistants provide a good level of skilled support.
25. Opportunities for research in subjects such as history and practical enquiry in science extend the pupils' thinking but the teachers are also highly aware of the link between successful academic learning and the promotion of personal development. Consequently, most areas of the curriculum not only provide appropriate academic challenge, but also open the pupils' eyes to important issues such as healthy eating and successful personal relationships. Units of work on topics such as 'Friendship' and 'Belonging to groups' enable the pupils to discuss issues that arise in their daily lives. The extracurricular clubs, such as music and physical education, also provide a valuable additional dimension to the pupils' learning experiences. Visits and visitors add further enrichment. For instance, a visit to the Egyptian gallery of the British Museum was

enthusiastically recalled during a discussion with a group of pupils in year 4. Local people who come to the school either to talk about their past experiences or merely to share social events with the children are also greatly valued.

26. The curriculum links with other local schools are strong. Careful preparations are made to ensure that when the pupils move to their middle schools, there is no duplication of study topics. During year 4, the pupils work in books that they take with them and initially use in their middle schools. The school also passes on information about the pupils' attainment that is clear and relevant.
27. The school has a strong ethos that permeates every aspect of its activities. The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development is effective. Social development is a particularly strong area as there are many opportunities for the pupils to acquire the skills of independence and service to others. The pupils are taught to be reflective and aware of the effect of their actions on others. The adults consistently promote a sense of self worth by praising the pupils for their academic and personal achievements. The daily acts of worship are reflective and make regular reference to a caring higher being. The pupils have opportunities to respond to works of art and to music that reflect different moods. The good relationships in classrooms create a climate where the pupils can share their views.
28. The pupils have a good range of cultural experiences. They visit places of worship representing different faith communities. They are introduced to styles of art from various parts of the world, for example, Africa and France. They study ancient cultures as well as the more recent history of their own locality and of this country. A visit to the Duxford Air Museum enabled them to see aircraft used in World War II and a visit to the British Museum aroused their interest in artefacts associated with several other cultures. Through the improved curriculum for information and communication technology, the pupils are now gaining a greater appreciation of technological discoveries.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

29. The school provides effective care for its pupils. The headteacher provides very good leadership and places a high priority on this aspect of the school's work and the pastoral care of the pupils. All members of the staff are caring, dedicated and totally committed to the welfare of the children in their charge. They are very approachable and supportive. Members of the non-teaching staff are effectively deployed and give very good support to both teachers and pupils, particularly those pupils who have special educational needs. This has a positive influence on the progress these children make and the standards they achieve. All pupils are treated as individuals and given the help and support that they need.
30. This is a community that cares very well for pupils with special educational needs and its provision helps them to make good progress. These pupils are encouraged to take part in all aspects of school life and receive a good level of support, both personal and academic. Their individual educational plans include attainable targets and are reviewed regularly with their parents. The school has good links with outside agencies.
31. The procedures for child protection and ensuring the pupils' welfare are securely in place and fully understood by all staff. The arrangements for pastoral care and for first aid are good. The governing body and the headteacher take their health and safety responsibilities seriously and all the required health and safety inspections, including risk assessments, are systematically carried out and formally recorded. However, there is some confusion over the school's policy on the

removal of potentially dangerous jewellery during physical education lessons. For example, some pupils were observed taking part in PE lessons wearing earrings, bangles and watches. Conscientious teachers and teaching assistants, who are alert and vigilant, supervise pupils very well at breaks. Experienced midday supervisors undertake lunchtime supervision conscientiously, and the standard of care is high. The supervision is firm, but accepted as fair by the pupils.

32. The school has good arrangements for promoting and monitoring discipline and good behaviour. All members of staff conscientiously implement the agreed procedures. This has a positive effect on the high standards of behaviour consistently maintained throughout the school. The behaviour policy is supplemented by New Year resolutions and class rules, which are negotiated and agreed with the pupils. Topics such as bullying, supporting class behaviour rules and respecting others' feelings are included in personal, social and health education. The procedures for recording and monitoring absence are sound. The registers are completed accurately, the reasons for non-attendance and times of lateness are recorded, and unexplained absences are followed up.
33. The school's procedures for assessing attainment and progress are good, and the resulting information is used well to plan the curriculum. These are improvements from the time of the last inspection. The teachers know their pupils well and therefore can identify their needs appropriately. The pupils' knowledge and skills are assessed on entry to full-time education and the resulting information is used to determine if any additional support is necessary. Their progress in English and mathematics is monitored regularly. There is also careful assessment and recording of the pupils' progress in information and communication technology, which is now being used across the curriculum.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

