

INSPECTION REPORT

HEATHLANDS SCHOOL

St Albans

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117685

Headteacher: Mabel G. Davis

Reporting inspector: George Derby
25349

Dates of inspection: 7 - 9 October 2002

Inspection number: 249371

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

© Crown copyright 2002

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:	Special (hearing impairment)
School category:	Community special (day and weekly residential)
Age range of pupils:	3 to 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Heathlands Drive St Albans Hertfordshire
Postcode:	AL3 5AY
Telephone number:	01727 754060
Fax number:	01727 754064
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	John Weaver
Date of previous inspection:	15 June 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		
25349	George Derby	Registered inspector
10329	Brian Sampson	Lay inspector
32055	Glan Davies	Team inspector
22408	Chris Lewis	Team inspector
10099	Sue Lewis	Team inspector

The inspection contractor was:

Cambridge Education Associates Ltd

Demeter House
Station Road
Cambridge
CB1 2RS

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	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

Heathlands is a day and residential special school for pupils, aged 3 to 16, who are deaf. One hundred and five pupils are currently on roll and 22 pupils stay up to four nights per week in Heath House residence. A small proportion of pupils have learning, physical and behavioural needs in addition to their hearing impairment. Pupils are on the three main sites. The Nursery and primary departments are on the main school site. One secondary department ('Heathlands at Townsend') is based within a local comprehensive. The other secondary department ('Heathlands at St Luke's') is a new development currently catering for Year 7 to 9 pupil but is due to be extended to take Years 10 and 11. These pupils are integrated within a special school with hearing pupils. Each department offers distinct ways of including Heathlands pupils with hearing peers from these schools. In the primary school, pupils are taught wholly by Heathlands staff but a few spend some time in mainstream schools. In the secondary locations, pupils are supported by sign language communicators when they are taught by the teachers from those schools. Heathlands senior staff are responsible for the pupils' education, wherever they are located, and the headteacher of Heathlands has overall responsibility. When pupils are admitted to Heathlands, their attainment is below average and many arrive with few skills in speaking, listening, signing, watching, reading and writing. The percentage of pupils taking free school meals is about 22 per cent although and about the same percentage of full time pupils come from different ethnic groups. Twenty six per cent of pupils come from homes where English is not the main language – for 18 families the home language is British Sign Language (BSL). The school has a *Total Communication* approach to its work. As each child's language develops, the type of communication varies according to each child's needs and preferences, but includes BSL, sign supported English (SSE), signed English (SE), speech and lip-reading and the use of the child's remaining hearing. Recruitment of appropriate specialist staff, such as a senior speech and language therapist, has been difficult in recent years and a number of unavoidable absences have slowed a few aspects of the school's development.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Heathlands is a very effective school and has some excellent features; it reflects deeply on what it does and how to improve. Pupils achieve well overall and very well in the primary department. This is through the very good teaching and the good quality support they receive from school staff. The school strongly promotes pupils' independence and personal development. Great care and concern for all pupils' physical and emotional needs and their personal well-being pervades the school. Their understanding of deaf issues and self-esteem is supported well. As a result of lively and enthusiastic teaching, pupils' response in lessons, and their enthusiasm for school, is very good. The school is very well led and managed by the headteacher and senior management team, especially in relation to the headteacher's tenacity for school improvement and determination that as many pupils are included in mainstream schools as possible. The school gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The provision for pupils' personal development is very good; the excellent emphasis on moral and social development pays off in producing well-rounded pupils, whose relationships are excellent and whose attitudes to work and behaviour is very good.
- The quality of the teaching is very good; pupils' achieve very well in the primary department and their achievements are good in the secondary department.
- The school's very effective response to the National Literacy Strategy is raising literacy standards and pupil confidence in all aspects of English; it is particularly strong in the primary phase.
- The leadership and management of the school are very good and the school has worked very hard to review the quality of its work and to seek the views of all people involved in its work and school life.
- The school has a genuine commitment to including as many pupils as possible in mainstream education. It has very strong relationships with, and goodwill from, its partner schools.
- The way the school works with parents and informs and involves them is very good.

What could be improved

- The arrangements for the provision and funding of Heathlands' pupils' placement and inclusion in mainstream schools, which currently impede the school's ability to fully utilise all its resources.
- The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) in Heathlands primary base and its use across the curriculum in all locations where Heathlands pupils are placed.

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

The school has made good progress since its last inspection in June 1998. It has maintained the high quality of teaching, despite staff changes and some new teachers who are not yet fully trained as qualified teachers of the deaf. Pupils' achievements are similar overall, although there have been some good results in the national tests and at GCSE in the past few years. The school has implemented a highly detailed, and very thorough, long-term school improvement plan which has relevant priorities. Assessment is now in place for most subjects. The monitoring of teaching by subject leaders has taken place, although staff absence and difficulties in recruiting temporary staff with specialist knowledge have made it difficult to sustain. Links between departmental heads are now well-established and comprehensive information is passed over to secondary Heathlands colleagues. The highly attractive and informative prospectus meets statutory requirements. Governors are well versed in, and have a considerable understanding of, the issues relating to the school's work.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets by the time they leave the school.

