

INSPECTION REPORT

ST GERARD'S RC PRIMARY & NURSERY SCHOOL

Widnes

LEA area: Halton

Unique reference number: 111391

Headteacher: Mr Roger Harrison

Reporting inspector: Mr Graham R Sims
28899

Dates of inspection: 8th – 10th July 2002

Inspection number: 249937

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Infant, Junior and Nursery

School category: Voluntary Aided

Age range of pupils: 3 to 11

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Lugsdale Road
Widnes
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Postcode: WA8 6DD

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr P. Finney

Date of previous inspection: 27th April 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
28899	G. Sims	Registered inspector	Information and communication technology Physical education	Information about the school The school's results and achievements How well are pupils taught? How well the school is led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9075	J. M. Baxter	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
22352	F. B. Gaywood	Team inspector	English Geography History Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
8845	H. M. Sumner	Team inspector	Mathematics Art and design Design and technology	
30745	P. Thorpe	Team inspector	Science Music Areas of learning for children in the Foundation Stage Equality of opportunity Provision for pupils with special educational needs	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Gerard's RC Primary School is situated in the heart of Widnes. It is a voluntary aided Roman Catholic School within the Archdiocese of Liverpool and is smaller than most primary schools. It has its own 52-place Nursery, which currently has 39 part-time children. In the main school, there are 141 boys and girls on roll between the ages of 4 and 11. In Year 2, there are ten boys and only one girl. The school is situated in one of the most impoverished wards in the country, with a significant level of crime and many social problems. Over half of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. A significant number of pupils, well above the national average, either join or leave the school during the school year. Some of these are pupils who come from a nearby site for travellers, others are children of mothers who live in the nearby women's refuge. Almost all of the pupils are from a white UK background, and none have English as an additional language. Almost a third of the pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, which is above average. Fifteen pupils receive help from outside specialists for a range of needs, the most common of which are dyslexia, learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties. At the time of the inspection, the school had no pupils with a statement of special educational needs, as a number of pupils with statements of special educational need had transferred to specialist units. Most children attend the school's own Nursery before they join the main school. Although there is a wide range, most have well below average levels of skill when they join the Nursery, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Since the last inspection, modifications and improvements have been made to the school's accommodation and a new computer suite has been installed. A corridor to link the main school building, the Nursery and the school hall is under construction. The inspection of collective worship and religious education is being carried out at a later stage by a separate Diocesan team.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Gerard's RC Primary School is a very good school, with some outstanding features. Under the excellent leadership of the headteacher, the hard-working, committed staff have created a wonderfully friendly and productive ethos in an area which is otherwise marked for its deprivation and social problems. The school is outstandingly successful in the way it fulfils its aims to foster happy and caring relationships and to enable all pupils, regardless of need or personal circumstances, to reach their full potential. The daily life of the school is influenced in no small measure by the faith which the staff profess and live out in an undemonstrative, but practical and caring way. Pupils make very good progress throughout the school as a result of the very good teaching. When they start school, the levels of skill shown by most children are very low indeed; by the time they leave, standards are close to the national average and well above the average for similar schools. Despite above average costs per pupil, the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The headteacher has been very effective in enthusing others and implementing his very clear vision for the school. As a result, the school has improved significantly since the last inspection.
- The headteacher's excellent leadership, and the commitment and hard work of the staff, have established an excellent ethos, which reflects, in practice, the school's Christian foundation.
- The quality of the teaching is very good and, at times, inspirational. As a result, pupils make very good progress and achieve very well in relation to the very low levels of skill shown when they start school.
- The school's input into pupils' personal development, particularly their spiritual, moral and social development, is excellent. As a result, pupils develop very positive attitudes and behave very well.
- The quality of care given by the staff is outstanding. As a result, pupils feel very secure within school, they learn to respect the feelings of others, and develop very good relationships with the staff and each other.

What could be improved

- The learning opportunities provided for pupils in information and communication technology (ICT), and design and technology.
- The leadership provided by subject coordinators.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

There has been a very good degree of improvement since the last inspection in April 1998. The school has taken a measured and sensible approach to improvement and, although not all of the key issues from the previous inspection have been tackled fully, the major issues have been dealt with very effectively. The school's main focus has been on raising standards in English, mathematics and science. There has been dramatic progress in Years 1 and 2, and very good progress in the rest of the school. The school's procedures for assessing and tracking pupils' progress in English and mathematics are much improved, and the information gained helps teachers to plan work which is appropriate to pupils' needs. The school has yet to develop similar, but manageable, procedures for other subjects. Although governors have been unable to do anything about the cramped classes, there have been improvements to the school's accommodation and facilities, and the construction of a corridor to link the main school with the Nursery and school hall was under way during the inspection. The next stage of this development will address the previously identified issue to improve outdoor facilities for the school's youngest children. Standards in ICT still remain below expectations, but the school has recently made significant investment in installing a computer suite as a major step towards addressing this issue. There has been a dramatic improvement in the level of attendance. The quality of the teaching has improved significantly, so that pupils are now receiving very high quality education throughout the school. All of the staff display a high degree of commitment to further improvement.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 6 based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
English	B	D	E	C
mathematics	B	D	E	C
science	B	D	E	C

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

The above table belies the progress made by pupils at St Gerard's. With the small number of pupils in each year group and a significant number who have traumatic home backgrounds and may only stay at the school for a short period of time, the school's results fluctuate, particularly at the end of Year 6. In 2001, the school's national test results were well below the national average. However, the recently released results for 2002 are all slightly above the previous year's national average and well above the average for similar schools. Considering these pupils achieved well below average results when they were in Year 2, they have made very good progress in recent years. The latest results in English, mathematics and science are all much higher than they were at the time of the last inspection. The improvement in the school's results at the end of Year 2 has been dramatic. At the time of the last inspection, the results in mathematics were amongst the lowest five per cent of schools in the country. The results for 2002 are likely to be well above the national average. In reading and writing, results have moved from well below the national average in 1998 to a situation which is likely to be above average in reading and average in writing in 2002. The results are certainly well above the average for similar schools. The school has been setting itself challenging targets and has been meeting them successfully.

The overall attainment of children when they join the Nursery is very low. The inspection findings show that they make exceptionally good progress in the Nursery, and good progress in the Reception class, so that they are not far below the expected standards in most areas of learning by the time they start Year 1. They continue to make very good progress in Years 1 and 2, achieving average standards in reading and writing, and above average standards in mathematics. Pupils currently in Year 6, who have not had such a good preparation as that currently enjoyed by pupils lower down the school, achieve average standards in English and science and above average standards in mathematics. With the exception of ICT and design and technology, where standards are below average, pupils achieve satisfactory standards in all other subjects. Taking into account their prior levels of attainment, all pupils are achieving very well throughout the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. All pupils have very positive attitudes towards school. They respond to their teachers with animation and enthusiasm. They want to succeed and, accordingly, work hard to achieve good, and well-deserved, results.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	In response to the high expectations of the headteacher and staff, behaviour is very good throughout the school. Very occasional, short lapses into less acceptable behaviour are dealt with quietly and effectively by staff. The result is a sunny, well-disciplined and responsible school community.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils are given a wide range of responsibilities, which they execute with dignity and maturity. The school council is outstanding in the way it functions responsibly and efficiently. The social integration of pupils is very good. Excellent relationships abound in this warm and welcoming school in which all pupils feel equally valued.
Attendance	Very good. The level of attendance has risen to well above the national average for primary schools in this school year. A tremendous effort on the part of all concerned has resulted in a dramatic drop in the rate of unauthorised absence.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The overall quality of the teaching is very good. Over half of the lessons observed during the inspection were very good or better, and some were quite inspirational. The combination of very good teaching, the very enthusiastic participation of all pupils, and the disciplined, but caring and respectful atmosphere within the classroom, results in very good learning and pupils whose standards of attainment improve at a much faster rate than in most schools. All of the teachers demonstrate great commitment to their work and strive to create a high-quality learning environment for the pupils. They stand no nonsense within the classroom, but are fulsome in their praise when this is merited, so that pupils are encouraged and want to do their best. The teachers cater well for pupils of all abilities and backgrounds. They have very high expectations, so there is every opportunity for the more able pupils to fulfil their potential. Indeed, in the most recent national tests, a quarter of the pupils exceeded national expectations in English and mathematics and over a third did so in science. The very good attention given to individual pupils ensures that newcomers are integrated successfully into the classroom, and staff seek the best way to help pupils who have difficulties with their learning. At times, this is provided through high-quality sessions, when a small group of pupils is withdrawn from their normal lessons for specifically targeted teaching. At other times, teachers provide different work for these pupils within the normal lesson. The teaching of English and mathematics is very good and teachers provide very good opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. The teaching in the Nursery is

exceptionally good, and children not only settle into school life very quickly, but really enjoy learning through the rich experiences provided for them. The only main areas of weakness lie in the teaching of ICT, and design and technology. The teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in these subjects, and their understanding of the National Curriculum requirements is weak. Now that the school has installed its computer suite, however, teachers are keen to make greater use of new technology.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The school's curriculum meets statutory requirements well and is very appropriate to the widely differing needs of its pupils. Residential trips and involvement within the local community make excellent contributions to pupils' learning. Insufficient time is given to the teaching of ICT and design and technology.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Staff are acutely aware of pupils who have particular learning difficulties or who need additional support to help them cope with emotional problems. The support provided, either on an individual basis or through withdrawal groups, is appropriately targeted and very effective.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent. The attention given to pupils' personal development pervades every aspect of school life. The staff provide excellent role models, are firm in their discipline, make their expectations very clear, but exude warmth, care and love in their dealings with all pupils. Pupils from diverse backgrounds, including those who have experienced traumatic home circumstances, are integrated seamlessly into the school community.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Excellent. The pastoral care and attention given to pupils is of the highest possible standard. Ensuring that the individual needs of each pupil are fully met is at the heart of the school's philosophy of education and the personal support it provides. There are good procedures for tracking pupils' academic progress in English and mathematics.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	Excellent. There is a strong bond of partnership between parents and the school. Parents are as valued by the school as are their children. The quality of information for parents is very good, enabling parents to make an effective contribution to their children's education in their own particular way.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher provides excellent leadership and manages the school very well. The excellent ethos within the school owes much to his vision and the direction he gives to staff. Very good leadership of English and mathematics has resulted in significant improvements. Other subject coordinators fulfil their roles satisfactorily, but the time is now right to delegate more responsibility to them and to develop their roles further. The school has a good number of well-qualified teaching and support staff.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors fulfil their statutory obligations well. They understand the school's strengths and the challenges it faces well. They share a common vision for the school and are very supportive of initiatives to bring about further improvement. They act as critical friends, but their role does not yet include gathering of first hand evidence, for example by observing what happens within the classroom.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school has been very clear in its priorities for development, and has focused, appropriately and with great success, on raising standards in literacy and numeracy. Subject coordinators are now ready to become more involved in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning.
The strategic use of resources	The school uses its resources well. The headteacher is very effective in obtaining additional grants to benefit the pupils' educational and social lives. In seeking to provide best value, the school uses very good procedures to compare its performance with others, consults widely before making major spending decisions, and then analyses the results carefully. The accommodation is adequate, and improvements have been made since the last inspection. The school has an adequate range of learning resources. A new computer suite has recently been installed.