34. The home / school relationships are good and the school enjoys the active support of the majority of the parents. Most are fully involved in their children's work in school and at home, for example, they actively support homework and home reading. A good number of parents regularly help in the classrooms and accompany the children on out of school trips. There is an active parents teacher association (The Friends of Houghton Conquest Lower School) that raises considerable funds for the school. The majority of parents expressed a very high level of satisfaction with most aspects of the school.
35. Communication between the school and home is good. The school sends out regular, informative newsletters and appropriate individual letters about specific events and activities. The teachers issue class newsletters with comprehensive curriculum information at the start of each term. The school publishes an attractive, comprehensive and informative prospectus. The governors hold an annual meeting with parents and publish a useful annual report. However, the latest report omits some statutory required information, for example, the rates of pupils' authorised and unauthorised absence and information about the implementation of the governing body's policy on pupils with special educational needs. A significant number of parents disagreed that they are kept well informed about how their children are getting on. However, the inspection evidence did not support these views. The parents are given an informative annual progress report that clearly indicates what the pupils can do, the progress they are making and the set targets for improvement. They are offered the opportunity to attend appropriate consultation meetings to discuss their children's work and progress with their teachers. The headteacher and her staff are very welcoming and approachable, and there are

plenty of opportunities for parents to talk with the staff informally at the start and end of each school day.

36. The special educational needs co-ordinator is very conscientious, is well supported by a member of the governing body and has good relationships with parents. The parents are encouraged to support their children and contribute to their individual education plans.
37. Some parents expressed concerns about parking and congestion on the footpath outside the school in the mornings and after school. The school has provided a safe enclosed area for parents and children to wait in, and there are plans to move the gate further into the school grounds in order to increase this space. Most parents park considerately, but a tiny minority add to the difficulties by stopping on the double yellow lines. The headteacher has approached the appropriate authorities to minimise the risk to both pupils and parents by improving the road signs.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

38. The headteacher leads the school effectively and places a strong emphasis on working with the teaching team to continue to make improvements in standards and provision. The teachers share a secure and collective vision for the school that ensures its aims and caring ethos are clearly evident in all aspects of its work. This has been developed through the headteachers' good management of the whole staff.
39. The headteacher and co-ordinators analyse the results of national and school tests thoroughly to ascertain how well the school is doing. This information is used to inform the school improvement activities and by the governors to compare the school's performance to other schools both nationally and locally. This has resulted in initiatives to improve, for example, standards in mathematics and writing. Additionally, the headteacher has led very successful initiatives to improve the facilities for information and communication technology and to refurbish the classrooms. Overall, the school is working well to bring about improvements, but the documentation that outlines the improvement strategy lacks clarity and focus. Moreover, the development and improvement plans do not provide sufficient information for the headteacher and governors either to monitor progress towards the targets that are set or to evaluate the effect they have on the provision made for the pupils and the standards they attain. In many respects the governors are using the best value principles well, for example, to compare the school's performance and to consult with parents. However, they are not able to challenge the effectiveness of school improvement because they have insufficient information to ascertain whether the resources allocated to this important activity have been used to maximum effect. Steps should be taken to produce a clear, focussed and sufficiently detailed school improvement plan that will allow the headteacher and governors to monitor and evaluate its effectiveness.
This is an issue for improvement.
40. The governors are very aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They make regular visits to find out for themselves how well the school is doing and consult with the parents and pupils to get their views. They became aware of the concerns of some parents and pupils about the supervision at lunchtimes and held interviews with the pupils to ascertain the nature of the problem. This issue has now been rectified through the school council. Similarly, the governors have visited the school to see how pupils with special educational needs are supported and included in lessons. Through this type of activity, the governors keep themselves well informed.

41. The school runs very smoothly because the secretary provides very efficient and effective support for the headteacher. The resources are being used effectively to provide additional support in the classrooms, to improve information and communication technology facilities and to enhance the fabric of the building. This has accounted for much of the school's financial reserves. A considerable number of classroom assistants, both for general and specific special educational needs support, are paid for from the school budget and specific grants. All are well deployed and used effectively, but there has been no formal evaluation of their effectiveness because, as stated above, there are no strategies for this type of activity.
42. There are sufficient teachers for the number of pupils on roll. The appointment of an unqualified teacher to support the teaching of information and communication technology and to maintain the computer facilities has given a significant boost to the teaching and developments in this area. The resources for information technology have improved and are now very good. In general terms, the school has good resources and they are used effectively by the teachers.
43. The special educational needs co-ordinator carries out her responsibilities very well. She is experienced and keeps up to date with regular training. The policy provides very clear guidance and the monitoring of the provision is effective. Inclusion is taken very seriously. The parents of pupils with statements are encouraged to participate in the selection of the support assistant for their child. The whole school team is given access to training and support.
44. The school is set in attractive grounds comprising of a large grass sports field, hard surface playground and a securely fenced environment area with a pond. The playground is well marked out for games and activities. There is a small, but very useful, outdoor swimming pool. However, there is still no enclosed area where the youngest children can freely move from indoor to outside. **This is an additional issue action.**
45. The classrooms are of a good size and place no restrictions on the delivery of the full curriculum. There is a good size multi-purpose hall, well equipped for physical education lessons. The school has greatly benefited from the new library area and computer suite. The accommodation is used effectively, kept very clean, and well maintained. The learning environment is also enhanced by attractive displays of the pupils' work.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

