

INSPECTION REPORT

Alston Lane Catholic Primary School

Longridge

LEA area: Lancashire

Unique reference number: 121198

Headteacher: Mrs Barbara Gardner

Reporting inspector: Greg Sorrell
Rgl's OIN 21529

Dates of inspection: 17th – 18th June 2003

Inspection number: 248042

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Primary

School category: Aided

Age range of pupils: 5-11

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Preston Road
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Preston

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Appropriate authority: Alston Lane Catholic Primary School Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Philip O'Donnell

Date of previous inspection: February 1998

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
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	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	11
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	17
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	19
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	20

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Alston Lane Catholic Primary School is located in between the villages of Grimsargh and Longridge near Preston. It serves pupils from the local area and is smaller than most primary schools nationally, there being 161 pupils on roll of whom 81 are boys and 80 are girls. The pupils' attainment on entry is generally above national averages and the number of pupils with identified special educational needs, is in line with the national average. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below national averages. Two pupils are of ethnic minority heritage, and there is one pupil for whom English is an additional language.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Alston Lane Catholic Primary School is a good school with many strengths. The pupils attain high standards by the end of Year 6, make good progress in many areas of school life and are well prepared for the next stage of their education. The quality of teaching is good, as is the curriculum provided. The school is very well led and managed by the headteacher who gives a clear educational direction for colleagues, parents and pupils. She is well supported by staff and the governing body. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- By the time the pupils leave, at the end of Year 6, they achieve high standards.
- The quality of teaching is good overall and enables the pupils to learn effectively.
- The broad and balanced curriculum promotes the pupils' intellectual and personal development very well.
- The pupils' attitudes to their work, behaviour and personal relationships are very good and have a positive effect upon standards achieved.
- The headteacher, ably supported by colleagues, provides very good leadership which supports effective management and gives a clear educational direction for the school.

What could be improved

- The standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 2 are not yet high enough and could be higher.
- The good use by some teachers of information and communication technology needs to be extended to all teachers in more subjects across the school.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the action plan prepared by the appropriate authority.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Alston Lane Catholic Primary School was last inspected in February 1998. Overall improvement since that inspection has been good. The curriculum co-ordination is much improved as a result of clearer management, effective planning, monitoring and assessment. The work for pupils is better matched to their needs with ability groupings for English and mathematics. However, there is some scope for improvement in the quality and use of pupils' individual education plans. The range and quality of books is now good and are well displayed and used in classrooms. Standards of pupils' work and resources in information and communication technology have also improved, although further improvement is possible with additional training and effective use of the new information and communication technology suite next term. The quality of outdoor play equipment for the youngest pupils is now good.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
English	A	B	A	A
Mathematics	A	C	A	A
Science	A*	A	A	B

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

At the end of Year 6, in relation to all schools, pupils attain standards in English, mathematics and science that are well above average. When compared to similar schools, the standards achieved by pupils are well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science. This level of achievement is a result of very good teamwork amongst staff and increasingly rigorous analysis of test results that enable the school to set appropriate work and targets. Additional data indicates that in mathematics and science, the pupils make well above average progress compared to how they did at the end of year 2, and in English their results are very high. The trend in these high results has been one of steady improvement. The pupils also achieve well in other areas of the curriculum, including, history, geography, physical education, art and music. Overall achievement in information and communication technology is satisfactory with scope for improvement. At the end of Year 2, compared to all schools nationally, the pupils attain standards that are average and above in reading, writing and mathematics respectively. Compared to similar schools, attainment is broadly in line, yet in reading, it is below that expected. The trend in recent years indicates similar standards. In view of the children's above average attainment on entry to the Reception class, they make satisfactory progress overall. Throughout the school, pupils with special educational needs or English as an additional language make good progress in relation to their needs. Evidence from the inspection indicates that the school is well placed to improve the standards of attainment.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. The pupils have very positive attitudes to school and their learning. They arrive promptly and are eager to get into lessons and work hard. They show respect for their teachers, their surroundings and each other.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. For example, when required to access teaching areas via other classrooms, they are very sensible and minimise disruption to learning of fellow pupils. Incidents of unsatisfactory behaviour are rare.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. This aspect is a strength of the school. The pupils relate well to staff and each other. A range of age-appropriate responsibilities encourages them to contribute to the overall ethos of the school.
Attendance	Very good. The school monitors registers well and works very hard to promote regular attendance of all pupils and discourages parents from taking holidays in term time.