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 are happy and doing well.• St Gerard's is a caring and supportive school where behaviour is good.• The positive attitudes and values promoted by the school.• They feel welcomed and appreciated.• The school is very well led and managed.• The support and help given by teachers.• The exciting residential trips in Years 3 to 6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consistency of homework across the school.

The views of parents are based on those expressed by the 13 parents who attended the parents' meeting and the 84 parents (47 per cent) who returned the parents' questionnaire, some of whom also added their own written comments. The inspection findings support parents' very positive views of the school. Inspectors agree with parents that the consistency and nature of homework needs reviewing and clarifying with them. Inspection evidence also corroborates parents' positive views of the very good behaviour, excellent pastoral care and the value placed on them by the school. The inspection team agrees with parents that the school is led and managed very well by the headteacher and that all staff care for their children. It endorses their views concerning the value of the residential trips arranged by the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Because of the small number of pupils in each year group, even small variations in the ability levels of different year groups, the proportion of pupils with special educational needs within a class or the number of pupils who enter the school at a very late stage in their primary career, can have a marked effect on the school's results. These have fluctuated considerably since the last inspection, with an apparently significant fall in standards in 2000 and 2001. The results of the 2001 National Curriculum assessment tests at the end of Year 6 were well below the national average in English, mathematics and science. When compared to the results of similar schools¹, they were average in English and mathematics and below average in science. The results for 2002, for which national comparisons are not yet available, are very much better than those for 2001 and are slightly above the national average for the previous year in all three subjects and well above the average for similar schools. The standards shown in these tests are much higher than those obtained at the time of the last inspection. A clear measure of the progress made by these pupils is gained by comparing the results they obtained at the end of Year 2, back in 1998, with their present results at the end of Year 6. From this comparison, it can be seen that they have made much more than the expected progress over the last four years. The inspection findings show that standards are average in English and science and above average in mathematics, and that pupils of all abilities are making very good progress and achieving very well in comparison to their prior attainment.

2. Although there have been fluctuations in the test results at Year 2, the overall trend is much clearer. It is one of dramatic improvement since the last inspection, at a very much faster rate than the national trend. In 2001, the results in reading were average, in writing they were well above average and in mathematics they were below average. When compared to similar schools, the results in mathematics were well above average, and in reading and writing they were among the top five per cent of similar schools. The results for 2002 show further improvement in reading and mathematics, although a slight decline in writing. Overall, these results are above the national average for the previous year and well above the average for similar schools. In all three tests, standards are well above those obtained at the time of the last inspection. Indeed, in mathematics, pupils are achieving standards which are two years above those obtained four years ago. The inspection findings indicate that standards are average in English and above average in mathematics, and that pupils are making very good progress and achieving very well.

3. When the school's results are put into context, they are particularly impressive. The level of skills shown by children when they join the Nursery is well below average in all areas of learning. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is much higher than in most schools. In addition to these factors, there are significant changes in school's population during the course of the year, as the school caters for children of mothers who seek temporary shelter in the nearby women's refuge and for children from traveller families. Many of the pupils from these two groups have had interrupted education and, in the former group, many of the children are having to cope with traumatic situations and significant

¹ The school's results are compared both to the national average (i.e. the average of the results of all schools in England, where pupils took National Curriculum assessment tests at the end of Year 6) and to the average for similar schools (i.e. the average of the results for all schools whose pupils come from similar socio-economic backgrounds, determined by the eligibility of pupils within the school to receive free school meals).

disruption to their home lives. Some of these pupils only stay at the school for a short time. These factors all have a bearing on the standards attained. But the school aims high for all of its pupils. In the most recent national tests at the end of Year 2, in an unusually small year group which consists almost entirely of boys, almost all of the pupils achieved the nationally expected Level 2 quite securely in all three tests. A quarter exceeded national expectations by achieving Level 3 in reading and a third achieved this level in mathematics. At the end of Year 6, almost all pupils achieved the nationally expected Level 4 in science, four-fifths in English and two-thirds in mathematics. Significantly, a quarter of the pupils exceeded national expectations by achieving Level 5 in English and mathematics, and a third in science.

4. Over the last few years, girls have achieved somewhat better results than boys in Year 6, and also in reading and writing in Year 2. The school is aware of these differences and, wherever it is seen that pupils could benefit from additional help, this is provided. Nothing was observed during the inspection to cause concern that boys and girls are treated differently or that any one group is particularly disadvantaged because of teaching style. There are variations within every group of pupils. Some of the pupils who are only at the school for a short period of time attain very good standards, others struggle and work below the expected level. Pupils with special needs make very good progress and achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment, even though the actual standard they attain may be below that of other pupils. Overall, pupils from all different groups achieve equally well and make very good progress. This is in large part due to the very good care and concern shown by staff throughout the school, the fact that they know their pupils very well and treat each as individuals and endeavour to cater for their needs. The school tracks pupils' progress very carefully and quickly becomes aware if a particular pupil or group of pupils is under-achieving. The fact that so many pupils with learning difficulties achieve the nationally expected standards and that an above average proportion of pupils exceed them, points to the fact that the school is catering well for all of its pupils.

5. The school sets itself appropriate targets at two levels. Expected targets are based on pupils' prior performance, but the school also sets itself more ambitious targets, which both teachers and pupils strive hard to achieve. Although the school did not meet all of its targets in 2001, it reached all of its expected targets in 2002 and came very close to reaching its ambitious targets.

6. The range of attainment of the children who enter the Nursery is wide, but the overall level is well below that found in most three-year-olds in all aspects apart from their physical development. During their time in the Nursery, the children make very good progress in all aspects of their learning, but particularly in their personal, social and emotional development and in their acquisition of literacy skills. They continue to make good progress in the Reception class. By the end of the Reception year, children are achieving many of the expected goals for learning, but standards, overall, are still below expectations in communication, language and literacy, mathematical development and knowledge and understanding of the world. In their personal, social and emotional development, and in their creative and physical development, children achieve almost all of the expected standards, which represents a significant achievement.

7. Pupils make very good progress in English throughout the school, attaining average standards in all aspects of English at the end of Years 2 and 6. Careful analyses, well-targeted support, modifications to the teaching and the curriculum, and timely intervention for specific groups of pupils have ensured that all pupils achieve very well. Although difficulties are caused throughout the school because of the pupils' limited vocabulary, teachers do all they can to extend this through practice and constant enrichment. In reading, pupils' understanding, research and information-handling skills have improved throughout the school, as has the range of pupils' writing. By the end of Year 2, pupils are beginning to read

well. They are developing good writing habits and write neatly and with increasing accuracy. By the end of Year 6, pupils' speaking and listening skills are broadly in line with expectations. Pupils read well, both for fun and for information. The most able readers show good reading skills, using inference and deduction, and predicting what could happen. The pupils' writing is well planned and is often lively and thoughtful. They present their work neatly and with good cursive handwriting.

8. Pupils make very good progress in mathematics throughout the school and attain above average standards at the end of Years 2 and 6. Pupils produce a good quantity of work in all aspects of the subject and take care over the way they present it. At the end of Year 2, most pupils perform the four mathematical operations effectively, higher-attaining pupils working with three-digit numbers in some calculations. They apply their number skills to everyday problems and are familiar with basic geometrical shapes and measures. By the end of Year 6, pupils cope with very large numbers, use fractions of various kinds and know the features of a wide range of geometrical shapes. The pupils achieve well because they are motivated to learn by very good teaching and interesting activities.

9. In science, pupils achieve well throughout the school and attain average standards by the end of Years 2 and 6. Good-quality teaching has played a major part in the good progress made by all pupils. Throughout the school, pupils have a sound understanding of all aspects of the curriculum appropriate for their age. By the end of Year 6, pupils have made good progress in their ability to carry out and record their investigative work and have a sound understanding of fair testing.

10. The only subjects in which pupils do not achieve appropriate standards are design and technology and ICT. Progress in these subjects has been unsatisfactory because pupils have received insufficient opportunities to develop an appropriate range of skills, and because teachers' understanding of National Curriculum requirements is weak. The school acknowledges its weaknesses in these subjects, but improvements are already forthcoming in ICT following the installation of the school's new computer suite.

11. Pupils make good progress in singing and art and design, and satisfactory progress in geography, history and physical education. Standards in all of these subjects are in line with national expectations at the end of Years 2 and 6.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

12. Every morning before the formal start of the school day, parents, pupils and staff of St Gerard's meet together on the playground to greet each other. This brief coming together every day illustrates the excellent relationships enjoyed in this family school in which all members of the community feel equally valued. Pupils arrive punctually, and their eagerness to come to school is reflected in the vastly improved attendance rate which is now well above the national average for primary schools. The school has also seen a stunning drop in the rate of unauthorised absence over this last school year. The previous rate of unauthorised absence was almost entirely due to the school's vigour in the way it recorded this category of absence and which did not do it any favours. Application of stringent recording procedures has resulted in this dramatic decrease in the rate of unauthorised absence.

13. With this eagerness to come to school every day, it is not surprising that pupils have very positive attitudes to all aspects of their school life. They tackle their lessons with enthusiasm and relish the learning they are asked to undertake. One example was in a geography lesson for pupils in Years 4 and 5, when they were considering the importance of water in our lives. Their experiment was to filter tainted water through various implements and materials to see how clean a sample they could achieve. Enthusiasm and excitement

were rife as they recorded their methods and obtained some interesting results.

14. Pupils have positive attitudes towards all aspects of their school life as a result of the welcoming environment which they encounter each day and the family atmosphere that pervades throughout the school year. In the Nursery, children are extremely interested and involved in all their activities. When a focus session, such as one to promote their mathematical development concludes, the teacher encourages all the children to sit together and discuss what they have done in that session. This is followed by questions from their peers about the activity and a most positive discussion follows in which all endeavour to take part. This sophisticated, highly successful, evaluation of their own learning is something seldom seen in children so young.

15. There have been no exclusions in the school and the rate remains static at nil. Pupils at St Gerard's are extremely well mannered. Behaviour throughout the school, inside and outside, is very good. The school records show a very low number of reported accounts of racism and bullying. On the very few occasions when behaviour lapses into a less acceptable standard, it is dealt with quietly and effectively by staff, and pupils respond with an immediate return to their high standards of very good behaviour and engagingly good manners. This is due, in the main, to the way in which staff corporately implement the school's behaviour strategies and make absolutely clear to all pupils their very high expectations in regard to what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. This is always done without fuss, and pupils know that if they are reprimanded, then they are assured of a clean slate when the admonishment is over.