46. The governors, headteacher and staff should improve
 - (1) the clarity and focus of the school improvement planning with a view to facilitating effective monitoring and evaluation of its effect on the provision made for the pupils and the standards they attain (paragraph 38)
 - (2) the standards of handwriting and presentation of the pupils' work (paragraph 6)
 - (3) the quality and consistency of marking so that it helps the pupils to improve their work (paragraph 18)

In addition, the governors and headteacher should take steps to realise the plans for a secure outdoor area adjacent to the reception classroom to facilitate the flow of activities from indoors to outside.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	25
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	18

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	1	4	16	4			
Percentage	4	16	64	16			

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 four percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	YR – Y4
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	94
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	YR – Y4
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	4
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	8

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	4

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	7
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	5.4
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)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	2002	6	7	13

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	6	6	6
	Girls	7	7	7
	Total	13	13	13
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (83)	100 (83)	100 (96)
	National	84 (84)	86 (86)	90 (91)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	6	6	6
	Girls	7	7	7
	Total	13	13	13
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (83)	100 (91)	100 (87)
	National	85 (85)	89 (89)	89 (89)

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	87	2	
White – Irish			
White – any other White background	2		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	2		
Mixed – White and Black African			
Mixed – White and Asian			
Mixed – any other mixed background	1		
Asian or Asian British - Indian	4		
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	1		
No ethnic group recorded			

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 – Y4

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	4.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	20
Average class size	24

Education support staff: YR – Y4

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	113

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2
	£
Total income	197 465
Total expenditure	201 051
Expenditure per pupil	2 139
Balance brought forward from previous year	25 426
Balance carried forward to next year	21 940

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	3.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	3.2

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	97
Number of questionnaires returned	61

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	62	34	2	0	2
My child is making good progress in school.	59	31	7	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	57	41	2	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	41	48	3	2	7
The teaching is good.	62	33	2	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	39	30	25	0	7
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	51	44	5	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	38	3	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	36	51	11	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	54	43	3	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	52	39	7	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	34	51	8	2	5

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

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

47. Children enter the reception class in the September of the year in which they are five. At present, there are some four-year-olds, who attend in the mornings only. Attainment on admission is about that expected for the age of the children although their physical development, and in particular their confidence, are slightly below average. Children of all abilities make good progress, and by the end of the reception year, almost all attain the early learning goals. Those with special educational needs are identified at an early stage and given extra support to help them make similar progress to all other children. All members of the staff are aware of the needs of the more able and set sufficiently challenging work so that these children also make good progress.
48. The setting is very warm, caring, and has a positive ethos. The teaching observed during the inspection was almost always either good or very good. The children relate very positively to their teachers. The curriculum is rich, well balanced, very well planned and prepares the children well for the next stage of their education. There is a good balance between activities that the teachers direct and opportunities for children to choose for themselves. The activities are of very high quality and generally great fun. The teaching team make detailed assessments and ensure that all children are very well challenged in their learning. As a result, they receive a very positive introduction to school. The teacher plans well and makes good use of the national guidance for the Foundation Stage. The quality of the accommodation for this age group was a key issue at the last inspection. They now have a good, well resourced, free standing classroom with cloakrooms. However, the development of the outside area is still lacking and, therefore, impeding the children's physical development. Satisfactory progress has been made with this key issue.
49. The Foundation Stage has very effective leadership. The members of staff work very well as a team, interacting positively with one another and with the children.

Personal and social development

50. The children's personal and social development is good. The good teaching ensures that the children's attainment in this aspect of their education improves well during their time in the reception class. The children are well behaved, enthusiastic and diligent. They are kind and caring towards each other. They learn to take turns and to listen to each other. They have opportunities for role-play both in the 'Vets Corner' and in their own free play. The teacher creates a stimulating environment and atmosphere where each child is made to feel special. Expectations in regard to their work and behaviour are high, and the children are cheerful and want to please. Most are able to undress and dress themselves and cope well with their personal needs.