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 overall quality of teaching is good, it has a positive effect upon pupils' learning and has improved since the last inspection. Lessons are well structured, relevant to the needs of all pupils and provide a variety of learning opportunities, such as reading, writing, oral and practical work across all subjects. The best lessons have a very good pace with regular feedback for pupils about their performance. Teachers have high expectations and are well skilled in teaching literacy and numeracy. This influences all other areas of the pupils' learning. As a result they develop confidence in their own abilities. Teachers have a good understanding of the pupils. They assess work frequently to maintain this knowledge in order to ensure that pupils acquire a good range of skills. All teachers use information and communication technology to aid classroom display and produce reports. Some teachers use information and communication technology well to support most areas of the curriculum, but more widely, the use of information and communication technology by teachers could be improved and become more integrated into pupils' learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides a good variety of learning experiences. It is enriched by good use of local settings, such as museums, galleries and churches. The curriculum also provides for interesting visitors, including artists from other cultures which assist pupils in widening their horizons considerably. A recently introduced residential weekend promotes pupils' social and personal development very well.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The overall provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. The staff are very attentive and make strong efforts to include all pupils irrespective of need. <u>The targets set in pupils' individual education plans could be better and used more frequently in the regular discussions held with pupils.</u>
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	This provision is very good and a major strength. The school successfully lives up to its aims and its way of life is evident in its work. As a result of commitment and careful planning, the school successfully develops the pupils' spirituality and other values within the Christian context.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Procedures for child protection and ensuring pupils' welfare are very good. The school community is very caring and promotes respect for self and others. Most staff know the pupils well and work hard to ensure they achieve their potential. Pupils know they are valued and are aware of in-school support systems for anyone with difficulties.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides very good leadership and is a very good manager. She has built upon existing strengths while addressing appropriate areas for development. She knows what is important and prioritises effectively giving a clear educational direction for the school. In management, she is very well supported by a senior teacher and subject co-ordinators who fulfil their roles well. The post of deputy headteacher has only very recently been filled.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The governors demonstrate a good awareness of the school's strengths and areas for development. They provide very effective support and have a positive role in monitoring and evaluating school improvement.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school evaluates the performance of its pupils very well and this has a significant effect upon the standards achieved. There are also good systems for monitoring the quality of teaching. Other evaluations of school performance, such as governors' self-evaluation and parental surveys inform school development planning well.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes very good strategic use of resources. The processes used to secure best value for the school budget are well established and very effective.

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 coming to school, are well behaved and make good progress.• The leadership and management of the school are felt to be very good.• The ease with which parents can approach the school with problems is much appreciated.• They feel that the teachers are good and have high expectations for their children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some parents wish the school would offer more activities after school.• The amount of homework expected of the pupils is thought by some to be excessive.

The inspectors agree with the parents' positive views. However, the team did not find any undue cause for concern about homework. The amount and relevance is generally well considered and contributes well to the pupils' progress. Nearly a third of returned questionnaires indicated that there could be more activities after school. The inspectors agree that the current range is limited, yet, acknowledge the school plans to offer clubs in art, information and communication technology and chess once the premises have been extended. A significant minority expressed the view that they did not get enough information about their child's progress. The inspectors consider that the school offers appropriate information about progress via reports and scheduled meetings supplemented by open access to teachers.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The pupils achieve high standards across the curriculum, especially, at the end of Key Stage 2.

1. The school has maintained the high overall standards achieved at the end of year 6 over the past four years. The school's overall attainment, at the end of Year 6, is well above the national average in all schools. When compared to similar schools, the standards achieved in English and mathematics are well above average and those in science are above average. These high standards are the result of a shared commitment by all to achieve higher standards and further improvement. Pupils with special educational needs, and those with English as an additional language, achieve well as a result of clearly planned work and appropriate staff support.

2. In English, analysis of pupils' written and oral work confirms the high standards that pupils achieve in tests. The very good subject knowledge of teachers, combined with their ability to choose a wide range of stimulating and challenging texts, ensure that pupils' literacy skills are developed very effectively. Most pupils of all ages read, speak and write confidently attaining standards which are often above, and well above, expected levels, indicating the considerable pleasure that they get from literature.