16. This is a school where pupils' personal and social development is also of the highest quality. This is a result of the value that is placed upon them by all staff as unique and special individuals. As a result, they are confident and form positive and warm relationships with each other. They play and socialise together happily. More than that, they value their peers, as was witnessed often during the inspection. Pupils are pleased when their friends do well in lessons or succeed in other ways, such as having very good attendance and improved behaviour. The residential experiences for pupils in Years 3 to 6 offer an enjoyable time for them to develop personally as part of a team and to understand how to work and play in cooperation with others. They learn the value and pleasure of sharing resources and experiences with each other and return home looking forward to the next year's residential trip.

17. Observation of a meeting of the school council is an invigorating and exciting experience for the onlooker. Many of the things that happen at St Gerard's do so because of the deliberations of the council. The headteacher and staff invest trust and confidence in the council, which has representatives from the Reception class through to Year 6, to debate important issues sensibly and with maturity. The council recently evaluated the system of rewards, and its deliberations were acknowledged and implemented. An example of the enthusiasm of the members of the council was made clear during the inspection. At the early morning meeting of the council, two pupils offered to draft a letter to the local department of the environment asking for a representative to attend one of their meetings to advise them on how they could improve the school environment. By early afternoon that day, the two pupils concerned rushed to show an inspector the draft they had produced in their lunch break. It was a well-written letter, needing only the minimum of help from an adult to tidy it up and send it off.

18. A wide range of responsible and helpful tasks, such as running the school office in the lunch break, are allocated to pupils, and they accept these with enthusiasm and alacrity. A result of this whole-hearted involvement of pupils in the running of the school is that it is an orderly, cheerful and thoroughly integrated community. Pupils in Year 6 are given particularly

mature tasks to equip them well for transfer to secondary school. They have their own company and, every year, undertake a business and management project. In this current year, they have produced an excellent booklet of prayers for sale to parents and within the parish. Every child in the school has written their own prayer, and these have been turned into a compilation that makes stimulating and moving reading.

19. It is not surprising, therefore, that the inspection team judges relationships throughout the school to be excellent. There is genuine respect and affection between pupils and staff and amongst the pupils. This is rooted in a strongly shared faith and is not sycophantic, patronising or sentimental. Excellent relationships extend to the way pupils greet visitors and warmly approach them to talk about their school and their enthusiasm for it. These pupils are helpful, caring, courteous and, above all, fun to be with. Accordingly the school is very highly regarded by the immediate and local community.

20. In an area of this country that is disadvantaged in many ways, it is very clear that at St Gerard's the pupils' very positive attitudes, very good behaviour and personal development, and excellent relationships are an extremely strong factor in the very good progress they make during their time in the school. This aspect of the school's work has been maintained, and indeed improved, since the previous inspection.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

21. The overall quality of the teaching throughout the school is very good. Over half of the lessons observed during the inspection were very good, many of these were excellent and some were quite inspirational. Parents feel that their children are being taught well, and the inspection findings wholeheartedly endorse this view. There are no classes in which the teaching is weak. When this very good teaching is given to well-motivated pupils, who try hard, behave well and show an eagerness to learn, very good learning results and accounts for the very good progress pupils make throughout the school.

22. The quality of the teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed during this inspection, and there was a much higher proportion of good, very good and excellent teaching than before. There has been particular improvement in the teaching provided for the younger pupils in Years 1 and 2, where the previous report talked of poorly planned and unchallenging tasks, lack of structure to group activities and an absence of appropriate learning targets. Quite the opposite is the case now in Years 1 and 2, as there is considerable challenge to the teaching, which is very well planned and meets the widely differing needs of pupils of differing abilities. There have also been improvements in Years 3 to 6, where there is much greater challenge for higher-attaining pupils to work independently. The strengths mentioned in the previous inspection, such as the good relationships between staff and pupils, good classroom management, and appropriate use of individual, paired and group work, have been maintained. Most of the weaknesses, such as inconsistencies in planning and lack of rigour, have been rectified. Two weaknesses, however, still remain, as teachers still lack expertise and confidence in teaching design and technology and ICT. In the latter subject, there has been some degree of improvement, although staff recognise the need for further training.

23. The overall quality of the teaching of English is very good, and its effectiveness can be seen in the rapidly improving results in reading and writing at the end of Year 2 and the progress made over the last four years by the pupils currently in Year 6. The teachers take every opportunity to improve pupils' vocabulary, a weakness which stems from the paucity of language with which pupils start school, and to ensure that pupils have many and varied opportunities to practise speaking and listening. Investment in new books and various initiatives to improve the skills of identified groups of pupils have helped to raise standards in

reading. The teachers choose their material carefully, plan their lessons well and inject interest and a sense of fun into their lessons. Teachers have increased the range of writing and provide helpful feedback for pupils when they mark their work. The teachers also help pupils to develop their writing skills through work undertaken in other subjects and the way they seek to integrate work in other subjects into the literacy hour. The teachers' expectations are high, and pupils respond well by presenting their work carefully and taking a pride in what they do.

24. The teaching of mathematics is also very good. The teachers expect pupils to work hard, and they do, producing a good quantity of good-quality, well-presented work. Pupils are motivated by the interesting learning activities, which often include investigative or practical work. The teachers use good questioning techniques and provide good explanations and help when pupils make mistakes. As a result, pupils gain in confidence. The decision to group pupils in sets according to their ability has helped to ensure that work is appropriately targeted at pupils' needs. Supplementary lessons for pupils in Years 3 to 6 who need additional input have proved particularly beneficial, and have improved pupils' learning. Careful analysis of previous test results in mathematics has identified those aspects which pupils undertake less successfully than others, and teachers give special attention to these aspects in their teaching. An area of relative weakness is the limited application of mathematics in other subject areas, though occasional examples are evident.

25. Apart from the weaknesses in the teaching of design and technology and ICT already mentioned, the teaching in all other subjects is good. Improvements which could be made in the teaching of geography, history and music have to do with the formulation and organisation of the curriculum, rather than with shortcomings in the teachers' expertise and classroom practice. The teachers do not yet make enough use of ICT to support pupils' learning in other subjects, but with the installation of a new computer suite, the staff now have good facilities to enrich their current teaching practice.

26. The quality of the teaching in the Nursery and Reception classes is very good. The teaching is consistently very good, and at times excellent, in the Nursery, and it is good in the Reception class. As a result, children have a very good start to their learning and make very good progress. The teachers plan their lessons with clear aims and good links between different areas of learning. They have a good understanding of the needs of young children, although the length of some of the lessons and activities in the Reception class exceed the children's capacity to concentrate. The nursery nurses and other adults who provide support within the classroom work well with teachers to support the children's achievements. A variety of appropriate methods is used to promote learning, from very structured sessions to less formal play sessions. However, in all sessions, the teachers know what they are to teach and exactly what they want the children to learn. In this way, all the children are challenged appropriately and make good gains in their learning.

27. Throughout the school, the teachers are conscious of the widely differing needs of the pupils in their classes, most of which contain pupils from two different year groups. In almost all classes, work is planned at different levels according to pupils' needs. In this way, more able pupils are provided with sufficient challenge, whilst lower-attaining pupils are given sufficient reinforcement activities to help them consolidate their learning. Pupils with special educational needs receive good support and, as a result, make progress which is equally as good as that of their classmates. The main thrust of the support provided for these pupils is in literacy and numeracy. Teachers plan well for these pupils and involve classroom assistants effectively during activities in order to give the pupils additional support. Pupils from traveller families and those who join the school at different times of the year, often because of disruptive home circumstances, are integrated quickly, effectively and unobtrusively, and attention is given to their needs in the most appropriate way. In only a

small number of lessons was this differentiated level of planning not in evidence. In one English lesson, for example, all pupils were completing the same unchallenging task and progress was barely satisfactory in the lesson. But this is the exception, and for most of the time the teachers meet the needs of all of their pupils very well indeed.

28. Apart from the exceptions already noted, teachers display good subject knowledge. They plan and prepare their lessons well. They make very good use of resources, which are relevant to the tasks in hand and help to stimulate pupils' learning. Visits to places of interest and visitors to school provide valuable additional resources which enhance pupils' learning. Lessons are structured well and contain a good balance of whole-class teaching, group-work and individual tasks. Teachers give clear explanations and, generally, conclude lessons well by providing a session to draw together what has been learnt during the lesson. Most lessons are conducted at a good pace and teachers have high expectations, both with regard to the way pupils behave and respond, and to the work they expect them to complete. The marking of pupils' work is frequently helpful, and shows pupils what they have to do to improve.

29. One of the only concerns voiced by parents, and then only by a small number, was the consistency with which the school sets homework. There are certainly good examples of homework being used productively to complement the work pupils are doing in class. The school's response on learning of these parents' concerns was typical of so much that happens. It was not one of blame or excuse, but a determination to ensure that the school's policy and approach to homework is clearly explained and that parents understand what the school is trying to achieve. Such an approach is admirable and entirely in keeping with the very positive relationships which the school endeavours to establish with its parents.

30. The very good teaching evokes an equally positive response from the pupils. With only minor exceptions, pupils listen well in class and try hard, not just to please, but to complete their work to the best of their ability. They use their time well. They concentrate and show initiative in what they do. They are concerned to learn from their mistakes. This combined partnership results in very good learning throughout the school.

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

31. The school provides a good quality, broad, balanced and relevant curriculum, which is enriched by the good range of learning opportunities available. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Educational visits, visitors with expert knowledge, and residential trips enhance pupils' learning and understanding of the world, whilst sporting and a wide range of extra-curricular activities afford many occasions for pupils to broaden their experience. The school places particular emphasis on the residential experiences which it provides for pupils in Years 3 to 6. The curriculum has become wider and more effective since the last inspection.

32. However, notable exceptions to this good picture are to be found in design and technology and ICT, where the school has not made as much progress in meeting the expectations of the National Curriculum, since the time of the last inspection. A systematic appraisal and adoption of the nationally recommended schemes of work has taken place, and a new scheme for design and technology is soon to be implemented. The school also has well-formulated plans to extend its curriculum for ICT now that its new suite has been commissioned. Whilst the school offers ample opportunities for singing performance inside and outside the school community, some other aspects of music are less well developed at present. History and geography are linked well. However learning is not a consistently continuous process, as the gaps in time between the teaching of units of work are sometimes too long. Because the number of pupils in each year group can vary, the school

has organised a curriculum which meets well the needs of mixed-age classes. This ensures that pupils do not repeat the same topics.