Language and literacy

51. The children's attainment in this aspect of their work is in line with expected levels. They are confident, articulate and respond well to their teacher's questions. In all sessions, the children are encouraged to develop their vocabulary. In a science lesson, for instance, children learned the word "brittle" after the teacher broke a spoon used in demonstration. They are beginning to listen carefully, though several still need a reminder from the teacher. They recognise many

simple words and the sounds of the letters and syllables at the beginning and end of words. They understand the stories and can predict what might happen next. Some read simple text accurately. The children enjoy books and like to talk about them; they know what an author and a title page are. They can write their names and most copy the teacher's writing with few mistakes. They are beginning to understand sentences. The potentially higher attaining children begin to write on their own and make good attempts at spelling new words. The quality of the teaching is good. A lively and rich range of activities is provided to encourage listening, reading and writing.

Mathematical development

52. The children's attainment is in line with the expected levels. They learn to count confidently to ten and beyond. They count forwards and back and can recognise simple number patterns and geometric shapes. In one lesson, for example, the children showed enjoyment and skill in addition and subtraction. Some can use arbitrary measures, estimate and find missing numbers. They are also acquiring and using mathematical vocabulary in an appropriate way. This is all the result of good quality teaching and a wide range of relevant learning experiences. The tasks provided for the children match their needs, and enhance their interest in learning.

Knowledge and understanding

53. The children's attainment in this aspect is good and their knowledge and understanding increase rapidly. In particular, they make good use of the local environment and are made welcome by the villagers, one of whom invited the whole class into her garden. They are able to carry out investigations; for example they can recognise and sort objects, which are made of different materials. They use computers with confidence. The teachers have high expectations, and through their very good use of discussion they encourage the children to reflect and explain their experiences.

Physical development

54. The children's attainment in this aspect is satisfactory. Their manipulative skills are developed well. For instance, they use scissors carefully and hold pencils and brushes appropriately. In lessons in the hall, the children make good use of space and are aware of each other as they move by hopping, skipping and running. However, they are less confident when jumping and balancing, but are learning to balance and jump from apparatus. In the lesson seen, the teaching was satisfactory.
55. At the present time, the pupils have limited opportunities to develop large body movements. The arrangements for access to the outside area are unsatisfactory and access to the hall is limited. Moreover, the resources are shared with other classes in the school so some of the apparatus is too big for the children to use comfortably. The school has recently obtained funding to develop an outside area for the use of the foundation stage children.

Creative development

56. In this aspect of the curriculum, expectations are high and attainment is good. Good teaching encourages the children's creativity. The children have opportunities for engaging in good range of art activities such as drawing, painting, modelling and printing. They paint confidently, often making bold use of colour. Noah's rainbow provided good opportunity to demonstrate this. They use a range of techniques including collage to select suitable fabrics for a coat for a teddy

bear. They have opportunities to make large models, such as a boat, and to use them in their play. They respond imaginatively to opportunities for using drama, in the form of role-play, in many aspects of their work. Good use is made of taped class music to develop listening.

ENGLISH

57. Standards in English are well above average in year 2 and above average in year 4. Attainment in English overall has improved since the last inspection as a direct consequence of a comprehensive review of the pupils' literacy skills and very good teamwork.
58. The pupils' speaking and listening skills are above average and enable them to make lively contributions to the lessons. There is a high level of interaction not only between the teachers and pupils, but also between the pupils themselves. This is clearly evident when they work in either pairs or groups to plan a piece of writing, to undertake work in science and to discuss issues in personal and health education lessons. The pupils in year 4, when planning group presentations during a drama lesson, listened carefully to suggestions from each group member and put forward interesting ideas for their 'freeze frame' enactment of an excerpt from a novel that they had been reading. The teachers also skilfully used the opportunity to enlarge the pupils' vocabulary. This approach has a very positive effect on the pupils' writing because they are accustomed to thinking about interesting words as opposed to those that come first to mind.
59. The pupils are achieving very well and making good progress in their reading. This is because the teachers understand how to develop reading skills and provide ample opportunities for the pupils to read. Those who receive additional help also make good progress as a result of careful analysis of their needs. The help that the pupils receive at home also makes a strong contribution to reading standards. A recent book fair was well attended and the pupils referred enthusiastically to their purchases. At times, the pupils read as a class, and this helps to boost the confidence of lower attaining readers. The teachers use these sessions to improve the pupils' expression. Very good examples of this were seen in year 2 during the reading of 'Little Red Riding Hood' and in the whole-class session when the pupils read out their own character descriptions. The teachers also provide good role models for expressive reading. As a result, the pupils are captivated, listen well and are able to discuss the shared texts in detail. The pupils in year 4 are developing confident opinions about story lines and authors. For instance, one pupil remarked, 'I like Jacqueline Wilson's books because they are very exciting and have unusual twists'. The school policy of encouraging the use of reference books, for example during history lessons, is effective because it exposes the pupils to non-fiction text. It is noticeable that the boys have positive responses to reading because the school ensures that the provision of books caters well for both boys and girls.
60. The teaching of writing has been thoroughly reviewed and improved. The present strategies are very effective and ensure high, and at times very high, standards. The pupils have been taught how to improve the structure of their writing so that their stories are more sequential. The use of a variety of punctuation is also developing very well. For example, the pupils in year 2 use exclamation marks, speech marks and, occasionally, suspension marks, appropriately. The pupils encounter a variety of writing styles so that they learn to recognise that the language of play scripts differs from the language they use to describe the setting in a narrative. The pupils in year 2 produced some engaging narrative in one story entitled 'Dreams come true'. They showed a well developed awareness of the need to engage the reader's interest. This is the direct result of the way text is discussed in the lessons when the writing tasks are prepared. Writing skills are very consistently promoted in many lessons. The sample of recorded work in science provided firm evidence of how technical vocabulary is conscientiously taught and