Progress in:	by Year R	by Year 6	by Year 11	Key	
Speaking, listening, signing and watching	A	A	B	very good	A
reading	A	A	B	good	B
writing	A	A	B	satisfactory	C
mathematics	A	B	B	unsatisfactory	D
personal, social and health education (PSHE)	A	A	A	poor	E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	A	A	A		

** IEPs are individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs.*

Overall, pupils' achievements are good by the time they leave the school in Year 11. Pupils who have a language other than English at home and those with needs additional to their deafness also achieve well. Progress is best in the Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception classes) and the primary department (Years 1 to 6) where, by the end of Year 6, pupils achieve very well. This is because of the specialist knowledge by the Heathlands teachers and support staff, and the individual attention pupils get in the very small groups. However, some weaknesses in the planning for pupils to be included in lessons at Townsend or St Luke's means support staff are sometimes unclear about what pupils are meant to learn. There is more variety in the achievement of pupils at secondary stage, often because pupils join the school in Year 7 and have not had the benefit of the school's strong support for learning at the primary stage. Pupils' achievements vary from year-to-year, but in the national tests and in GCSE in the past few years, one or two pupils attained at or above the expected level for their age. In both the 2000 and 2001 GCSE examinations, one pupil achieved five passes between A* and C grades including a grade C pass in English - a remarkable achievement. Throughout the school, very good attention to pupils' personal skills means they achieve very well in PSHE. Pupils' IEP targets are well thought-out

and include aspects of their communication; they make very good progress towards these. Achievement in English is good. It is very good in the primary years but the newly introduced, but strong, literacy strategy in Years 7 to 9 has not had a full effect on the skills of pupils of secondary age, as yet. Pupils make good progress in mathematics and science. In ICT it is satisfactory. Planning is not fully in place in the primary school and ICT is not sufficiently used to support pupils' learning across the whole curriculum. The school sets carefully thought-out challenging targets which are achieved well.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are very interested and responsive in their lessons. They work very productively and pay careful attention to teachers and communicators.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils behave very well overall. They are courteous, polite and show interest in visitors. Two exclusions, in line with the school's behaviour policy, occurred in the past year for unruly behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils have a very good understanding of right and wrong. Pupils take their responsibilities very well and relationships in the school are excellent.
Attendance	Good. Pupils' really enjoy coming to school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 - 6	Years 7 - 11
Lessons seen overall	very good	very good	very good

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

The quality of teaching is very good and very positively contributes to pupils' learning. This is because of the Heathlands' teachers' knowledge of how to effectively communicate with pupils and how to present challenging activities that meet their individual needs. They implement the school's communication policy well. Particularly skilful teaching of key ideas and vocabulary in subjects, results in pupils quickly gaining a firm grasp of these. Ideas are presented in many different ways to reinforce the pupils' learning; staff are tenacious in their approach to ensure that pupils have understood what was intended. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is very good. A significant strength here is the knowledge of the teachers and their team work with the highly effective support staff. Activities are very well planned to meet the needs of the children. In the primary department, the close relationships with pupils and the very small groups mean that staff know pupils very well and plan very well for their needs. This is also the case in the secondary department, when pupils are taught by Heathlands' staff. However, when pupils are included in lessons taught by mainstream teachers in Townsend or St Luke's, they are in larger groups. They generally receive good attention from support staff, who support their learning well. Occasionally, support staff do not know what is to be covered in a lesson and are not prepared for the modifications which might be necessary to adapt the work to meet pupils' needs. This limits the learning which takes place in some lessons and subjects and its pace. Overall, the teaching is very good in English (including literacy) where pupils' communicative needs are very well understood. It is good in mathematics (including numeracy), science and PSHE. The teaching of pupils with a language other than English at home or who have needs additional to their deafness by Heathlands staff is also very good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good overall. It meets statutory requirements. It is very good in the primary department and good at the secondary stage. It supports all aspects of pupils' communication well. There is a broad range of subjects which are timetabled well; the way staff plan meaningful activities for pupils and the opportunities for personal and social education, are very strong (particularly so for pupils from Nursery to Year 6). The residential provision also significantly supports this. Some subjects have not yet been fully revised in the light of the new 2000 programmes of study. An extensive range of activities outside lesson time contributes well to pupils' personal development and particularly their social skills. There is a very good, distinct curriculum for Foundation Stage children which meet their particular needs very well.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall. There are excellent for opportunities for moral and social development and the very good programme for personal development contributes very significantly to these areas. The school has developed a 'climate' in which pupils flourish and respect and help each other. Staff make use of the very good opportunities which arise for pupils' spiritual development, both in lessons and in the celebration of festivals and pupils' achievements. Cultural opportunities are very good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The procedures for ensuring child protection, health and safety and pupils' welfare are very good. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored; for personal development, the systems are very good. There is a very good approach to monitoring and promoting good behaviour. The school prepares pupils well for 'life' in mainstream schools through its inclusion programmes; it supports pupils from other schools through a 'signing club' and discussing matters which relate to hearing impairment. Any bullying or other incidents in the secondary schools and provision are dealt with effectively by staff. Assessment of pupils' academic performance is good and the information gained is used by teachers very well. The school makes effective use of the limited educational audiology time made available and works hard to ensure pupils' hearing aids and equipment are functioning.

Links with parents are very good and parents view the school as very positively. The school is also very supportive of its parents and keeps them very well informed.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher is very ably supported by the deputy headteacher and the strong senior management team. They work well together and have built a very strong team of teachers and support staff. The headteacher leads very well by example and provides an excellent quality of teaching. As result of consultation, senior staff have reviewed and improved further the way they communicate with and include staff in decision making.