33. The school strives, very successfully, to ensure that its curriculum meets the needs of all its pupils, whether they have recently joined, have special educational needs or difficult home circumstances to cope with. Pupils are given the opportunity to join in all activities, and the staff help pupils, however long or short their time in the school, to make the best of their experiences at St Gerard's. All pupils, regardless of need or personal circumstances, enjoy the same very good quality of provision. Activities outside of lessons are wide ranging and varied in order to attract pupils with different interests, and the school's tradition of choral singing is open to all pupils. The school is a strong, close-knit community of staff, pupils, parents and governors, and this strong sense of teamwork is a very important factor in improving pupils' learning and raising standards.

34. The school has successfully introduced the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, and there has been significant review, which has resulted in modifications and interventions, that have had a very positive impact on standards in English and mathematics throughout the school. The very effective strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy skills have raised standards. Generally, there has been a keen awareness of the need to review and refine the curriculum, and the staff are totally committed to the task of raising standards. They achieve this by working very well as a team, with a growing understanding of what impact their actions have on the learning of the pupils. A good example of this is the school's philosophy of ensuring equal opportunities for all pupils. Where pupils are perceived to have a need or problem, the school believes they should be given a different input in order to improve. When tracking and data analysis indicate a needy group, the school works hard to modify the curriculum and to offer appropriate support through various initiatives and schemes. Withdrawal for specific support is treated as an entitlement, not as 'missing out'.

35. The curriculum for children in the Nursery and Reception classes is good. Based on nationally recognised guidelines, the wide range of good-quality learning opportunities meets the interests and needs of children of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties. The curriculum for these young children, as for the older pupils, is enriched by visits to places outside and by welcoming visitors to the school.

36. The school's curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. A helpful policy is evident in practice throughout the school, and staff ensure that pupils have full access to the school's curriculum. Teachers ensure that the needs of these pupils are taken into consideration when planning their lessons, thus enabling pupils to join in lessons at an appropriate level, often with skilful help from the trained and well-organised team of support staff. The quality of pupils' individual education plans is good, and targets are identified for each pupil. On the whole, these are relevant and achievable, but some targets are too broad and need to be broken down into more manageable steps.

37. The school's provision for pupils' personal, social, health and citizenship education, is outstanding. It pervades the whole of school life, and underpins what and how things are done. The school is an extremely caring community, where every effort is made to help pupils from different backgrounds and home circumstances blend in, yet become individual, thinking learners. All groups of pupils have the opportunity to contribute to the life of the school. A thriving school council, for instance, debates and helps to implement small, as well as momentous, decisions, such as changing the playground, making a garden or whether the girls should wear trousers. On this last issue, excellent consideration was given to the cost of such a change for parents; finally, pupils decided how much smarter they looked in skirts and tights, than girls from other schools appeared wearing trousers. Election to the council takes place at the same time, and in the same way, as the local council elections. In

these ways, pupils are learning to make appropriate decisions and are gaining insights into responsibilities needed in adult life. Similarly, provision for learning about sex and relationships is made sensitively, and pupils say their discussions are helpful as well as informative. Work on all types of drug, alcohol, and tobacco abuse is tackled openly and honestly, and pupils are enabled to make informed judgements, in light of their experiences within the wider community. When interviewed, pupils in Year 6 said they are well prepared to go on to further learning and to make new friends, because they have been happy and confident, and been made aware of important issues throughout their life at the school.

38. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is excellent; provision for their cultural development is less well developed, but is nevertheless still good. Pupils' progress in these areas is central to the aims of the school which are securely based on its beliefs and values as a Roman Catholic educational institution. There is no heavy emphasis on dogma, however. The school is a happy, caring community, which lives out its principles in every area of its provision. The high quality of the leadership of the school is a key factor in this respect. The pupils' responses to this aspect of their education are very positive. They respond well to the learning opportunities provided and try hard to live up to the loving expectations for them.

39. The quality of pupils' spiritual development is encapsulated in a recently compiled book of prayers to which every pupil has contributed. Produced by pupils in Year 6, it movingly illustrates their faith in the power and love of God. They give thanks for their families, friends and teachers and for the small, but unexpected pleasures which come their way. They pray for those who are suffering and ask for support in their daily lives so that they may live up to the values expected of them. These outcomes are the result of the value that they sense is placed on every one of them, and the examples shown by all staff and older pupils in the school. Pupils' spiritual development is also promoted through the frequent, but informal, opportunities for prayer and reflection, which crop up within the day-to-day life of the school as well as those which are provided on a routine basis, such as acts of worship. Despite the difficulties which many of these pupils face in their daily lives, they are happy in school and grateful for the stimulating and rewarding range of opportunities it provides for them. They show an emerging awareness that the material aspects of life are less important than the quality of human relationships and compassion and respect for others, whatever their background.

40. Pupils' spiritual awareness provides strong support for their moral development. This is refined and developed through daily interaction within the school. Incidental, short, end-of-day discussions, as well as much more formal occasions for discussion of moral issues are provided. They include those that occur in acts of worship and within the religious education lessons, which are based on the local diocesan syllabus for religious education, which was not observed within the context of this inspection. Children's moral development is given high priority from the Nursery onwards. Pupils learn to distinguish right from wrong, not primarily as a matter of keeping rules but of showing respect for others' needs, feelings and beliefs, even when they are different from their own. Senior pupils present a good example in this respect. The school places a special emphasis on the value of residential experiences as occasions when pupils have further opportunities to put their moral values into practice. Pupils are encouraged to contribute to the community through singing for elderly people and raising money for charities, for example.

41. Provision for pupils' social development has strong links to that for their moral development. They are given many small responsibilities within the classroom, which they carry out with commitment and the pleasure of contribution. Many lessons include opportunities to develop social skills through work in pairs and small groups. Pupils respond well to them, sharing equipment in art and design and listening to other points of view when attempting mathematical problems, for example. Occasionally, they clap in response to the successes of other pupils. The qualities expected of the oldest pupils are demanding. Every opportunity is taken to give them extra responsibilities and to encourage their independence. Every pupil in Year 6 has the status of prefect and responsibilities in relation to a particular class, helping out during wet playtimes, for instance. They manage the school office at lunchtime and contribute to the running of the school library. Some act as road safety officers, gleaning information on it and occasionally making short presentations on it in assemblies. These senior pupils respond well to the trust which is placed in them. Their independence is encouraged by allowing them to work in classrooms during breaks if they so wish. The development of the computer suite is prompting arrangements for independent work on computers. The wide range of community links, which the school has developed, provides many opportunities for pupils to widen their social horizons. Involvement in church activities, such as singing in special services, is of particular significance.

42. Although not as strong as other aspects of pupils' personal development, the provision for their cultural development is good. The school is concerned that they have had to squeeze the remainder of the curriculum to allow for the priority given to literacy and numeracy. This is clearly reflected in the relatively small time allowances available to other subjects. Membership of the local 'Small School Arts Initiative' is a recent measure undertaken to restore some balance in this respect. Besides increasing the possibility of visits to art galleries and museums, it provides enrichment for pupils' multicultural education. Recent artwork, for example has been strengthened by the study of African art, supported by a visiting teacher. Next year, the focus will be on Chinese culture, during which a visit to Chinatown in Liverpool is envisaged. Other faiths are also included in the religious education syllabus, as when a Jewish visitor helped pupils to understand key aspects of Judaism. Cultural development is also promoted through subjects such as history. Instrumental tuition and performance opportunities in the neighbourhood contribute significantly to pupils' musical development. An unusually up-to-date area of provision is the school's mini-enterprise initiative which this year led to the production for sale of the prayer book already mentioned, with proceeds going to charity. This particular example is a minor illustration of a key feature of the school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, the fact that all the elements are inter-connected. The school's success derives less from its provision of individual initiatives than from the sum of its parts, which in turn rest on the beliefs and values which are central to the life of the school.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

43. Without doubt, all pupils flourish in the friendly and caring environment provided by the school. The way the school caters for all pupils, regardless of their background or circumstances, and the teachers' determination to promote high standards of academic achievement, as well as personal development, are at the core of its ethos. Accordingly, the pastoral care given to all pupils is an outstanding strength of the school and excellent on all counts.

44. All staff fully understand the procedures for child protection, and the named officer for child protection receives the full support of the headteacher. Five members of staff have up-to-date certificated training in first aid, and fire drills are held regularly. Health and safety procedures are deeply embedded in the school's routines. Risk assessments are undertaken for all activities as, for example, the annual residential trips to the Lake District and the

climbing of the famous and well-known mountain, the Old Man of Coniston. A video is shown to parents to reassure them of the school's safety precautions for their children on these trips.

45. The school places great importance on very good rates of attendance for each and every pupil. It has very detailed procedures, not only to monitor and record attendance, but also to promote the importance of a high individual rate of attendance to ensure consistency of learning and strong academic progress.

46. High standards of behaviour are promoted strongly throughout the school by all members of staff. The school evaluates its performance in this respect as, for example, in an audit of behaviour it asked the local education authority to undertake. It has responded positively to the findings and used these as a tool to improve behaviour even further.

47. The detailed monitoring of pupils' personal development results in the very mature and responsible pupils as already described. This aspect of all pupils' development is discussed and considered at a staff meeting that takes place without fail at the beginning of each school day. When necessary, records and notes are made, and all adults in the school, including parents, are involved in these deliberations so that the overall picture is accurate and caters for the needs of individual pupils. A number of outside agencies work closely with the school to give support in the way it cares for all pupils. It is seen as a safe haven for all of them by many outside the school and is highly regarded as such by many parents.

48. The excellence of the school's pastoral care for all of its pupils, which has been sustained since the previous inspection, is another major factor in the very good progress pupils make and the standards they achieve. The headteacher's assertion that the welfare and safety of all the children and staff is paramount to the school community is clearly visible to all who attend and visit the school.

49. As befits a school that cares so well for all of its pupils, staff do all they can to help those with special educational needs, who are identified as soon as initial assessments are made when they enter the Nursery. Pupils who enter the school when they are older, or who develop specific learning needs later, are identified by the regular comprehensive assessments made in English and mathematics throughout the school. Other needs are recognised by staff, who know pupils very well and are sensitive to any particular difficulties. Staff have sufficiently clear advice and guidance to help them identify particular needs. The liaison between the school and external support agencies is good. The school uses its entitlement to the full, and appropriate expert advice is sought when necessary. The comprehensive support given to pupils by parents, teachers, support staff and outside agencies plays a major role in the consistently very good progress made by pupils with special educational needs.

50. The monitoring of pupils' personal development and academic progress is very good. The school's assessment procedures, and their use, have improved significantly since the last inspection when the existing procedures were not consistently applied, findings were not systematically recorded and the tracking of individual pupils' progress was difficult. Recently, the assessment processes have been further enhanced by the installation of a computer-based, assessment management system, which allows for the recording of extra data and facilitates access to it. The improvements to date have been managed well by the deputy headteacher who is in the process of drafting a booklet to inform parents about the arrangements. The results are already evident in the higher standards which are being achieved by the pupils.