utilised by the pupils when they record their own work. The use of writing frames is effective in helping the younger pupils to plan their work, and word banks and dictionaries are available to improve the accuracy of spelling. Most pupils spell common words correctly, but their ability to spell more complex, polysyllabic words is not so secure. The marking of work does not sufficiently draw attention to this fact. Overall, the pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work also leave some room for improvement. Too many of the older pupils do not consistently join their letters even though the practice tasks show that they are able to do so.

61. The close relationship between the teaching of reading and writing is a powerful factor in the high attainment of the pupils. The teachers are consistent in their efforts to raise the pupils' awareness of the quality of the words they use. They do this through the skilful use of reading texts as a stimulus for writing. Equally, good attention is drawn to different types of writing, for example, labelling, diary writing, notes and lists. The use of information technology to record writing and to support language work is developing well.

MATHEMATICS

62. The school has worked very hard since the last inspection and has achieved a very significant improvement in its provision and results. In 2002, very high standards were achieved the year 2 tests. At the last inspection, the test results in 1997 were below average. The teaching is now consistently good rather than satisfactory, and in year 2 it is excellent. Very effective assessment arrangements, appropriate subject training and careful monitoring by a skilled subject manager have all contributed to this improvement.
63. At the age of seven, standards are well above average with a high proportion of the pupils working at higher levels. They are making very good progress in mathematics compared to levels when they started school. Those with special educational needs are supported well and make good progress. Over time, the boys and girls make similar progress. During the present inspection, the work seen in year 4 shows that at this stage standards are above the level achieved by most schools. This view is confirmed by the results of the non-statutory tests. The majority of pupils are achieving the expected standards with a significant number reaching the higher levels. The more able pupils are performing at an appropriately high level. The pupils with special educational needs are supported very well and generally make good progress.
64. By the age of seven, the pupils are able to recall basic number facts and are developing accurate, reliable mental methods of calculating with two digit numbers. Most of them have appropriate knowledge of addition, subtraction and the multiplication tables. They also have a very good mathematical vocabulary. The skills they need to use and apply their mathematical knowledge are developing well, including those for problem solving. They have a good understanding of number operations and most are acquiring a sound grasp of place value. The pupils use standard units for measuring length and can tell the time. They use graphs to display data, for instance, when conducting survey on favourite sweets. They have a good knowledge of the names and properties of shapes, and can describe position and direction well by using eight points of the compass and right angle turns.
65. The pupils increase their capabilities well in year 3 and by the time they are in year 4 they have acquired accurate, reliable methods for adding and subtracting two and three digit numbers. They can multiply and divide whole numbers by ten and a hundred. The average pupils can multiply and divide by a reliable method and can use simple fractions. They can classify shapes and have a secure knowledge of diagonals and other attributes of shape. Their ability to do mental arithmetic is also developing well. They make good use of informal methods and jottings

when appropriate. The pupils enjoy their mathematics lessons and take a pride in their learning. The work in their books is generally neat, but could be improved with more regular attention to titles and dates. The pupils make good use of information technology to consolidate their learning in the classroom. For example, their work on position was made clearer because they knew about creating instructions for a computer programme using the turtle. The links between mathematics and other subjects of the curriculum, particularly science, are well developed. This was evident, for example, in an experiment where the pupils measured water with a pipette.