3. For example, younger pupils in Year 1 read with good expression stories they've written based on The Wizard of Oz. They think carefully about different aspects of the characters' personality and relate it to their own experiences when they felt sad or afraid. Older pupils in years 3 to 6, show an increasingly good understanding of how to write different texts for a variety of purposes. For example, they write letters of complaint or support for local land developments. Handwriting shows much more maturity and most pupils are showing their own distinctive style with some fluency. They talk effectively about a range of issues and are confident in presenting their ideas to larger groups about a chosen topic.

4. In mathematics, pupils use and apply their knowledge and understanding well to make quick and accurate mental calculations when solving problems. Teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations. This results in pupils having a good understanding of mathematical terms and the ability to explain how they approach a problem solving situation. Regular re-enforcement of key vocabulary and attractive displays, combine to enable pupils to show confidence in numeracy. All pupils appreciate the challenge of energetic mental mathematics, sometimes played against the clock. Data handling skills are well developed in Year 2 through the creation of pictographs and by the use of spreadsheets by older pupils in Year 6.

5. In science, pupils at Key Stage 1 show good all round knowledge and understanding and show confidence when using and applying their skills to carrying out experiments. Year 2 pupils show great interest in their study of the butterfly life cycle. They demonstrate a real concern for the welfare of the caterpillars. They use reference books and CD ROMs to find out further information. Pupils systematically extend their skills across Key Stage 2 in tasks closely linked to the scheme of work. By the end of Year 6, pupils demonstrate the ability to predict outcomes, observe details carefully and present written work of good quality. Completed tasks indicate that most pupils attain above expected levels in their understanding of materials, physical processes and living things and the part that these play in their own lives. The school nurse supplements the pupils' knowledge well when discussing growth and maturity in humans.

6. In information and communication technology, all pupils are very interested in extending their skills and in learning how technology can be used to improve their work. For example, they enjoy using the recently acquired electronic microscope. In Year 2, teachers make sure that the pupils learn specific vocabulary such as “key word”, “cursor” and “menu” so that pupils can search for data productively. Most attain expected levels in the aspects they cover, such as using word-processors to produce well presented work with additional graphics from the Internet. Some older pupils use a presentation program to display units of their work in science. Programs are well used to produce graphs based on data collection.

7. Teachers provide a good variety of activities which enable all pupils to achieve high standards in other areas of the curriculum. Pupils use these opportunities well to develop their academic, personal and social skills. A good range of pupils’ art work is displayed throughout the school. Drama and music have a high profile at regular times in the year when pupils enjoy demonstrating their many skills. These performances are much appreciated and enjoyed by parents and the wider community. In music lessons, a wide variety of experiences enable the pupils to appreciate music from the past in the form of “playground rhymes”. Good standards are attained by most pupils in gymnastics, football, netball and swimming. All pupils are aware of good general fitness practice, for example, the need to stretch before and after exercise as well as the importance of wearing correct kit.

8. In history, local resources, such as museum visits are used well to develop knowledge and understanding about events and characters of the past. For example, the Viking Day and trips to a Victorian setting assist in bringing the subject to life and inspire some very rich writing. Geography skills are developed effectively across the age range as pupils learn about their own locality. They also compare Britain with other countries such as India and Africa. Study of a local bird reserve has provided a varied diet of experiences that support literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology capability. For example, letters are written in support of the reserve and data on the bird population is entered into a computer program.

9. Children in the reception class enter the school with above average attainment and make satisfactory progress. Strong emphasis is given to literacy and numeracy which assists their communication and mathematical development. They understand the elements of a story and can write simple regular words. They can write their “news” using recognisable letters. They can use mathematical language like “bigger” and “more”. Their creative development is good as they paint, cut, stick and crayon to draw themselves and familiar objects. Their knowledge and understanding of the world is developing well as they use aspects of information and communication technology well, manipulating the mouse and using the keyboard to locate functions. They know that the computer screen can change as a result of pressing the keyboard and study the screen carefully for information. They also enjoy listening to stories of Postman Pat that they recorded after discussion.

The quality of teaching is good overall and enables the pupils to learn well.