51. Each pupil's academic progress is carefully tracked from the time they enter the

school until they move on, most usually into secondary education. Late entrants to the school are given time to settle in before their achievements are assessed. While pupils' attainments in the core areas of learning - English, mathematics and science - are monitored thoroughly, effective systems for the assessment of pupils' progress in other subjects have yet to be developed. The school is well aware of this deficiency and is poised to remedy it. Additionally, support for pupils' self-assessment of their own progress as learners is inadequate.

52. Children's personal and social development is a key priority when children enter the Nursery, and their individual progress in this area of learning is tracked carefully. Any problems arising are given early attention, with help from specialist agencies if required. Children with special educational needs, academic as well as behavioural, are identified as soon as possible so that appropriate intervention can be arranged. Progress in the children's personal development is assessed further as part of the initial testing procedures which take place soon after entry to the Reception class. The relatively small size of the school ensures that teachers know their pupils well and are very alert to any personal development problems which pupils may be experiencing as they move through the school. Pupils' behaviour is also monitored carefully. A weekly report card system operates for pupils with less serious problems. More serious cases prompt discussions with parents, and specialist support is requested where necessary. There are frequent, minuted reviews of the well-being of pupils in difficulties.

53. The school makes significant use of its assessments of academic progress, beginning with the baseline assessments in language and numeracy which form the basis for predictions of pupils' attainment in national tests at the end of Year 2. Individual and school attainment targets are set and used as measures of individual progress and school performance. This data is supplemented at the end of the Reception year by in-house tests of reading, mathematical achievement and assessment of children's key-word recognition. Additional learning opportunities are provided where results show that some pupils would benefit from extra help. Reading and spelling assessments take place twice yearly throughout pupils' time in the school. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 2 are used as a basis for individual target setting for the national tests at the end of Year 6. Optional, formal tests are carried out in Years 3, 4 and 5 so that individual progress can be assessed. The results are used to identify pupils likely to benefit from additional teaching in smaller groups. National test results and observations during the inspection confirm that this strategy is very effective in enhancing pupils' achievements. The results at the end of Year 2 also help the school to draw up its own targets for English, mathematics and science. These are set at two levels, one 'expected', the other 'challenging'. This strategy, too, inspires increases in the standards the school is achieving.

54. So far, assessment of pupils' progress in subjects other than those tested nationally has not been carried out effectively. While scrutiny of the results of assessments of pupils' progress in English and mathematics have been used successfully to refine the subject curricula, this has not been the case with other subjects, a weakness which has hindered their development and with it, pupils' achievements. An assessment scheme for science is being piloted, but its systematic use across the school has yet to be formalised.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

55. The school is well aware that it cannot achieve what it wants to on the part of every pupil unless it works in close and friendly partnership with parents. Its efforts to promote a strong, healthy and positive relationship with all parents are excellent, and have become even better since the previous inspection.

56. Comments from parents at the pre-inspection meeting and responses to the parents' questionnaire were almost all very positive indeed. The only aspect of the school's work where comments were slightly negative relate to parents' views on homework where some are not totally happy with the content and consistency. The school has taken this comment on board and will be seeking to clarify its definition and expectations in regard to homework very soon.

57. Positive links with parents are forged as soon as their children start school in the Nursery. Here, relationships with parents are excellent and contribute in no small measure to the rapid progress children make in the Nursery. Parents stay with their children when they enter the Nursery until the children are confident to stay for a short while on their own. Before their children join the Reception class at the beginning of the year in which they are five, parents are invited to a meeting in school to ensure they are fully informed about the transfer of their children into the main school. A reading workshop is held for parents at the beginning of the year so that they can support the learning of their children at home. Some parents help in the classroom and accompany trips out of school. Teachers keep in regular contact with parents whose children are in the Nursery and Reception classes.

58. Parents of children with special educational needs are also suitably involved from the time the teacher has an initial concern, and they are kept well informed about subsequent developments. If external advice and support is felt to be necessary, parents are invited to discuss their child's difficulties with the support service concerned before any further action is taken. Parents are informed about any particular provision made for their child and are invited to any review meetings held.

59. The quality of the information provided for parents by the school is very good. A short, weekly, news sheet has recently been introduced to replace longer, monthly newsletters, and this new form of communication meets the demands and needs of this school's parents more appropriately. The quality of the annual reports to parents on their children's progress is very good, and parents are left in no doubt as to what their children know, understand and can do and exactly what is needed to meet targets and improve. Three open meetings are arranged each year to give parents the opportunity to discuss their children's progress, and the informal meeting at the beginning of each school day between parents and staff gives parents another opportunity to discuss any problems they might have. During the inspection, parents were also observed to come into the school to talk to the headteacher and other staff informally.

60. There is a hard-working Friends of St Gerard's Association that arranges enjoyable social and fund-raising events to benefit the pupils. One of the ways raised funds have been spent has been on the attractive garden situated off the main playground. Parents are welcome to attend the breakfast club with their children and to help in the school if they wish. A number of them, who have enjoyed helping in the classrooms, have gone on to train as support staff and gain qualifications. In this, they have had the considerable support and help of the school.

61. In this part of the country, parental involvement in the school is not necessarily as conventional and traditional as might be found elsewhere. However, parents at St Gerard's bring their own unique contribution to the school that is valued and appreciated by the school. Parents know they are valued in a genuine partnership with the school and respond warmly accordingly. This is yet another aspect of the school's work which contributes positively to pupils' continuing very good progress and the standards they achieve.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

62. The overall quality of the school's leadership and management is very good. All of the positive features mentioned in the previous inspection report have been maintained, and the vision and direction which were at that time beginning to bring noticeable improvements to the school have come to fruition in the excellent ethos which pervades the school. Not everything is perfect, and there are still issues for the school to deal with, indeed, some of them stemming from the previous inspection. But there is a very strong sense of purpose, and huge dedication and commitment from the staff and governors, which has ensured that the most important priorities have been tackled in a systematic way and very effectively. The school knows where its weaknesses are and, one by one, is remedying them.

63. The headteacher himself provides excellent leadership and manages the school very well. He is a man with a very clear vision and very firm principles which are deeply rooted in the faith for which the school stands and which influences every part of its life and work. Many of the school's pupils come from impoverished backgrounds, either financially, socially or emotionally, and it is part of the vision to ensure that these pupils receive from their school the best that can be provided. The headteacher makes the school's expectations abundantly clear. Those who do wrong can expect to be reprimanded, at times quite severely, but the pupils know that matters are dealt with fairly, that there is forgiveness and acceptance, and that there is always another chance for them when they do wrong. It is not by accident, therefore, that standards of behaviour are very good and that warm, caring, loving relationships abound. Staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and of the headteacher's expectations, at times made plain in carefully worded, but very clear, guidance. The school's aims are clearly stated, shared by staff and governors and amply fulfilled in practice. The headteacher has his finger very firmly on the pulse of the school and knows exactly what is happening. Provision for design and technology and ICT are not good enough; the headteacher knows this, but other priorities have taken precedence, and significant improvement is now underway in ICT. Coordinators are not playing as full a role as they should in monitoring what happens; the headteacher knows this, but the English and mathematics coordinators have got it right, and have provided very good examples for the others to follow. The headteacher is providing very clear direction for the hard-working and committed staff, not over-burdening them, but bringing in change at an appropriate and measured pace, ensuring that each new initiative is tackled in the right way. Under the headteacher's leadership, the ethos of the school has blossomed into one of which any school could be proud, and parents rightly are. And he has secured the wholehearted commitment of his staff who work together well as a team and feel motivated to play their part in improving the learning experiences provided for the pupils. All have their part to play and are valued for their strengths.

64. Other staff fulfil their leadership roles very well indeed. The deputy headteacher provides a very good example for others in her classroom practice, and full support for the school's initiatives. Her main coordination role is English, where improvement since the last inspection has been very good indeed. The third member of the senior management team provides an equally good example in the classroom and as coordinator of mathematics, where, again, improvement has been very good. There is a friendly and healthy rivalry; the mathematics coordinator is determined that performance in her subject should be as good as that in English, and so there is a constant and continuing impetus for improvement. The work undertaken by the team which looks after the school's provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is impressive, and there is a really clear commitment to providing for every individual pupil, regardless of their background or problems. Their work is so effective that it is difficult for the outsider to tell which groups which pupils belong to, all are so well integrated. Provision in the Nursery has improved under the leadership of the Nursery teacher who, with her team enables children to make such a good, secure and happy start to

their education. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is led and managed well by a very experienced coordinator. She is involved from the moment initial concerns are identified by teachers and provides good advice and support. She is very familiar with the correct procedures, so that the needs of each pupil are fully met. She liaises with parents and external support services at the earliest appropriate time.

65. The leadership provided by other subject coordinators is satisfactory overall, but they, too, have been helping to deal with the school's main priorities and have not turned their energies to their own subject areas. The time is now right to delegate more responsibilities to them and to expect a greater involvement in providing real leadership and clear guidance to other staff. Not enough time is set aside at present for coordinators to monitor the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school, and to take responsibility for ensuring that there are adequate procedures for assessment which are helpful to teachers in their planning. It is not a surprise that this is an area already identified by the school for development in the coming year.

66. The governors fulfil their statutory obligations well. They share a common vision for the school and are very supportive of the many initiatives to bring about further improvement. Key governors demonstrate a good understanding of the strengths of the school and are well aware of the challenges it faces. Governors act as a critical friend and hold the school to account for the standards it achieves. They are not a silent body, but ask questions and help to find ways forward for further improvement. The governing body has an appropriate structure, in which roles and responsibilities are delegated effectively. Governors are kept well informed about what is happening in the school, but much of their knowledge is as reported to them. Although governors are linked to key areas of the school, talk with their respective coordinators and visit the school on an informal basis, there is very little first-hand monitoring of what happens within the classroom. A programme of more formal visits to monitor what happens at the heart of the school in the classroom could help the governors to an even better understanding of the school and enable them to make even more informed decisions on the basis of their own experience.

67. The school's monitoring and evaluation of its performance are good and there are some aspects which are very good. The headteacher and staff have been very clear in their priorities for development, which have arisen from the school's own analysis as well as external evaluation and advice. There is a very clear understanding of standards and provision in English and mathematics, and action is taken whenever it is merited in order to improve pupils' performance. If, through their monitoring, the school perceives that particular groups of pupils need additional help, it is provided. Although there is a clear understanding of the weaknesses which exist in subjects such as history and geography because of the way time is allocated to the subjects, or in design and technology and ICT because not enough has yet been done to improve teachers' expertise, the procedures for monitoring all aspects of teaching, learning and planning in subjects other than English and mathematics could be better. Some subject coordinators are not as aware as they should be as to how well pupils are doing in other parts of the school, or exactly how well teachers are fulfilling National Curriculum requirements. Training may well be required to sharpen coordinators' critical perceptions and their ability to distil important messages for staff in order to bring about further improvement in the development of teaching and learning within their subject areas. But in the areas on which it has already focused, the school's procedures and practice have led to very good improvements, which have benefited pupils' learning and raised standards.