How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Very good. Governors are strongly supportive in shaping the development of the school and have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and where improvement needs to be made. They monitor all aspects of the school's work rigorously and ask probing questions to ensure that what is put in place is effective.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school's new system of self-review is helping ensure that the views of the people involved in the school are taken into account and improvements are made on the basis of these. The headteacher and senior management and have been instrumental in checking on the quality of teaching. They know the strengths and weaknesses of their staff well and give them very good support. Performance management systems for teachers are very strong. Co-ordinators' roles for checking the quality of teaching in their subjects is under-developed, mainly because of staffing difficulties. The checking of how pupils are included in lessons in other schools is under-developed.
The strategic use of resources	Good overall. Short-term financial planning and control are very well managed and funding arrangements for financing inclusion places and resources are discussed with the main two partner schools. Longer-term financial planning is less secure, however, as issues relating to the funding of inclusion have not yet been resolved with the LEA and the school is fearful of a massive deficit in the future. The school has a considerable under-spend, partly because of this, and partly because some posts are unfilled. Specific grants are used well.

The school applies the principles of best value very well and the school collects data from, and is involved with, a consortium of schools for the deaf. Costs and pupils' results are compared. All people who have a 'stake' in the school are consulted and 'listened' to. The school's use of services is very cost 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"> Parents like nearly everything about the school and are highly supportive of its work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few parents were concerned about the information they received, how the school works with them and out of school activities.

The inspection team agrees with what pleases parents most. Forty three per cent of parents replied to the pre-inspection questionnaire; they expressed highly positive views of the school. Inspectors found that information provided for parents is very good and that there is a very good range of extra-curricular activities. Given the distance pupils live, staff try very hard to include parents in the life of the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The provision for pupils' personal development is very good; pupils' attitudes to their work are very good and they are very attentive in lessons. The excellent emphasis on moral and social development pays off in providing well-rounded pupils, whose relationships are excellent and whose behaviour is very good.

1. The considerable opportunities provided for pupils' personal and social development, especially in relation to them learning alongside hearing peers, significantly contribute to their understanding of themselves, their hearing impairment and how others view them. The excellent relationships among staff and pupils at Heathlands, and the strong desire by the teachers for pupils to do their very best, results in pupils trying their hardest and concentrating very well in lessons. The pupils love coming to school; they concentrate very well and get on with their work, often ignoring any silliness by hearing peers which might occasionally be going on around them.
2. The school's very clear moral code, and the way it is implemented consistently, supports pupils' understanding highly effectively. Moral issues are very well explained and there is a considerable emphasis on promoting all forms of equality; racial, social, religious and academic. Deaf awareness is also strongly promoted and sign language classes help mainstream peers begin to understand the language which deaf pupils use and support better communication with them. Only rarely are there any negative comments about school life by pupils; where these occur they are usually about how the pupils feel they are occasionally treated by a few hearing peers at Townsend. Although relationships are very strong between deaf and hearing peers in the secondary placements, there is the occasional grumble about unpleasantness or teasing from hearing pupils. However, staff are highly vigilant in dealing with any issues and these, and any misunderstandings (sometimes because of communication difficulties), are quickly cleared up. In fact, the school's recent survey on its work (including canvassing the views of its pupils) showed that one of the major strengths of the school was in the attitudes, self-esteem, enjoyment and confidence of pupils and especially the friendships made between hearing and deaf pupils as well as those in school between pupils.
3. Lessons and school life are planned so that pupils have very good opportunities for improving their social skills; for instance, through the school's residential activities in Heath House. The staff are particularly good at planning and teaching lessons in such a way that pupils are expected to work in pairs or groups and share ideas. This happens from the very beginning of their time in Heathlands and staff in the Nursery and Reception class pay close attention to how children can work together, especially in informal play situations. An early emphasis on sharing and problem solving together helps to create the excellent harmony which exists within the school. By the end of their time in school, Heathlands pupils are very confident communicators, who readily respond to questions in lessons when given the opportunity, and have views and opinions which reflect real thought about social and moral issues. They are very mature, confident young adults well prepared for their next stage of their education, which for many is away from home.
4. The high standard of residential provision meets the educational, personal and social needs of the 22 pupils staying there very well. However, no formal inspection of the unit by the local authority inspectorate has taken place which the school would welcome in order to confirm the good practice. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good and although there has been less opportunity to support pupils' social opportunities more recently, because of residential staff recruitment difficulties, staff try their hardest to ensure that the social opportunities they get through using the local community are good. The use of the independent listener ensures that pupils' voices are heard. All members of the school community work well together; residential staff and school staff ensure that homework is used effectively to support children's learning and their independence; lunchtime staff, administrative staff and those concerned with site maintenance all display interest in pupils, communicate with them well and do their utmost to support the school's work.

The quality of the teaching is very good; pupils' achievements are good in the primary department and their achievements are good in the secondary department.

The main points are:

- staff implement the school's communication system very well in all subjects, using appropriate subject terminology and placing high expectations on pupils in terms of their involvement and attention to each other and to the teacher;
- support staff are used highly effectively in the Foundation Stage and in the primary department – they are considerably skilled in Foundation Stage in responding to, and using, children's communication; they expect children to think about what they are doing and they support their explanations very well;
- introductions give pupils clear ideas of what they will cover and the teacher's expectations – there are very good ways of meeting the diverse needs of pupils in lessons;
- the teachers' use of time is highly effective; there is very good use of plenary sessions at the end of lessons to review key points and to set scene for what they will go on to do next;
- very good feedback is given to pupils as to what is good in their work; there is good use of planning ideas – for example writing frames in the secondary department to support literacy across curriculum as well as in English.