10. The overall quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection when it was judged to be satisfactory. It is now good throughout the school. In the 17 lessons that were seen, the overwhelming majority of teaching was observed to be satisfactory or better. Over six out of ten were good or better and over 2 out of ten were very good or excellent. When other sources of evidence including analysis of pupils’ work and discussion with school staff, the isolated instance of unsatisfactory teaching is judged to be untypical.

11. Detailed schemes of work and improved assessment procedures have contributed greatly to improvements in teaching. Good use is also made of learning support assistants who work closely with designated pupils. This feature is particularly useful when the role of support staff is clearly identified in lesson planning. The school does much to support initial teacher training. There are some good examples of specific deployment for students that assists them, the teacher and pupils equally. Teachers' planning and teaching styles, appropriately influenced by national strategies for literacy and numeracy, are also evident in other subjects.

12. During the inspection, teaching in the Foundation Stage was undertaken by a supply teacher. Planning for this stage was already in place and has been well supplemented by additional activities. For example, increased use of "real-life" events such as going for a "swim" in swimming costumes followed by a "picnic." Consequently a good balance of structured learning experiences and play activities enable the pupils to make progress towards their learning goals and demonstrate increasing independence.

13. Most lessons are well structured and build upon previous learning experiences. In the best lessons, the teachers re-cap on what has gone before and then outline the lesson's content. Plenary sessions are planned in most lessons although in practice, time did not always allow for a sharing of learning at the end of lessons.

14. Teachers place an appropriate emphasis on promoting literacy and numeracy skills. In specific literacy lessons, for example, in Year 1, the teacher's good use of themed work on The Wizard of Oz offered a range of opportunities for the pupils to develop their skills in creative play, creative writing, handwriting, and spelling. The pupils enjoy working in their different groups, they also respond very well to questions "asked" by their very own class bear. The "family" of class bears, Benjamin, Barney and Barnaby, progressively become larger from Reception and to Years 1 and 3. This imaginative use of resources is most effective during plenary sessions when all pupils are encouraged to share their learning. In Years 3 to 6, teachers use a wider range of strategies to promote literacy by use of different kinds of texts, such as newsletters written by the pupils and articles that are intended to persuade the reader to adopt a particular point of view. Teachers provide a good range of opportunities to use literacy skills in other subject such as science, history and geography.

15. Numeracy skills are also taught well. Pupils, as in literacy, are grouped according to their levels of attainment and different needs. Higher attaining pupils are frequently set more challenging tasks individually or in pairs, sometimes using computers to aid their investigations, such as a spreadsheet to investigate number factors.

16. The teachers' high expectations, the provision of good learning resources and challenging tasks promote brisk pace. Almost all pupils concentrate very well, listen with interest and are eager to give answers "against the clock" in mental maths. Similar skills are promoted in physical education where pupils are asked to repeat a given number of exercises whilst a stopwatch records their timing.

17. Teachers have good relationships with the pupils that have been built up over a period of time. Mutual high expectations promote a ready response from pupils who are seen willingly raising hands to offer answers and suggestions. Good subject knowledge of literacy and numeracy is evident in most lessons and teachers promote specific specialist vocabulary to enrich the pupils' knowledge and understanding. When pupils understand these terms, they use them with confidence and accuracy.

18. Teachers also have good subject knowledge in most other subjects and is very evident during themed weeks, such as those for science and multi-cultural events which draw heavily on art and music. Good links are made with other subjects such as science, design and technology, history and geography to enable pupils to extend their skills. When teachers plan together in key stage meetings they provide a coherent experience for pupils as well as focussing specifically on standards achieved.

19. Teachers make good use of information and communication technology to develop literacy. Typically, the pupils use word recognition programs, word banks and CD ROMs to support their learning. In mathematics, some teachers offer their pupils data handling opportunities whereby pupils can plot various quantities on a scale. Some good use is made of an electronic microscope to support science and the use of Internet to acquire resources is well established by some teachers.

20. On a very few occasions, teachers' expectations are not high enough. Some activities are teacher-led with too little opportunity for pupils to experiment. In some pupils' work, notably higher attaining pupils, significant amounts are marked as correct which indicates too little challenge. Similarly, some marking gives too little guidance on what needs to be done to improve. Analysis of pupils' individual education plans indicates that targets could more specific and used as a point of reference when reviewing pupils' work or behaviour.