66. The teachers make very good use of the strategies advocated by the National Numeracy Strategy. The quality is good overall and in year 2 and 3 it is excellent. The lessons are very well planned and managed; the teachers' presentation of the work is lively and engages the pupils well. In particular, the teachers make very good use of simple resources to illustrate mathematical ideas and processes and as a result the pupils concentrate and learn well. In nearly all classes, the oral and mental starters are based on a very good range of activities designed to revise and consolidate what the pupils have previously learned. During an excellent lesson in years 2 and 3, for instance, the teacher used a lively sound and movement game to consolidate key mathematical vocabulary.
67. The teachers use informal observations and regular tests to assess the pupils' attainment. Their marking of the pupils' work is regular, but does not give pupils sufficient feedback. The school makes effective use of a range of other tests and assessments and has established procedures for tracking the progress of individual pupils and cohorts as they move through the school. The mathematics co-ordinator analyses outcomes and identifies areas of strength and weakness. This information is used in the planning of subsequent work.
68. The management of the subject is very good, and the mathematics co-ordinator is working well to make further improvements. She is monitoring the quality of the provision effectively by checking the teachers' planning, through classroom observation, and scrutiny of the pupils' work.

SCIENCE

69. In year 2, standards of attainment are above the average expected in all areas of science. In year 4, they also exceed national expectations across the subject. This is a significant improvement in both areas of the school since last inspection.
70. In the 2002, the teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 show that the percentage of pupils who attained the expected level was very high compared to the national average. Moreover, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher level was also well above the national average. The inspection evidence shows that the present year 2 pupils and year 4 pupils are maintaining these standards. There is very little difference between the performance of girls and boys. The pupils with special educational needs make good progress. They have opportunities to respond to the same range of work as other pupils and receive good levels of help and support in their work.
71. The pupils in year 1 can experiment sensibly to find out about sound. They are able, for instance, to observe and comment upon the ripples made by a vibrating instrument in a pool of water. In year 2, the pupils are beginning to understand the importance and meaning of fairness in testing. They write their own accounts of their work and make good use of tables and diagrams. Similarly, when the pupils in year 4 tested a variety of papers for absorbency they showed they have learnt what makes a test 'fair'. They know that a control is an important factor in the process of comparison. They also know that when testing they must alter only one

thing at a time whilst keeping everything else the same. Their general application of their literacy and numeracy skills in science is very good.

72. The pupils have very good attitudes towards science. They show a keen interest and enthusiasm and their real enjoyment of lessons was apparent during the inspection. The pupils are anxious to take part in the lessons and are eager to answer questions and contribute ideas for discussion. Their behaviour in lessons, except for those with specific problems, is good. They work extremely well together when doing experiments, share both ideas and resources and treat equipment sensibly and safely. They have a good awareness of the importance of their behaviour to the safety aspect of experiments.
73. In most instances, the teaching is good. However, in year 1 planning is not as thorough as it should be so noisy experiments and those which demand quiet go on side by side. Consequently, the pupils are unable to conduct the experiments properly. In contrast, the planning in year 4 is very thorough and includes the provision of tasks for groups of differing attainment, including the pupils with special educational needs and the higher attaining pupils. For example, when presenting experimental ideas on the ways in which different papers respond to water the teacher challenged the most able to think about the variables involved. All teachers have a sound knowledge of science and in all lessons they emphasise the correct terminology and are very skilful in their questioning techniques. They make their pupils think, explore and apply the knowledge they have. They give good attention to literacy and numeracy skills within a science lesson. There are appropriate and developing opportunities for the pupils to use information and communication technology in science lessons, such as collecting and interpreting data and word processing reports.
74. The science co-ordinator left the school at the end of last previous term. The post is now unfilled. However, the documentation is up to date, the policy recently reviewed and half-termly assessments are in place. The school has made good use of the test analysis to improve its performance.

ART AND DESIGN AND DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

75. Standards in art have improved since the last inspection and are now good. The pupils finished work shows they use a good range of media and techniques and that these are being developed effectively through a well planned curriculum. For example, in year 1 the pupils have good opportunities to experiment with natural dyes, textiles and collage. They also use 'painting' software on the computer to work with line and colour. However, the emphasis placed on utilising these experiences to create a finished piece of work is sometimes unnecessary. The older pupils use their art books to try out different techniques and to explore and develop their ideas. They couple this with learning about the work of well-known artists, such as Duffy, Matisse and Klimt, and to explore the techniques they used. For instance, they used paint, pastel and crayon to explore the patterns in Klimt's work. The pupils are also beginning to express their own views about the work of these artists, for example, when commenting on the detail in David Hockney's picture 'My Parents' and the colour used in a tablecloth in a painting by Matisse.
76. In one well-planned and organised lesson, the teacher confidently guided the pupils through an activity to combine the qualities of different media and techniques. They were encouraged to work independently and make decisions for themselves. They achieved well using sponge painting to create the sky and tissue and crepe paper for vegetation. This lesson followed good observational work of the immediate landscape around the school, which they had recorded with a digital camera.