In addition:

5. The teaching by Heathlands staff is very good overall. Although at Townsend, about 30 per cent of the teaching is by Townsend staff and all the teaching, except for English, is by St Luke's staff, only the learning could be judged in these locations as the teachers belong to other schools. Pupils' learning is also very good on the whole, although there were examples when in lessons at Townsend or St Luke's, the quality of the learning was reduced because pupils were slow to understand vocabulary and key ideas that were not sufficiently emphasised or illustrated and when communication support staff were not fully aware what was to be taught in a lesson.
6. The headteacher leads by example; her teaching is a highly positive model for staff to follow. Senior staff have been vigilant in checking on the quality and on providing support where necessary. This has meant that even with the turnover of staff (some of whom are not yet qualified teachers of the deaf), the quality of teaching has been maintained since the last inspection. Teachers' knowledge of the different ways deaf pupils should be taught, so that they learn effectively from the lessons, is very good. This is a significant strength of the teaching by Heathlands staff. This is because of their high level of understanding of hearing impairment and their knowledge of what will work and what might prove difficult with deaf pupils. Key vocabulary and ideas are very well taught and pupils usually grasp ideas readily in lessons taught by Heathlands staff. In a science lesson for Year 6 pupils, pupils gained a very good idea of the different habitats animals live as a result of the probing questioning by the teacher and the key vocabulary written by the support assistant. The introduction of a real live Australian tree frog also prompted pupils to think about the conditions in which it lives. However, even with the expert knowledge of staff, sometimes, when really complex ideas are to be developed, additional resources would help, such as the use of ICT software, models or other visual aids. For instance, in a science lesson for Year 8 on elements, the pupils' understanding of atomic and molecular structure (a very difficult idea to grasp) would have been helped by a computer 'model' or even a three-dimensional structure. Instead, the teacher used an array of coloured circles to get the idea across; this took a long time and was initially too abstract for pupils. The explanation and reinforcement by the teacher helped but learning could have been much more efficient if more relevant visual aids had been used. This, however, also illustrates a key strength in assessment and evaluation that staff use. If something is not working they do try another way of helping pupils to clear up the problem. Explanations are usually of very good quality and supported well by a variety of approaches to communication, in line with the school's communication policy. The very strong quality of teaching and learning is usually consistent across the school, but not all lessons are taught by Heathlands staff and pupils' learning would be more effective if closer planning and a

greater understanding about the ways deaf pupils learn was to take place.

7. Communication support staff provide high quality interpreting, as well as practical support, for pupils who are included in lessons other than at the Heathlands bases. They provide valuable help, especially when explanations or ways of presenting information do not fully take the needs of their pupils into account. When communication support staff work with pupils in the secondary provisions, where there is great deal of technical language, they need to be better prepared beforehand, especially about the words and signs to be used. Occasionally, in the primary department the role of learning support staff in whole class parts of lessons is not always well defined.
8. Pupils at Heathlands do significantly better than many other pupils in schools for the deaf across the country. This is measured by their results in national tests and at GCSE. Although data needs to be used and compared cautiously, the school's own comparisons, using data from the British Teachers of the Deaf Association (BATOD) indicates this, as does comparison with the Ofsted Performance and Assessment Data (PANDA). Pupils' achievements are very good in the primary department because of the high quality of teaching. In the national tests at the end of Year 2, Year 6 and Year 9 in 2002, one or two pupils attained at the expected level for their age and in the Year 6 tests two pupils attained the expected level for their age in English, a remarkable achievement. In science, nearly all the pupils attained the expected level or above. The assessments made by teachers at the end of Year 9 indicate that a few pupils attain levels considerably above the expected level in art, physical education and religious education. There is a similar high quality of teaching seen in the secondary department by Heathlands staff and overall the pupils' achievements are good. These are especially good for those pupils who continue with their education right through the school. Some pupils enter the school after the age of 11 and come from a variety of previous educational settings; their communication skills and reading skills vary considerably. The school works hard to improve these pupils' skills and has introduced the framework for teaching English and progress units in Years 7, 8 and 9 to support pupils' learning. Pupils' achievements at the end of Year 11 are fairly consistent from year-to-year when all the grades they attain are considered together. The pupils achievement at GCSE at the end of Year 11 is consistently above similar schools, with pupils achieving 100 per cent pass rate at A-G grades and with some pupils achieving five or more A -C grade passes in both 2000 and 2001.

The leadership and management of the school are very good and the school has worked very hard to review the quality of its work and to seek the views of all people involved in its work and school life.

9. The school's high degree of success is built on a strong set of values which puts the child at the centre of everything that is done. This starts with the school's very clear communication policy which aims to '*foster a positive self-image which enables each child to participate fully in both deaf and hearing societies*'. It recognises the individual pupil's communicative abilities and uses a combination of listening, talking, signing and watching to meet each child's needs. The school is constantly evaluating its approach and strives to improve on how all facets of communication can be used to support the child's understanding, achievement and command of both sign language and English. It provides very strong support for the use of pupils' residual hearing and meets their communicative needs very well.
10. The headteacher's tenacious desire for improvement, and her ability to act as a role model with her excellence in teaching English, sets high standards for all staff to follow. The school's work is monitored well, overall, although the checking on how well Heathlands pupils are educated on other sites by non-Heathlands staff is underdeveloped. The highly successful headteacher, the high calibre governing body, the very effective deputy headteacher and senior managers know the school very well and know what needs to be improved. However, because of staffing difficulties, not all co-ordinators have had the opportunity to check on teaching in their subjects, although the termly system for subject monitoring and for picking up issues and improving practice is very good. This has recently provided the head of each department with a very clear view, for instance, as to where resources need to be improved in religious education, how planning should be

developed in PSHE and improvements in the use of investigations and experiments through science topics.