The broad and balanced curriculum promotes the pupils' intellectual and personal development very well.

21. The school gives an appropriate priority to teaching literacy and numeracy. This commitment has not lessened the importance attached to the wider curriculum that enables the school to offer a broad and balanced learning experience for the pupils. Good links are made with other subjects such as science, history and geography to enable pupils to extend their skills. These strengths are a result of clear planning based on national guidance to suit school based needs, including the needs of mixed year classes. The timetable has been designed to enable literacy and numeracy to be taught before lunch-time for the majority of pupils, thereby leaving the afternoons available for other subjects. This has contributed significantly to a good learning environment.

22. Very good provision is made for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Assemblies are regarded as important for the school's ethos. They enable all pupils to reflect upon and raise awareness of their own and others' values and beliefs. Pupils are given good opportunities to take responsibility, for example, by participating in school productions, the school council and "buddying" of younger pupils. The strong Christian ethos that the school successfully promotes is effectively cultivated in religious education lessons and assemblies. The partnership with parents and the Church is very strong. Careful planning ensures that all aspects of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is very well nurtured. The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of visits and visitors, which extend pupils' knowledge and experiences. These include well-focused theme weeks and day visits. Recent examples, include, a festival of multi-cultural activities that embraced music and art. Visits to industry and local wildlife reserves show the range of opportunities available. A newly established weekend trip offers stimulating learning experiences and effectively extends pupils' personal, intellectual and social development.

23. Parents also play an important role within the curriculum. Not only does the parental association provide significant additional funds for resources, parental commitment to the education of their children sees them as regular visitors to school. They support school visits and topics where their generations of experience assist the present day pupils to understand their own history and that of their community.

24. The range of extra-curricular activities is narrower than may be found in similar schools, although, those that are offered, netball and football, are enjoyed immensely by pupils. The innovative use of a “sportsnight” where the typical “sports day” is held in the evening, is extremely popular with parents and an excellent example of the school reaching out to parents and the community.

25. Although not a statutory requirement, pupils are taught French, which not only introduces them to a modern foreign language but supports their learning of skills in their own language. Strong elements of music and drama are also provided in the curriculum and productions are very much valued and appreciated by parents and the local community.

26. Equality of opportunity and access to activities are good for boys and girls. In most teaching, pupils’ learning is promoted through the careful matching of tasks to pupils’ prior attainment at all levels. Pupils with special educational needs are identified early. The support offered is good, although there is room for improvement in relation to their individual education plans.

27. The development of citizenship is embedded with school life. Pupils are encouraged to think about others and very good relationships are developed. There are several features in everyday school life that underlines the commitment to making pupils feel secure and valued. For example, the “worry box” where pupils may drop a note of concern if something bothers them. The “buddy bench” is available for pupils to sit if they feel they need some company. The school council enables pupils to have a voice in school affairs so they feel consulted. In discussions with pupils, they are very clear about what the school does for them in keeping them safe and secure. This feeling of security also assists them to feel relaxed and ready to learn.

The pupils’ attitudes to their work, behaviour and personal relationships are very good and have a positive effect upon standards achieved.

28. Pupils’ attitudes, behaviour, personal development and relationships with each other and adults are strengths of the school and make a very good contribution towards the standards they achieve. Pupils’ attitudes towards learning, including those with special educational needs, are good. They concentrate well and show interest in what they are doing. In lessons, pupils enthusiastically put up their hands to answer questions, eager to show their knowledge and please the teacher.

29. They have the confidence to contribute their ideas and answers in front of other pupils, as seen during plenary sessions. Pupils in all year groups settle down to work quickly in lessons and are eager to answer the teachers’ questions. They work together well and exhibit increasing independence, for example, being prepared, and equipped, for lessons throughout the day. This readiness for learning is also a tribute to the high regard held by parents and carers for the children’s education.

30. Pupils behave very well in the classroom, and during breaks. They are well mannered, polite to adults and to each other, courteous and welcoming to visitors. The vast majority move around the school in an orderly way even when not directly supervised. During the inspection major building work was being carried out which meant a certain amount of disturbance that the pupils managed very well indeed. The works have affected the pupils’ learning only minimally and their mature response is commendable. A number of Key Stage 2 pupils have some lessons in the corner of the hall. To this, the pupils respond with considerable maturity. This unsatisfactory arrangement is planned to end when the school

extension work is complete. Similarly, Year 1 pupils are not unduly distracted by their classroom being part of a thoroughfare to the hall.