77. The oldest pupils talk confidently about art and artists whose work they have studied. They clearly enjoy art lessons and appreciate the work of artists. A number of pupils, for instance, talked confidently about George Seurat and pointillism. The pupils' work using this technique is of a good standard and reflects the good progress in skills and techniques made as they move through the school.
78. Although design and technology lessons were not on the timetable during the inspection, the pupils, including those with special educational needs, are making similarly good progress. There was ample evidence of interesting work on display and in books showing that the curriculum is well covered and that standards in year 2 and year 4 are at least in line with those expected nationally.
79. In one project, the pupils in year 2 specified the criteria when making a sweet box. One pupil for example decided it should be small and appeal to an adult in search of a luxury item. The pupils in year 4 have tackled a range of projects. They can design and make a personalised birthday cake or a box for a cereal product. Several pupils had designed attractive purses which included specialised compartments.
80. A strong feature of the provision is the application of design and technology skills to enhance understanding of other subjects across the curriculum. In history, for example, the pupils are in the process of constructing a wattle and daub wall, which they have planned and built outside. They also produced some very attractive jewellery after studying Egyptian designs and worked with a visiting artist to design and plan a stained glass window. The extra curricular activities include lace making.

GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

81. The school has drawn extensively upon national guidelines to plan its curriculum for geography and history. A rotation of the topics ensures that in mixed-age classes there is no repetition, but enables skills to be developed in a very systematic way.
82. Standards are above average in history and securely average in geography. This is broadly similar to what was seen at the last inspection. A good volume of work is recorded in history where the pupils are given a wide range of opportunities to practise their independent writing skills. A strong feature of the work is the way the teachers encourage the development of enquiry skills.
83. The pupils in year 1 have a very sound understanding of simple maps and plans relating to their local area. They have recently progressed beyond this to appreciate the location of countries, such as Africa and Australia, on a world map. They can describe some of the differences between these countries and the United Kingdom. During the inspection, a visitor held the pupils' attention very well by showing artefacts, photographs and a video sequence of a Ghanaian school to which the pupils have recently donated equipment. Likewise, the pursuit of Barnaby Bear has developed the pupils' interest in places beyond the United Kingdom and Europe.
84. As in geography, the younger pupils have used their observation skills to obtain evidence of life in the past. Photographs and evidence gathered during a visit to the British Museum have recently enriched the pupils' written recording about the River Nile, hieroglyphics and the mode of dress of the Ancient Egyptians. Both younger and older pupils are beginning to develop an

above average understanding of what peoples in the past have left as evidence of their way of life. In year 2, the pupils have looked at photographs and museum relics of runic script and have attempted to recreate it, only to realise how very difficult it was for the Vikings to leave more than fragmentary 'written' records. The pupils in year 4 have used their mapping skills well to understand why the Nile flooded annually and the effect of the inundation on the surrounding countryside. These older pupils are learning to ask and answer historical questions that lead to their understanding of issues, such as why people leave their homes to raid those of other people. They also begin to understand the fact that many people from overseas have settled in this country.

85. The teaching of geography is both very sound and stimulating. This is particularly the case when, for example, visitors bring first hand knowledge to share with the pupils. The range and quality of the artefacts, photographs and video material used to teach history arouses the pupils' curiosity and stimulates their enquiry skills. The pupils respond well to both subjects, but visits to sites and museums have added an extra dimension to the teaching of history. As a result, standards of work are somewhat higher in history than in geography.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

86. Since the school was last inspected, there have been significant improvements in the facilities, the teaching and the standards attained in information and communication technology. It now has a recently constructed computer suite with good resources, and in collaboration with four other schools in the area has an unqualified teacher who works alongside the teachers and maintains the equipment. The headteacher, co-ordinator and governors have been very successful in bringing about these important improvements.
87. The teachers have also undertaken training and are now making increasing use of information and communication technology right across the curriculum. For example, in science they are using the digital microscope to look at materials, in history they are using the Internet for information and in art they have software that allows them to experiment with line and colour. This is possible because good direct teaching is improving the pupils' knowledge and skills of information technology allowing them to communicate in a variety of ways, for example, by sending an email and using eye catching colour to highlight text. As a result, standards are above average.
88. The skills of the unqualified teacher are used very well to help to deliver a well planned programme of activities. In year 4, the class teacher introduced the idea that sequences of LOGO instructions can be given far more economically by using commands such as REPEAT. Very quickly the pupils were using this command in quite complex instructions. In the following lesson, the unqualified teacher enthusiastically challenged the more able pupils by introducing the writing of procedures. The pupils made rapid progress in this lesson and were quickly creating procedures to draw a circle and a pentagon and then using them to create elaborate patterns.
89. The teaching is good. The teachers know how to use a good range of applications, ensure that the activities are challenging and the pupils are well motivated. The unqualified teacher provides a very good level of support, expertise and considerable enthusiasm that adds significantly to the teaching. As a result the pupils are confident and the older ones persevere and attempt to solve problems that arise without immediately requesting help.
90. Each pupil's progress is carefully assessed and recorded in their 'ICT Pupil Profile'. This provides a clear record of the work they have covered and what they have achieved.