11. In order to better identify what the school does well and what needs to improve, the school has supplemented its very clear 'self-evaluation' policy with a very new set of self-evaluation methods, including the use of questionnaires. The school has rightly since identified some limitations in these; for instance the language of aspects of the questionnaire was too difficult for younger age groups and the staff returns were anonymous, somewhat at odds within a community meant to be improving together. Nevertheless useful information was gained and the exercise has had significant merit in moving the school forward and improving the provision for staff and pupils. The views of the school's 'stakeholders' (those who have an investment in the school through their direct involvement or through having a child placed there) have been sought and analysed by an independent consultant. Overall, the outcomes of the review were very positive; however, a few 'hard' messages emerged for the headteacher and senior management team, which centred on decision-making and communication. Inevitably, in such a complex organisation the perceptions of staff will be varied, but practice has been altered and staff now feel much more included in processes and that communication is better. The school has taken very seriously the views of all contributors (although parent returns were surprisingly low in number) and is planning to respond as appropriate. There is also, however, appropriate recognition that *strong leadership is not always comfortable or popular because it is single-minded in its aim of achieving a core purpose – in this case the good of the pupils of the pupils'* (direct comment from the report) and that difficult decisions cannot be avoided. The results of the school self-evaluation, including the work with the consultant, have given the school a good starting point to develop further how it looks at its practice. The school has a range of assessment procedures in place which enable them to document pupils' progress and to compare its GCSE and other national test results, for pupils' individually, for year groups and with other schools. However there is still room for improvement in how it uses all the data it has to identify how well pupils are doing and what they might need to do to improve further (such as by using the points score system, or having a clearer way of comparing pupils year-by-year progress across all subjects).

The school has a genuine commitment to including as many pupils as possible in mainstream education. It has engendered very strong relationships with, and goodwill from, its partner schools.

12. Heathlands has extensive and very effective links with a wide range of mainstream schools. It has carefully thought out the range of ways it can include its pupils alongside children of a similar age and does so in mainstream schools, as well as planning to meet the needs of its secondary pupils with more complex difficulties, additional to their deafness. It is very active in identifying how pupils' needs might be better met through providing opportunities for pupils to be included with hearing peers; for example, through Heathlands pupils attending sessions at local primary schools or small groups of local primary school pupils attending sessions, such as a numeracy session, in Heathlands. The school is very ambitious for its children and when staff recognise a specific strength they are very quick to explore ways in which pupils might be able to work alongside mainstream peers. For example, discussions are already taking place about how the needs of higher attaining pupils over the age of 16 might be met locally in the future. Primary pupils from local schools attend Heathlands for a highly successful 'reverse integration' programme as well for clubs, such as gymnastics, after school. Parents of both deaf and hearing children think very highly of this and help regularly to support the programme after school. This approach reflects very well the school's vision statement of *'preparing our children to integrate academically and socially...'* and this ideal is deeply rooted in all that it does.
13. The relationships with partner schools are extremely strong and the links with the five primary schools (Aboyne Lodge, Garden Fields, Manland, Wheatfields infants / junior school) one secondary school (Townsend), and a special school (St Luke's) build on mutual commitment to the right and need of deaf pupils to be educated alongside hearing peers, supported by the expertise of Heathlands staff. These links contribute to high academic achievement in the secondary school and GCSE results which reflect the hard work that goes into supporting pupils. For example, Heathlands pupils benefit from the high quality discussion and experiences provided within drama and the ways in which the teacher and the communicator ensure that the deaf pupil understands what is happening and has the opportunity to put forward his ideas in the same way as all other pupils. The school is quick to identify pupils at Foundation and primary level who

might benefit from more extensive contact with hearing pupils. Indeed, individual pupils have transferred successfully to their local primary school full time, following such carefully worked out integration programmes. Staff at all host schools speak highly of all aspects of the support from Heathlands staff and of the pupils exemplary behaviour, work attitudes and response to the opportunities that are provided. They are quick to point out how much other pupils gain from the presence of Heathlands pupils, socially, personally and academically. For example, Heathlands primary school staff plan carefully with other schools, so that their literacy and numeracy work links in to mutual themes and all pupils' continuity of experience is catered for. There are aspects of this work, such as how Heathlands staff check on the quality of what pupils receive when included in lessons elsewhere and the funding of the various provisions, which could be even better; however, the commitment and effort that the headteacher and senior staff put into organising placements and provision and in ensuring a continuity of education from Heathlands primary base through to their secondary education is outstanding. The day-to-day management and organisation of the provision in all these locations is very good. A teacher from the primary department oversees, as well as teaches, integrated groups on the Heathlands base and the head of the secondary department, based in Townsend, manages the provision there and at St Luke's. The work of the Heathlands staff in planning for the subjects they teach to pupils at Townsend and St Luke's is monitored very well and staff at both secondary schools, welcome the opportunity to have deaf pupils within their teaching groups.