31. The pupils show respect for property, for example, when collecting and putting away equipment during lessons. There is also a marked absence of litter which indicates the pupils' appreciation of the school's environment. Relationships between pupils and with adults are very good. In lessons, younger pupils settle problems in a calm and fair manner for example, when sharing out tasks to be done when working as part of a team.

The headteacher, ably supported by colleagues, gives very good leadership which secures effective management and a clear educational direction for the school.

32. The headteacher provides very good leadership and management. Although in post for a relatively short time, the headteacher has become well-respected by staff, parents and pupils. She has built upon existing strengths, knows what is important and prioritises effectively giving a clear educational direction for the school.

33. The ethos of the school is shared by the headteacher, staff and governors. This common commitment is a key feature to success in the school. Overall management of the school has improved since the last inspection. The headteacher's expertise and experience is valued by staff who consult her for curricular and pastoral support. In management, she is supported by a senior teacher and subject co-ordinators who fulfil their roles well. The deputy headteacher has only been very recently appointed and acknowledges good support for induction during the first few weeks. The headteacher continues to manage change sensitively including the deployment of teachers and development of expertise to ensure that the pupils' learning remains paramount.

34. In addition to formal performance management, the monitoring of teaching and the curriculum is increasingly a feature of what all teachers do, although peer observation to support teaching and learning is still in the early stages of development. Increased delegation to key stage leaders and subject co-ordinators has widened accountability and responsibility: a challenge that staff have managed well. Nationally recommended guidelines on curriculum management are adapted effectively to meet the school's needs. The meetings that teachers have are valuable opportunities to focus upon standards, share ideas and take decisions. Not all these meetings are well recorded which can reduce their effectiveness when recalling decisions made and proposed actions.

35. Governors take their responsibilities towards staff, children and parents very seriously. The headteacher's leadership on academic standards has enabled the governors to have a stronger role in whole school development planning. For example, a recent self-evaluation exercise prompted a critical reflection and identification of school strengths and potential for improvement. Governors use data in a more informed way to challenge and support the school, so that they are able to set appropriate targets. They effectively apply the principles of securing best value from the available resources. Furthermore, the match of governors' expertise to their governance role is very well thought out. Day to day finances are managed very effectively by school administration staff. Close attention is paid to detail and regular application for specific grants ensures that the school receives optimum funding. A good example of this is the use of additional funds only available to small schools. The grant has funded close collaboration to assist pupils' transition to secondary school. The current numeracy focus has enabled the pupils to understand how mathematics is taught in the next school. All funds are properly committed or else identified for specific improvements in staffing levels, resources or accommodation. Whilst very much involved in school governance, the role of governors could be more clearly identified within the school improvement plan.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 2 are not yet high enough and could be higher.

36. End of key stage data and the school's own monitoring systems have identified the need to raise standards by the end of Key Stage 1. Inspection evidence confirms the view that a combination of factors have meant that standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are not as high as they could be given the pupils' above average attainment on entry. The school provides a rich curriculum with many strong features and submits this to regular review in order to maintain and improve standards achieved by pupils. The current foundation curriculum is adequately planned and takes suitable account of national guidance for early learning goals. However, analysis of children's work indicates that more opportunities need to be given for independence and experimentation so children start to become more confident, self-sufficient learners before moving into Year 1. One recent approach has been to introduce the idea of "continuous provision". This approach encourages the children to make choices with greater independence rather than adults having to set up all equipment and activities. This requires careful planning and preparation and a willingness to let children take some responsibility for their own learning, a feature more commonly seen in later years.

37. The overall provision for the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is not yet integrated enough to ensure a seamless transfer between the two so that progress is constantly maintained and monitored to support the further raising of standards. The provision has not been assisted by high staff turnover. Nevertheless, the headteacher has recognised the potential for a more effective deployment of the considerable staff expertise. Good progress has been made since the relatively recent appointment of a key stage manager who is working hard to raise standards. Indeed, whilst all teachers work very hard for the pupils, the need to more freely share information and work collaboratively is now recognised as being the way forward.