68. The school's financial planning is very good and is clearly linked to educational and other identified priorities in the school development plan. All monies, including specific and special grants, are spent appropriately as intended. The large carry forward in the previous year's budget has enabled the school to move ahead with its plans to improve facilities for

ICT and make improvements to the school's accommodation. The administrative officer is extremely efficient and oversees the financial affairs of the school on a day-to-day basis. The school has regular meetings with the local education authority to discuss and monitor spending in relation to the annually set budget. The headteacher is extremely skilled in pursuing grants from sources within the local education authority, as well as other grants available in the local community. When successful, these funds are used to support the school's income and expenditure that are both well above the national average. The pursuit of such grants, however, has its drawbacks, as the process is bureaucratically time consuming and diverts the headteacher's energies away from other important matters. In the light of the time needed for administrative and other matters, the decision to reduce the headteacher's teaching commitment has been sensible.

69. The school actively pursues a policy of obtaining best value for money when purchasing goods and services, and competitive quotes are sought on all occasions. St Gerard's is not frightened to consult parents, pupils via the school council and others in the local community to ensure that it applies principles of best value at all times in the best interests of the school. This willingness to consult as many individuals and organisations as it can with confidence is one of the many measures of its outstanding success.

70. The school has a good pupil to teacher ratio together with a number of support staff who provide solid and expert help in the classrooms. A member of staff from the local education authority visits the school each week to offer appropriate support to its traveller pupils. This visit not only contributes positively to pupils' progress, but also helps to cement the very good relationships which already exist between the school and the travelling community, as seen in the way these pupils are fully and seamlessly integrated into all aspects of school life. Performance management for all staff is at the heart of the school's ethos and rooted in the school's mission statement. There is a detailed performance management policy and the performance management cycle for all staff is on target. The headteacher has met all performance management targets for previous years. In-service training and other training courses respond to areas of development identified in the school improvement plan.

71. The school accommodation is just adequate to meet the demands of the curriculum and is used extremely well to promote learning. Although small in size, cramped and in serious need of storage space, considerable improvements have taken place since the last inspection, and current building work will result in a link corridor between the Nursery and the main body of the school. The school now has a computer suite, and an attractive small garden off the playground has improved the external environment considerably. Facilities and access for the disabled have recently been improved through the provision of a specially adapted toilet, although there are no mechanical means to enable disabled persons to gain access to the first floor. Just across the road from the school, the recently refurbished Community Centre is available for the school's use, with additional facilities for ICT.

72. The school building and grounds are welcoming, tidy and clean. There are colourful and stimulating displays in classrooms and in all areas of the school. They consist mainly of a celebration of pupils' work and achievements. Children in the Reception class do not have access to a safe, separate outdoor play area. However, plans have been made to build a shared play area for the Nursery and Reception classes when the present building work is finished. Although the school is small and cramped, the good use it makes of its available accommodation has a positive impact on pupils' learning and success. The school has improved its ratio of books to pupils, and the range of resources available for teaching

English is good, as it is for mathematics. Resources in all other subjects are satisfactory, including ICT since the commissioning of the computer suite.

73. The school has a number of outstanding features, particularly in the way it caters for the overall personal development of all pupils and seeks to ensure that each individual is given maximum opportunity to make progress and to benefit from all that the school has to offer. The school has improved considerably since the last inspection, and academic standards are rising. Pupils' progress, the quality of teaching and the overall leadership and management are all very good. Although the school's income per pupil is well above that received by most primary schools, the school is deemed to be giving very good value for money because it is very effective in what it does.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

74. In order to improve the quality of education provided and the standards pupils achieve, the governors, headteacher and staff should work together to:

- (1) Improve the learning opportunities provided for pupils in ICT, and design and technology by:
 - raising the profile of both subjects within the school's curriculum;
 - ensuring that adequate time is devoted to the teaching of both subjects;
 - providing training for staff to ensure that they fully understand the requirements of the National Curriculum for both subjects;
 - providing additional training for those staff who need to improve their own skills in using computers or specific applications which need to be taught to pupils*;
 - ensuring that appropriate curricular guidance is provided for staff in both subjects to help them plan their lessons;
 - making greater use of new technology to assist pupils' learning in all subjects of the National Curriculum*.(Paragraphs 10, 22, 25, 32, 63, 67, 68, 102, 106, 107, 117, 124, 125-129, 137-142)

- (2) Ensure that subject coordinators play a greater role in leading and being accountable for their subject areas* by:
 - monitoring and evaluating the quality of curricular planning, teaching and learning, so that they become aware of strengths and weaknesses and the standards achieved by the pupils within their subject areas;
 - providing clear curricular guidance, assessment procedures and training updates to assist staff in their own planning and teaching.(Paragraphs 51, 54, 63, 65, 67, 124, 129, 136, 142, 148)

** These issues have already been identified as priorities in the school's development plan.*

Other issues which should be considered by the school for inclusion in the action plan:

- provide more opportunities for pupils to create and develop musical ideas through composing in music
(Paragraphs 25, 32, 143-148)
- provide more continuous learning experiences in history and geography
(Paragraphs 25, 32, 67, 130-136)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	50
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	38

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	10	16	11	13	0	0	0
Percentage	20	32	22	26	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	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	20	141
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	N/A	80

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	3	42

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	23
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	37

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	2.7
National comparative data	5.6

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.6
National comparative data	0.5

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	9	10	19

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys			
	Girls			
	Total	17	17	17
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	89 (90)	89 (95)	89 (81)
	National	84 (83)	86 (84)	91 (90)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys			
	Girls			
	Total	17	16	16
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	89 (98)	84 (81)	84 (86)
	National	85 (84)	89 (88)	89 (88)

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

Where the number of boys or girls in the year group are ten or fewer the individual results are not published

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
	2001	9	13	22

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys			
	Girls			
	Total	14	10	14
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	64 (79)	45 (63)	64 (79)
	National	75 (75)	71 (72)	87 (85)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys			
	Girls			
	Total	11	12	N/A
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	50 (74)	55 (68)	N/A (74)
	National	72 (70)	74 (72)	82 (79)

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

Where the number of boys or girls in the year group are ten or fewer the individual results are not published

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	120
Any other minority ethnic group	0

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

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 of pupils of compulsory school age, 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)	8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	20.1
Average class size	23.5

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	5
Total aggregate hours worked per week	89

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	20
Total number of education support staff	1
Total aggregate hours worked per week	20
Number of pupils per FTE adult	10

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	487 914
Total expenditure	449 398
Expenditure per pupil	2 553
Balance brought forward from previous year	35 774
Balance carried forward to next year	74 190

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	0
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	0
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
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	180
Number of questionnaires returned	84

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	65	31	2	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	68	27	4	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	58	39	2	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	48	31	14	2	5
The teaching is good.	81	15	2	1	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	68	26	5	1	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	81	17	1	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	75	24	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	58	36	2	2	1
The school is well led and managed.	78	20	1	0	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	70	25	2	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	56	29	8	0	7

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

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

75. Children enter the Nursery immediately after their third birthday. Although the range is wide, their attainment in most areas of learning is generally well below that which is normally found in children of the same age. Children move from the Nursery into the Reception class at the beginning of the year in which they reach their fifth birthday. The school has successfully addressed the key issue from the previous inspection, which was 'to improve the quality of education of children under five by providing access to suitable outdoor large play equipment.' The quality of the teaching and the school's provision for its youngest children have improved significantly since the last inspection.

Personal, social and emotional development

76. When they start in the Nursery, the children's social skills are well below those expected for their age. Because of the well-planned activities, and the very good teaching and support they receive, most children achieve the expected standards for their personal, social and emotional development by the time they leave the Reception class.

77. The warm, positive atmosphere in the Nursery helps the children to settle well into the structure of school life and, generally, results in them being eager to learn. From the beginning, the children are encouraged to become independent, make decisions and think about their actions. At the start of the session, for example, the children are expected to select their name and to settle down quickly for registration. Most children do this quite happily, although a few still need help from their parents in selecting their name. They learn to put on their socks and shoes after physical activities in the hall.

78. Through discussions and stories, such as 'The Rainbow Fish', which was the class text during the inspection, the children begin to understand the importance of sharing. In the Reception class, most children respond well to the simple, but clearly explained classroom rules, such as waiting until others have finished before speaking. They play amicably with others in the role-play area. For example, in the newsroom, one child played the music before others read the news. Class discussions are a regular feature in both Nursery and Reception classes. As well as developing their speaking and listening skills, these sessions help the children to learn to care about and respect the views of others. The staff work well as a team in both the Nursery and Reception classes and provide very good role models for the children. They show respect, patience and courtesy to all the children with whom they work.

Communication, language and literacy

79. When they enter the Nursery, many children have very poor language skills. They leave the Reception class with much improved skills and an interest in language and books, even though most still do not reach all of the expected standards for communication, language and literacy. The teaching of this aspect is very good, and at times exceptional, in the Nursery, and it is good in the Reception. In both the Nursery and the Reception class, there is a strong emphasis on the development of communication skills, as teachers aim to build a strong base for learning in the next stage of education.

80. In the Nursery, children recognise their own written name from a group of others. They know the way the book should be read, and understand the terms 'illustrator', 'author', 'title', 'publisher' and what the 'barcode' is for at the back of the book they are reading. They listen very attentively, engrossed in the story line and understand the actions and feelings of

the main characters. This evident love of books and their rapidly developing speaking, listening and reading skills are due to the teacher's ability to motivate them and maintain their attention. She directs questions skilfully and maintains their interest in the story by telling it while still appearing to read it, so they know how the story works and how the reading process can be such fun. Because the sessions are so well managed, the children respond exceptionally well and make very good progress indeed. In an excellent session observed at the start of the day, the teacher shared special items from her treasure box as a stimulus for discussion. Once the items had been shown, she asked the children if they would like to ask questions, and many of them asked sensible questions, such as, 'How long have you had it?' The following day, a group of children brought in their own treasures, and a similar discussion took place, with children listening attentively and asking pertinent questions. Such responses are exceptionally good for children who, in normal conversation, cannot offer full sentences, or any extended pattern of speech. The teacher and support staff constantly enrich the children's vocabulary, taking every opportunity to discuss things such as colours, names, books or the weather. Because the children begin from such a low base, no opportunity is lost to develop language.