The way the school works with parents and informs and involves them is very good.

14. Parents think that Heathlands is a very good school - inspectors agree with them! Just under a half of parents replied to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressing very positive views of the school. There were a very small number of negative responses relating to the information parents receive, the closeness of the work with parents and the provision of activities outside lessons. The quality of the information – the prospectus, school reports and Annual Reviews of the pupils' Statement of Special Educational Need and the general information about what pupils do and achieve is very good. There are informative newsletters, a very clear step-by-step guide to the school's approach to including its deaf pupils with hearing peers and a contact booklet regarding who to approach if there is a problem. The attractive newsletters, in particular, are of high quality and identify the informative school web-site (www.heathlands.herts.sch.uk), as well as the main features of school activities and pupils' achievements (including photographs). Home-school diaries for the youngest pupils keep parents well informed and holiday books ensure that pupils' skills, such as writing, are kept up. The range of activities outside lessons is very good, although some parents were concerned about a reduction in activities in Heath House. This is because of staff shortages, but local links such as the youth club and judo club still occur. Pupils have attended guides and scouts groups in the past and staff are exploring pupils' attendance at the 'deaf club' in Hitchin. Given the distance some parents live from the school, parents are as involved as they can be and the school encourages a very strong partnership. Parents support homework very well and parents and other family members regularly attend the signing club. Some parents also support the after-school integrated gymnastics group and a number of parents are governors; some have a role as elected parent governors while others have had children at the school and wish to continue supporting Heathlands' work. There is a high degree of involvement in the pupils' Annual Reviews with parents making a strong contribution to their children's annual targets. They are well aware of their children's IEP targets and how they might help them. The school listens carefully to what parents have to say about their children and involves them appropriately in all key decisions. A range of informal and formal events bring parents into school and parents contribute very effectively to pupils attainment and progress through their support for the work the school asks them to do with their children at home.

The school's very effective response to the National Literacy Strategy is raising literacy standards and pupil confidence in all aspects of English.

15. The school has a very strong commitment to high standards of literacy for its pupils. The National Literacy Strategy is very well established within the primary department. As the school has gained experience in teaching within the literacy strategies, it has thought carefully about how to stretch and challenge higher attaining pupils and meet the needs of pupils with additional

difficulties. This is now done very well, through the ability groupings from Year 3 onwards and the careful use of teacher and support personnel for younger pupils. (The same approach is also used for the teaching of numeracy skills and is also very successful). The very good attention to pre-reading and writing skills and to the children's communication needs in the Nursery and Reception years mean that the children are very well prepared for more formal literacy work. In particular, the use of drama and role-play and the extensive, expressive story telling engender a love of books and stories. This means that children spontaneously pick up books and ask to share them, even with visitors, and are keen to point out the words that they know. As the children progress through the school their reading and writing skills are very systematically supported, through very careful planning and recording of literacy experiences, the very good teaching and the very strong leadership of the primary and secondary English co-ordinators. They work very well together and draw on available support, such as that from the local education authority consultation groups, very well.

16. During their primary school years pupils' skills and understanding in all aspects of their English work are very carefully monitored, through teachers' day-to day assessments and end-of-year literacy tests. This means that teachers know the pupils and their targets very well and plan effectively both to meet pupil need and teach all elements of the framework for teaching literacy. For example, although each ability group may work on different texts and elements at a specific time, all groups cover all elements and explore a range of appropriate literature. In all lessons observed, pupils were enthusiastic contributors. There was a good pupil self evaluation and discussion in all lessons, because their teachers explored with them very well the objectives of the lessons and what they should be thinking about. Pupils' speaking and listening in English was very effectively supported as well as their literacy, as in a lesson identifying 'oo' sounds with one group and an excellently taught lesson based around '*five children and it*'. In the latter lesson with a group of Year 4, 5 and 6 higher attaining pupils, ideas contributed were levels commensurate with their age and individual pupils also read at levels similar to other children of their age. They were able to explain phrases such as '*man-to-man*' and '*badly beaten*' very clearly.
17. The careful support for how pupils think about and discuss their literacy work prepares them well for the more complex text and ideas that they meet at Key Stage 3. The school has worked hard at getting its response to the Framework to Teaching English at Key Stage 3 in place, the associated 'Progress Units' and at developing their English curriculum, including their support for pupils' literacy in Years 10 and 11. This provision has not fully improved standards as yet, as it is so new. So, although the teaching of, and support for, literacy is very good, especially in the designated lessons, literacy progress is good overall by the time the pupils leave school. However, the school's own evidence shows standards to be rising throughout the school, particularly for pupils who have experienced the very good support for literacy at primary level. An increasing number are now entered for GCSE English and the rising literacy levels enable pupils to consider a broader range of subjects at GCSE level. Although many pupils still read and write at levels below their chronological age, an increasing number achieve closer to other students of their age, particularly in reading. Where pupils have very low attainment levels, either because of additional difficulties, or because of specific reading difficulties, the school is quick to identify these and these students make small but significant gains in their attitudes and skills. The organisation of the English groups into ability sets enables the school to focus very well on these pupils needs and to stretch higher attaining pupils. There is a very good element of challenge in all materials used and staff have high expectations of pupils in all lessons. However, in subjects taught by staff other than Heathlands staff, materials used do not take sufficient account of the deaf pupils' literacy levels and worksheets are often too complex for them. Although communicators explain these very well to pupils, this limits their independent access and misses opportunities for supporting literacy across the curriculum. For some individual pupils with specific difficulty more use of ICT would help to reinforce key ideas and support their independent reading and writing further.
18. The school has made very good use of additional funding, the opportunity to trial materials, close links with literacy advisers and other schools, to devise and adapt Progress Units and other materials. There is a great enthusiasm noticeable in all classes from both pupils and staff and an

enjoyment of literature and texts. Pupils listen very carefully to the excellent feedback they get from teachers as to how they could improve their work. They also are quick to praise what is good in each others' work. Homework is used very effectively to reinforce points and to develop pupils' independent reading and writing and care staff and parents support this very well.