MUSIC

91. It was possible to observe only one lesson in music during the inspection. Additional evidence was gathered from taped performances, from the singing in assembly and the teachers' planning. From the latter, it is clear that the pupils receive a broad and balanced music curriculum enhanced by opportunities to perform, by clubs for recorders and ocarinas and additional instrumental teaching. There was insufficient evidence to judge either the standards overall or the extent of improvement since the last inspection, but the quality of the singing indicated that the pupils enjoy this activity and the standard of work is as expected for the age range.
92. The pupils in year 2 know that sounds can be either high or low. For instance, they successfully used chime bars to strike three or four notes representing high, low and medium pitch notes. They recognise that they produce different images in the mind, such as rain and other weather features. A few children know the names of some notes and can use body movements to indicate if notes rise or fall. Although the pupils have frequent opportunities to sing to the accompaniment of either tapes or a guitar, the school is not able to provide regular piano accompaniment for singing. At times, this has an adverse effect on the pupils' sense of pitch. The older pupils listen to a good range of music, including that from non-Western European sources. They can reproduce rhythms by clapping. In discussion, they express their enjoyment of working together to create and perform short pieces of music. They learn how music can describe movement, for example, that of animals.
93. The policy for music indicates that it is viewed as an important element of the pupils' broader curriculum. In the one lesson seen, the pupils worked well together and used instruments with enthusiasm. The resources for music are of good quality.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

94. Two physical education lessons were observed during the inspection. In both cases, the pupils worked at the levels expected for their ages. The teaching in both lessons was mainly good, but the pupils were neither reminded to work safely, nor were they asked to remove their jewellery. The school has no consistent policy on this issue and should take immediate steps to ensure that all risks of injury are either eliminated or minimised at the start of physical education lessons.
95. In years 2 and 3, the teacher challenged the pupils by using effective demonstrations, good coaching and a brisk pace to involve them in a range of movements both on the floor and on the apparatus. The pupils displayed their ability to use rolls and jumps well and transferred them to the apparatus with growing confidence. In year 4, a similarly well planned and structured lesson allowed the pupils to improve their movement to music and their control and balance when changing pace and direction.
96. In both lessons the vast majority of pupils behaved well and listened to their teacher. Those failing to do so were managed sensitively, but firmly, by the teacher. Most of the pupils work well, and enjoy being given the freedom and independence to generate their own ideas and express them in their movement.
97. The school has a multi-purpose hall of adequate size, a good hard play area and a large playing field. It also has the benefit of a small outdoor swimming pool, which is used in the summer months to give the pupils confidence in the water.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

98. No religious education lessons were taught during the inspection, but from the pupils' previous work and the teachers' planning, it is clear that standards meet the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. The picture seen at the last inspection has been maintained. The teachers' planning takes appropriate account of mixed-age classes and the need to avoid duplication. There is a good balance between the factual, descriptive elements of Christianity and those of other faiths. There are also opportunities for the pupils to encounter some of the more spiritual aspects. For example, at both key stages, the pupils learn to appreciate the ceremonial aspects of different religions and come to understand something of the spiritual symbolism represented by religious activities.
99. The younger pupils know that each religion has a special book. In learning about Jesus' life, for example, they have heard the story Zacchaeus and the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. They have a satisfactory level of knowledge about the different buildings associated with worship. In years 3 and 4, this knowledge develops greater detail. The teachers plan a variety of ways for the pupils to record their work, but at times the pupils have insufficient opportunity to present diagrammatic recording in an eye-catching way. The teachers use artefacts and books to enrich the pupils learning, but this is not always sufficiently reflected in the recorded work. Nevertheless, some of the independent writing, for example, to record Bible stories is carefully done. From the planning, it is clear that the teachers devise a range of interesting activities to which the pupils are likely to respond with interest. For example, video material enables the pupils to observe religious festivals in major world faiths. A good link is made to some of the lessons taught in personal, social and health education where the pupils discuss issues such as friendship and belonging to a community.