81. In the Reception class, children continue to make good progress in developing their oral language skills, and in reading and writing. The teacher's planning is generally good, although rather formal at times. A structured approach to sounds has been adopted, and children use the skills which have been taught to help them read. They are developing an increasing love of books and stories. Many children are beginning to read accurately and confidently, working out how to read new words by sounding them out and using a range of other strategies. Because the inspection took place at the end of a year, it was possible to see how the children tackled the more formal setting of a literacy hour. Although the lesson structure was not well proportioned by the teacher, the children were developing a feel for the literacy hour and rose to many of the challenges quite well. They remembered the book from the day before and had quite a lot to say about the characters. As they discussed, they were confident to speak to others, but their sentence construction was still simple or they gave monosyllabic answers. They were able to sustain their listening and make appropriate responses for much of the time. However, the session observed was too long for many in the group to maintain their concentration. The children's written work is developing well, and they have had opportunities to write for different purposes. Most understand how to form letters and how to hold and use a pencil, whilst a few are writing their own names, labels and captions on a regular basis. By the end of the Reception year, children have made good progress towards some of the goals they are expected to reach. Their achievement is best in their attempts to read and write. However, their basic lack of vocabulary and listening ability is still a problem for their teachers.

Mathematical development

82. Children's progress in mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding varies over their time in the Nursery and Reception class and results in variable levels of achievement by the end of the Reception year. While a small minority are beginning to work towards the first learning objectives in the National Curriculum, the majority do not achieve the expected standards for mathematical development by the time they enter the main school. Though the curriculum for these younger children has been modified in recent years, this outcome is broadly similar to that reported at the time of the last inspection.

83. The children's mathematical competence on entry to the Nursery is well below average for the age group. However, most children are motivated well by the mathematical activities provided in the Nursery and make good, and sometimes very good, progress at this stage. A motivating and practical approach is used. In addition to direct teaching sessions, some based on stories, for example, the children learn through sorting and matching

activities using small equipment, number jigsaws, rhymes, role-play and artwork, such as achieving symmetrical butterfly wings by painting and folding. Their sense of shape, size and capacity is developed through sand and water play and construction activities. By the end of their time in the Nursery, a minority of children confidently and successfully recognise and understand numbers up to 5.

84. In the Reception class, where the approach becomes more formal, many children find it difficult to concentrate in the whole-class sessions which are used towards the end of their time in Reception to familiarise them with the structure of the numeracy lessons they will meet in Year 1. A few higher achievers can cope with numbers to 20 and even 30, finding it easy to identify missing numbers in number sequences. They count on in 3s, and even 4s in a few cases, and do simple additions using numerals only. They clearly understand what they are doing and are able to express this, using appropriate mathematical terms in coherent sentences. Many children count on in numbers to 10, but a significant minority are soon out of their depth, even though the teacher uses a variety of learning support equipment to add reality to the number sequences. The practical tasks, which follow the whole-class sessions, are better matched to the prior attainment of the children, enabling most to make satisfactory progress. This indicates that a more flexible lesson structure, with shorter bursts of more motivating activities is required to accommodate and ensure the continued progress of the less mathematically mature children.

85. The quality of teaching for children's mathematical development is variable, but good overall. Teachers' understand the curricular requirements for very young children, and their planning shows clear and relevant objectives. It also includes criteria against which to assess children's progress. In the Nursery, there are some interactive displays which encourage thoughtful responses from the children. Though some good work on pattern-making was evident in the Reception class, the mathematical learning environment is insufficiently stimulating.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

86. Most children enter the Nursery with very limited knowledge and understanding of the world around them, and their attainment is well below average. Children make very good progress due to the very good teaching, but remain below average when they enter their Reception year. Many children lack the necessary language skills to express their knowledge fully or to make independent observations and to ask why things happen. Although the teaching is good in the Reception class, children still do not achieve the expected standards for this area of learning by the time they leave the Reception class.

87. Children begin to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world effectively by exploring freely and through structured activities, often linked to current topics. In the Nursery, for example, after listening to 'fishy' stories and joining in rhymes about fish, the children searched for seashells and crabs in the sand and retrieved a variety of plastic fish from the water. They discovered that fish and other sea creatures have different shapes and were beginning to identify them by name. Looking after the class goldfish helps the children to understand that all living creatures need care and attention. Activities are planned carefully to develop children's investigative skills. For example, children in the Reception class discovered the best material to make a raincoat when they poured water on a variety of materials and discussed the results with their teacher. The children are beginning to use computers to extend their learning in other areas. They use the mouse accurately and understand what is required of them. Staff make very good use of visits and visitors to widen children's experiences and knowledge. This is very beneficial. Walking round the local area introduces the children to early geography skills as they locate the position of the roads, houses and shops. Visits to Knowsley Safari Park and the Blue Planet Aquarium enhance

children's knowledge of living things. Local people, such as the postman, nurse and dentist, are invited to the school to talk to the children. This stimulates the children's interest and increases their awareness of people who work in the community. These visits and contacts also do much to enhance children's social and personal development.

Physical development

88. When they enter the Nursery, many children are already reasonably confident in their larger physical movements, but most lack skill in the finer movements of manipulating objects or using pencils. The children make very good progress due to the very good teaching in the Nursery and the good teaching in the Reception class, and almost all the children achieve the expected standards for physical development by the end of the Reception year.

89. Children in the Nursery only have access for a short time to an outdoor play area, and children in the Reception have no access to a securely enclosed outdoor play area during lessons. This inevitably means that opportunities for children's physical development are restricted. This is compensated for by making good use of the indoor hall for physical activities. Steps have been taken since the last inspection to improve the range of outdoor toys and equipment available for children in the Nursery, and a securely fenced-off area at the front of the Nursery is used for part of the day. For security reasons, however, teachers cannot leave the equipment outside unattended, so its use is restricted to short periods of the day. The provision of a securely enclosed area for children in both the Nursery and Reception is part of the current building project, and this deficiency should, therefore, soon be rectified.

90. During the inspection, two good physical education lessons were observed in the school hall. In the lesson for the Nursery, a vigorous warm-up period, both on the spot and travelling around the room, helped the children to develop their awareness of space, move in different ways and control their bodies. They responded to the challenge of different levels, speed and direction. The children in the Reception class are developing good coordination when using games equipment. During their lesson, the children negotiated a series of cones with bats and balls, thus increasing their skills in hand and eye coordination. The children recognise the effect of exercise on their bodies, and they know that the heart is pumping blood around the body. In both classes, activities are well organised, with appropriate emphasis on moving safely and being aware of others.

91. As they play with construction kits, building blocks and malleable materials such as dough and clay, children increase their level of manipulative control. Teachers provide children with mark-making and cutting and sticking activities to enable them to practise the vital skills needed for writing. Most children control paintbrushes, pencils and scissors well by the end of the Reception year.

Creative development

92. Most children achieve the expected standards for creative development by the end of the Reception year. Children make very good progress because of the very good teaching in the Nursery and good teaching in the Reception.

93. The children make good progress in their musical development. Teachers make good use of creative and imaginative experiences in their lessons. In the Nursery, for example, children receive support and encouragement from the teacher and nursery nurse to join in simple songs and action rhymes to enrich their learning about fish. They use a variety of percussion instruments and investigate the sounds they make. Children listen to different sorts of music and respond to it with simple dance movements. Similar experiences are

provided in the Reception class. In one lesson, for example, the children identified the instrument being played in the 'Flight of the Bumble Bee' and then listened to a range of violins played by a visitor to the class. They explored the sounds the violin makes for themselves with enthusiasm. Skills in drama begin to develop as they take part in role-play activities, such as acting as the newsreader in the newsroom. In both the Nursery and the Reception class, children are introduced to a wide range of techniques including printing, colour mixing, cutting, pasting, collage and modelling with dough and reclaimed materials. In the Nursery, children used the patterns in the skin and coats of animals as inspiration for their own patterns. In the Reception, children show developing observational skills, for example, as they produced careful line drawings of violins.

ENGLISH

94. In the national tests at the end of Year 2 in 2001, results were in line with the national average in reading and well above the national average in writing. When compared with the results of schools in similar contexts, results were very high in reading and writing. The school's trend in both these areas is definitely upwards, and shows a marked improvement since the time of the last inspection, when results were well below average. This very good improvement is a result of significant review, careful analysis and well-targeted support. Modifications and interventions have ensured that pupils have achieved very well, and preliminary indications are that the results for this year's tests continue that success. Teachers take every opportunity to improve vocabulary and ensure pupils have varied opportunities to practise speaking and listening. However, in many cases, the pupils' limited language continues to be a problem. The inspection findings indicate that pupils are achieving nationally expected standards in reading and writing by the end of Year 2, which represents very good progress from the poor literacy skills shown when they started school.

95. In the national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2001, results were well below the national average, but were average in comparison to schools in similar contexts. These results were very similar to those obtained at the time of the last inspection, but there have been marked fluctuations over the last four years, because of the small number of pupils in each year group and the fact that some year groups have a higher than usual percentage of pupils with special educational needs. Preliminary results for the 2002 tests show a marked improvement and are equal to the school's best ever results. This is due, again, to review, analysis, and intervention strategies, as well as very good, targeted teaching in Years 5 and 6. The targets, which the school sets at the beginning of the year, have been exceeded. Inspection findings show that the standards achieved by the current group of pupils at the end of Year 6 are in line with national expectations. This represents very good progress, considering that this same group of pupils achieved well below average results at the end of Year 2.

96. The school has implemented and modified the National Literacy Strategy very well. It has invested considerably in new books of all types, but especially in information books. This has resulted in the raising of pupils' research and information-handling skills throughout the school. This very positive picture answers the criticism in the previous report and indicates how well the school has worked on that key issue for action. The school is continuing to target pupils' speaking abilities, and teachers throughout Years 3 to 6 take every opportunity to develop pupils' vocabulary, ideas and imaginations. Given the fact that the pupils' skills are poor when they start school, their achievements are very good and they are making very good progress. This is also true for pupils with special educational needs, for pupils from traveller families and for pupils whose mothers live in the nearby refuge, all of whom are made so welcome and integrated so well and so quickly into the school community.

97. Pupils enter Year 1 with standards generally below those expected for the age group

in English. For many pupils, the lack of vocabulary and the difficulty they have in expressing themselves clearly are problems. Teachers are very sensitive of this and seek, at all times, to build up the pupils' confidence. At the beginning of the year, the school realised that these particular pupils would need specific help, and so a conscious decision was made to spend more than the usual amount of time on their language development. This, coupled with excellent, expert teaching, has paid off, and pupils in Year 1 have made first-rate progress. In an outstanding lesson during the inspection, all the pupils' language skills were enhanced as a result of high-quality planning, firm but warm discipline and excellent questioning, carried out with a wonderful sense of fun. The pupils demonstrated their increased ability to speak coherently to an audience, to listen effectively and to read with obvious pleasure and understanding. They were also able to analyse what they had read very well, because the teacher had chosen relevant texts which interested them, such as story and information books about bears, a favourite topic in this classroom. Subsequent writing activities were planned very effectively to challenge all pupils of all abilities, especially through opportunities for them to pose, as well as answer, pertinent questions.