19. The school's literacy work is very ably led by two age phase co-ordinators who work extremely well together and have a huge commitment to continuing to raise expectations and achievements. They overview work in their departments very well, although there is a need to ensure that the work in St Luke's school and pupils' progress there is also overviewed by co-ordinators.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The arrangements for the provision and funding of Heathlands' pupils' placement and inclusion in mainstream schools which currently impede the school's ability to fully utilise its resources.

20. The school's arrangements with Townsend secondary school are well established, both as a teaching base for Heathlands pupils and as a place where the pupils can spend part of their time being taught alongside Townsend peers. Negotiations over funding and the number of places have been long established with the Hertfordshire local education authority together with an agreement over the number of places per year group, the fees payable to Townsend for space and tuition, and the allocation of accommodation.
21. However, the same firm and clear arrangements are not yet in place for the 'inclusion' at St Luke's school. Two years ago, Heathlands school, in the light of secondary pupils' needs becoming more complex, entered into discussions with St Luke's special school for a small number of Year 7 pupils to transfer there as a 'pilot' arrangement, to be managed by Heathlands' staff and overseen by various LEA officers. However, arrangements have remained somewhat informal, although there is a 'loose' arrangement in that no fees are paid to St Luke's and a teaching base has been provided, Heathlands provide a teacher and communication staff to support pupils who are mostly taught (except for English) by St Luke's staff. The numbers of pupils attending St Luke's increases each academic year as new pupils enter Year 7 and other pupils move up a year group.
22. The school's projections show the need for increased teaching and communication staff if the current planned growth is to continue. As in the Townsend situation, the amount of staff needed to support pupils at St Luke's will become disproportionate to the funding provided for the Heathlands school as a whole. The school is rightly concerned over being able to maintain a budget in credit in the forthcoming years. Forecasts show a potential deficit, as spending could exceed income. The school has worked very hard with the LEA to provide for the needs of secondary pupils who in previous years would have needed to be educated outside of the authority. It has sought over the past two years to gain agreement about the way forward. However, at present, no such agreement has existed and few discussions have taken place; the school finds itself frustrated at attempts to clarify the situation and to be able to firmly plan in the long-term.
23. The school is currently, however, in a considerably advantageous financial position, in that it has an extreme surplus of money (in excess of £250 000 – nearly 20 per cent of its budget when private funds are included). This is a similar situation to the last inspection, when the surplus was earmarked for upgrading resources for learning and decoration of the building. All this has been undertaken as planned, but the current surplus, accrued since 1998, is partly a result of the school's anxieties over its future funding and budgetary arrangements, but also partly because funding for some of the identified projects was found from other budgets. This has included funds provided by the LEA. In addition, and in common with many other schools in 'expensive' areas of the country, the school has had difficulty in recruiting staff such as teachers and a Head of Care, and money budgeted for these posts remains unspent. However, more could have been spent on resources for the pupils the school currently has; for instance, ICT could have benefited from

much needed networking arrangements and more software, as there is a shortage of programs to support learning in subjects. The school is now more accurately forecasting individual budgets, having taken into account underspending in certain areas. However, if the school can appoint all the staff that it has budgeted for, and its forecasts for inclusion funding are accurate, then the school is more than likely to be in a deficit situation.

24. There are strong mechanisms for checking on the practical arrangements for inclusion at Townsend and St Luke's, and headteachers of partner schools meet from time-to-time with the headteacher of Heathlands and various LEA officers. However, there are no formal systems in place to check on the quality of what the Heathlands pupils learn when included in lessons in the partner schools, the activities they undertake and the quality of the teaching they receive. Observation of lessons during the inspection identified that there were some weaknesses in Heathlands' pupils' learning in both Townsend and St Luke's, associated sometimes with an inexperience in meeting the needs of deaf pupils and a lack of planning for this. The secondary head of department discusses issues with communication support staff which they bring to him, for example, regarding any practical issues or difficulties they are having in interpreting or adapting material presented in lessons. This is helpful in guiding and advising different methods and approaches. However, the broader view of how effectively pupils are included in lessons, how these are planned to meet their needs of the pupils and how presentations ensure that pupils fully understand the ideas developed, is limited. The school is very strong on advising mainstream and special school staff on how to communicate with deaf pupils and sign language classes are well attended by pupils from the other schools. However, there is a need for clearer systems for sharing planning with support staff and training for partner school staff in the different methods that can be used to include deaf pupils and ensure that their learning is as effective as possible.

The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) in Heathlands primary base and its use across the curriculum in all locations where Heathlands pupils are placed.