The good use by some teachers of information and communication technology needs to be extended to all teachers in more subjects across the school.

38. The use and provision of information and communication technology has improved since the last inspection. There are some teachers who use information and communication technology very effectively. For example, they plan lessons that allow pupils to draft work in English after using the Internet for research on topical events. In mathematics, some teachers successfully use spreadsheets to develop pupils' data handling and modelling skills. Digital photography is well used to personalise displays of pupils' work. However, this is not consistent throughout the school. These strengths need to be developed to enable all teachers to provide similar opportunities for the pupils. Opportunities to develop other skills to this level including more advanced work with spreadsheets and databases and the use of sensors and programmable devices are more limited due to limitations in resources and staff expertise. The potential for improvement is good given that information and communication technology is well led by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable co-ordinator.

39. Although, work is in progress to equip the school with an information and communication technology suite, planning for the further development of the subject is at an early stage. The co-ordinator understands the need to plan this new resource into the teaching of the subject. There is a clear need to improve the levels of software and training amongst staff to ensure that maximum benefit is derived from the new resource. Information and communication technology training is in progress which will need to embrace this new

facility. Subject policies and schemes of work do not yet take account of the newly available resources as they become integrated into the wider curriculum.

40. Many teachers wish to use the computer for whole class teaching, for example, studying how to navigate a CD Rom using on screen icons. This skill development is essential, however, it will be much more effective when used with a digital projector so that pupils can see much more easily. An interactive whiteboard is now also available which will enhance teachers' strategies and pupils' learning considerably once teachers have received suitable training.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

41. Alston Lane School is a good school. In order to sustain the high standards and ensure that the governors, headteacher and staff are even more successful in their shared commitment to further improvement, the school should:

1. Continue to raise standards in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 by:

- i) conducting a regular analysis of assessment data, planning and pupils' work
- ii) creating a collegiate approach based on a shared understanding of pupils' curricular needs
- iii) improve opportunities for children in the Foundation Stage to develop their independent learning by:
 - allowing them to initiate, choose and select resources and activities;
 - devising their own means of recording;
 - undertaking more research, investigative and experimental work.

2. Improve the use of information and communication technology throughout the school by:

- i. increasing the sharing of good practice that currently exists within the school
- ii. increasing the monitoring of subject policies; teachers' plans, and pupils' work
- iii. review resources, including programs and equipment, in view of curricular requirements and the newly acquired information and communication technology suite
- iv. providing an appropriate allocation of time for training in the use of information and communication technology in subject teaching so that maximum advantage may be taken of the new suite as soon as possible.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	17
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	42

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	1	3	7	5	1	0	0
Percentage	6	18	42	30	6	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	161
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	5

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	6
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.6

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0

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	12	7	19

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	11	10	11
	Girls	7	7	7
	Total	18	17	18
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	95 (81)	89 (88)	95 (100)
	National	84 (84)	86 (86)	90 (91)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	11	11	11
	Girls	7	7	7
	Total	18	18	18
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	95 (96)	95 (100)	95 (92)
	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	11	16	27

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	52	64	68
	Girls	51	58	61
	Total	103	122	129
Percentage of pupils At NC level 4 or above	School	76 (78)	90 (83)	95 (97)
	National	75 (75)	71 (72)	87 (85)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	59	63	67
	Girls	54	58	61
	Total	113	121	128
Percentage of pupils At NC level 4 or above	School	83 (76)	89 (83)	94 (89)
	National	72 (70)	74 (72)	82 (79)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	159
Any other minority ethnic group	1

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table 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)	7.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21
Average class size	27

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	84

Financial information

Financial year	2002/3
	£
Total income	401,971
Total expenditure	380,656
Expenditure per pupil	2,364
Balance brought forward from previous year	49,569
Balance carried forward to next year	70,884

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	1.5

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	161
Number of questionnaires returned	89

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	52	37	9	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	43	48	7	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	40	52	1	4	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22	54	16	8	0
The teaching is good.	48	50	0	1	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	28	53	14	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	60	34	6	1	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	67	30	3	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	35	49	11	4	0
The school is well led and managed.	40	51	4	3	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	44	49	4	1	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	29	39	25	7	0