25. Information and communication technology is co-ordinated at the primary base by a part-time teacher who has a relatively new but considerable responsibility for managing the subject, improving resources and developing the currently limited programme of study. Although a great deal has been done in improving the number of computers and arranging a separate ICT suite, there is still a lot to do and help is needed. Expertise on the staff could be utilised, as the secondary co-ordinator is a very experienced and competent ICT practitioner. The plan to improve the subject is adequate, although the way its success is to be measured does not include anything on improvements in pupils' attainment. Teachers' planning has not been updated in the light of the new National Curriculum 2000 and is still based on the areas such as *communication, handling information and control, monitoring and monitoring* instead of the themes which emphasise the application of ICT skills. There has been discussion about the relative merits of the different national and local curriculum plans and the school is considering using the Hertfordshire scheme as the basis for its planning. However, there are few records kept of the skills, knowledge and understanding pupils have gained in ICT, although it is intended that a system should be linked to the new scheme.
26. The new computer suite is helping to ensure that pupils have a regular opportunity to improve their skills and teachers speak positively about how their own skills have been improved as a result of the national ICT training programme. However, there is still a wide variation in confidence and skills among staff and there is not enough use of ICT to support learning in other subjects, even though this is meant to be identified in all subject planning. Co-ordinators' monitoring does show that there is some use of word-processing and a data logger has been used in science. The head of the primary department has monitored the use of ICT well and has taken steps to address the need to plan and record better the use of ICT, within this department.
27. Pupils' progress is improving, as they use ICT in a systematic way. Some of the younger pupils (Year 3) using the ICT suite use a website linked to their history project on the Egyptians. They locate the correct page (some with help) and 'translate' the letters of their names into Egyptian hieroglyphics. A few still need help controlling the mouse, some because their seating position is

inappropriate and other because the mouse is too large for their small hand. Towards the end of their time in the primary department (Years 5 and 6), pupils can create simple presentations relating to a drama activity, displaying a sequence of photographs (taken using a digital camera) incorporating text. However, many of the pupils are capable of reaching the expected level for their age, but do not yet do so because not all aspects of the curriculum are fully taught in the depth required.

28. In the secondary department, ICT is co-ordinated well for Heathlands pupils at Townsend and the subject is mostly taught by Townsend teachers, although there have been years when the co-ordinator has taught this in the separate teaching area for the pupils. Two pupils obtained grade C passes at GCSE in 2002, a significant achievement. Although pupils' attainments vary from year-to-year, the support given to aid their understanding through additional work at lunchtimes by the communicator, certainly pays off, in improving their skills and enabling them to keep up with their hearing peers. This was seen in the support given when pupils were designing business forms for Year 11 pupils. More attention needs to be given in mainstream lessons to the ways deaf pupils can better grasp key vocabulary and greater awareness by support staff as to the content could aid pupils' learning more effectively.
29. Although Heathlands' co-ordinators in Townsend are asked to identify how ICT can support learning in other subjects, and there is clear evidence that use of CD ROMs and the Internet for research is improving, there is still too little use of computers overall. Occasionally, when pupils are included in lessons with Townsend pupils, they use ICT, such as in a Year 7 design and technology lesson, when they used ICT to design simple circuits. However, at Townsend, and particularly at St Luke's, pupils have too few opportunities. The use of ICT as support for supporting the learning of pupils' additional needs is also limited; in a science lesson at St Luke's for Year 8, a pupil with physical difficulty struggled to physically manipulate materials as no other way for him to work as independently as possible, such as using a computer, was planned.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

30. In order to improve the educational standards and rectify the weaknesses the headteacher, senior management team and governing body should:
- (1) review the school's funding arrangements and the provision for inclusion so
 - that together with the LEA and host schools, funding arrangements and provision for all the school's inclusion activities, including the checking on the success of the inclusion and particularly the quality of the teaching, are clarified so that the school can effectively financially plan for in the long-term and effectively monitor all aspects of its work;
 - that the amount of surplus funds held by the school are within national guidance or that the school has a clear expenditure plan, in line with a long-term plan, for the substantial contingency held.
 - (2) improve further the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) in Heathlands primary base and its use across the curriculum in all locations where Heathlands pupils are placed.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	53
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	26

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	3	19	22	9	0	0	0
Percentage	6	36	41	17	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than two 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	105
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	22

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	105*

*The school considers that all pupils are learning English as a language additional to British Sign Language, although for most pupils this is not their home language.

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	8
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	4

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	5.7	School data	0.4

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

Attainment at the end of Years 2, 6, 9 and 11

Too few pupils took the National Curriculum tests or award bearing examinations to report their results.

Ethnic background of pupils

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

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
65	2	0
0	0	0
4	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
8	0	0
3	0	0
2	0	0
0	0	0
2	0	0
3	0	0
5	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0

The table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YN – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	21.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	4.8
Average class size	6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: YN – Y11

Total number of education support staff	24
Total aggregate hours worked per week	639

Financial information

Financial year	2000-01
----------------	---------

	£
Total income	1,531,818
Total expenditure	1,497,425
Expenditure per pupil	15,762
Balance brought forward from previous year	260,468

Balance carried forward to next year	294,861
--------------------------------------	---------

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	3
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	7*

*mainly part-time teachers appointed

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	45
Number of questionnaires returned	105

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	64	33	0	0	2
My child is making good progress in school.	47	49	2	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	42	47	0	0	11
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	43	48	7	0	2
The teaching is good.	71	22	2	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	52	36	11	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	64	33	2	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	70	27	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	59	30	11	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	61	34	2	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	60	40	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	45	34	11	2	7