98. With this high-quality teaching continued into Year 2, it becomes obvious why standards have improved so well. In another excellent lesson, broadly similar qualities and atmosphere ensured that pupils were challenged and inspired. Here, the writing was of exceptional quality, because the teacher enabled the pupils to have confidence in their own abilities. Consequently, pupils' ideas and imagination were enhanced. This included all ability groups. For example, a pupil with special educational needs used the sentence, 'On the silvery sanded beach, I tripped over a treasure shell.' and the class were so appreciative of his effort that they clapped, spontaneously. The stories they all wrote were magical, and one boy, who usually lacks all confidence, asked to stay in at playtime, in order to finish his work. The teacher was delighted. Very good achievement in this class is particularly pleasing, because it comprises almost entirely boys, who, in previous years, have not performed as well as girls. Throughout the year, pupils have had a wide range of opportunities for writing, which is a marked improvement from the time of the last inspection, when it was found that the range was too narrow.

99. In Years 3 to 6, pupils continue to progress well in all aspects of English. Even though speaking and weaknesses in language still present a problem, teachers are committed to raising standards, and the success in this is directly attributable to the quality of education they provide. Teaching is particularly strong for the older pupils, who are fortunate to have consistently very good teaching, which has included a supply teacher in Year 6, during this year. Younger pupils have completed a good amount of work during the year prior to this inspection and have made definite improvements in their writing. Their presentation is neat, and their handwriting, though not joined, is developing into individual styles. As pupils move up the school, handwriting does become joined and develops a good style, which is neat and legible. Teachers generally mark work regularly, and some are very good at helping pupils to improve by the comments they write, such as 'remember to put your punctuation before closing speech marks.' Pupils write for a wide range of purposes, which is a marked improvement from the time of the last inspection, when they had insufficient opportunities to extend their ideas. Teachers use texts effectively. A good example of this was seen in a lesson for pupils in Year 5, where not only was appropriate consideration of persuasive writing possible, but it was of topical interest, tying in with the recent news headline of a fox mauling a baby. All pupils have seen foxes in Widnes, and had their own ideas about them. The texts on offer were letters relating to the topic of foxhunting, giving different points of view. The pupils appreciated the different points of view and understood the logical arguments both for and against controlling the number of foxes. They were able, successfully, to pick out phrases which were persuasive, and their reading ability was above average on that occasion. However, their spoken responses fell below expectations, because their speech patterns were not so well developed, some were mumbling and some were almost inaudible.

100. By the end of Year 6, pupils have covered a good amount of work, which comprises a suitably broad range, is thoughtfully planned and is relevant to pupils' needs. Speaking and listening skills are broadly in line with expectations, and pupils read well, for fun and information. Generally, they are independent and accurate, using appropriate strategies to read for meaning if necessary. The most able readers do so at a high-level, using inference and deduction, and predicting, without hesitation, what could happen. They identify key ideas well, and understand characters and mood, sensitively, substantiating their ideas and opinions by reference to the text. Most pupils enjoy information texts as much as reading stories and poetry. The school has worked hard to provide a wider, broader more relevant selection of books, since the time of the last inspection.

101. In writing, pupils have been offered appropriate opportunities for independent and extended work, which they present neatly, using bold, tidy, cursive handwriting. The teachers' marking is very effective and supports pupils whilst giving them a very good indication of how to improve. A good example observed when looking at a pupil's piece of work was when the teacher wrote a positive comment about the first part of the work, but asked the pupil to try the second part again, because it was simply a description. The correction resulted in a noticeably more mature conclusion. Marking also makes a good contribution to pupils' individual targets for improvement. Because the teacher makes judicious use of sheets and writing frames, the pupils are able to plan their work more carefully and have success in their writing, which is often lively and thoughtful. An excellent example of this was the very powerful poetry about the mountains and scenery witnessed on the residential trip the week before. The careful planning sheet enabled pupils to sort out their thoughts and gave them a formula for the structure of their ideas. However, the finished pieces were far from formulaic. Their use of language was impressive and indicated just how valuable the trip had been in widening and broadening their experience. Other good writing opportunities provided as a spin-off from the trip were very different in nature, presenting the pupils with a good balance of expressive and informative writing. In a very good lesson seen during the inspection, the pupils were examining leaflets to identify, evaluate and justify the purpose and the structure of the layout. They did this very well, and went on to formulate their own leaflets later in the week. A particularly pleasing and perceptive comment came from a pupil with special educational needs, who realised that the best leaflet or brochure for him, would be one with 'headline news' and pictures, rather than one which had too much information. This led to a very good discussion about the purpose and audience of a piece of writing.

102. The subject coordinator provides very good leadership and is an excellent role model for good practice. Good links are made with other subjects, and teachers offer very good opportunities to practise literacy skills in all lessons, where appropriate. Some limited use is made of computers, but this is disappointing, because pupils often only copy out, instead of drafting and re-working their pieces, straight into the computer. Accurate analysis of test results, and optional papers, alongside the tracking of individuals and groups of pupils, have all led to improved results. The coordinator has instigated extra support and withdrawal groups when necessary, and the impact of these interventions is monitored closely. The coordinator, leading the school as a whole, has understood that pupils in this school do not practise their reading enough, so extra sessions, outside the literacy hour, have been set up. These work well in most classes; however, more varied use would lead to more effective sessions, especially in Years 3 and 4. In the main, ending sessions to lessons are useful for checking understanding, eradicating misconceptions and setting the next lesson in context. However, some opportunities are lost, because the session is spent sharing what has been done. This works best when teachers are verbally 'marking' the work, such as in a lesson seen in Year 2. At the time of the last inspection, the school needed to find a more coherent scheme of work. The Literacy Strategy has provided that framework, and, generally, teachers use it to very good effect. The high-quality leadership, the very good teaching overall, and the

very good relationships in most classes, ensure that pupils respond very positively to the subject and are successful throughout their learning, not merely in tests.

MATHEMATICS

103. Standards of attainment in mathematics are above average at the end of Years 2 and 6. This is a considerable achievement. At the time of the last inspection, only a small majority of pupils in Year 6 were meeting national expectations for their age in mathematics, leaving the school's results well below the national average at the end of Year 6. Over the intervening years, levels of attainment have fluctuated significantly, influenced in part by the small and varied composition of each year's pupils.

104. Though most pupils are not yet performing in line with expectations for their age in mathematics when they enter Year 1, the school's results in national tests in recent years have shown a very significant climb towards the average for schools nationally by the end of Year 2. In 2001, when all pupils reached the standard expected for their age and a tiny minority exceeded it, the school almost reached the national average. With more pupils achieving at the higher level in the 2002 national tests, the school's results are now clearly above the previous year's national average.

105. The latest national test results at the end of Year 6 show a very significant improvement in standards over the past year, leading to results which are just above the previous year's national average. In 2001, barely half of the pupils achieved the required standard for their age, though the school's results matched the average for schools in similar circumstances. The school set its targets for 2002 at a level which reflected these results, but it also set a 'challenging target', as it implemented improvements in the provision for mathematics. In the event, it exceeded this higher target, with two in every three pupils achieving the nationally expected standard for their age, more than one in four of them exceeding it and several other pupils nearly doing so.

106. The standards achieved throughout the school are supported by appropriate coverage of all the required elements of the curriculum for mathematics. Pupils produce a good quantity of work and generally take care in the presentation of it. Pupils throughout the school show a developing understanding of mathematics as they answer questions about how they have arrived at particular answers. Most pupils at the end of Year 2 perform the four mathematical operations effectively, higher-attaining pupils working with three-digit numbers in some calculations. They are familiar with the required multiplication tables and are learning to use Venn diagrams. They apply their number skills to everyday problems and are familiar with basic geometrical shapes and measures. No use of computers is evident in their work, however.

107. Pupils at the end of Year 6 can cope with very large numbers, carrying out population comparisons, for example. They use fractions of various kinds, understanding the equivalents when moving between them, decimals and percentages. Pupils know the properties of a wide range of geometrical shapes and can work with angles, bearings and coordinates. Pupils show skills in handling and displaying data, though there is no evidence of them using the computer for this. Most of their mathematical problem solving is based on real-world applications, money transactions in particular.

108. The teaching of mathematics is very good, and sometimes excellent. It leads to very good, and occasionally excellent, achievement by the pupils. Teachers' management of the pupils is very good, resulting in the development of a partnership in learning which fosters pupils' very good attitudes towards the subject in almost all cases. Pupils are further motivated by teachers' very good subject knowledge and the interesting learning activities they provide. This often includes investigative work. In a lesson in Year 6, for instance, pupils were observed solving mathematical problems and puzzles. After a bingo-type game through which mental number skills were reinforced, the key focus was on analysing the mathematical mysteries which govern the structure of 'magic squares'. After much thought and discussion, pupils had unravelled the mathematical patterns involved and were confidently constructing new magic squares. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 played a dice game which enabled them to make good progress in their understanding of the principles and use of coordinates, incidentally becoming familiar with the relevant vocabulary.

109. Pupils in Year 1 were provided with a range of interesting practical activities to help them to understand the principles of data collection and display. This was quite challenging for the pupils concerned, but they made good progress. Expectations of pupils' ability to succeed are high throughout the school. Teachers' questioning techniques and on-going assessment of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are at least good and more often very good. These various skills combine to give pupils an interest in learning, growing confidence in their ability to succeed and enhanced achievement in the subject. All staff have attended courses to support the quality of provision in mathematics. Some monitoring of teaching has taken place, but the school is planning to develop this further.

110. The overall improvements are a great credit to the pupils and their teachers, but much of the improvement is also due to the school's management, including the mathematics coordinator's successful implementation of several initiatives which have supported the achievement of improved results. For instance, reorganisation of class groupings has reduced the range of pupils' prior attainment in each mathematics lesson. Higher-attaining pupils are challenged as they work alongside older pupils in the mixed-age classes, and slower learners work with younger pupils in order to secure their learning. The numeracy strategy is used effectively as a basis for planning, with individual and group learning tasks suitably matched to pupils' needs within the more homogeneous classes.

111. This organisational change is complemented by supplementary, small-group mathematics lessons for selected pupils in Years 3 to 6, including those with special educational needs, who make very good progress as a result. Pupils in Years 4 and 5 were observed in one of these lessons. Excellent teaching and planning supported progression in pupils' understanding. The teacher took them, in a series of finely graded steps, from revision of the place value of digits, through simple fractions and their equivalents in decimals. At each stage, the sequencing of questioning was determined by the pupils' queries and responses, to which the teacher listened with the greatest care. Simple but well-chosen resources and activities were changed frequently, effectively ensuring pupils' continued concentration and success. 'This is easy!' exclaimed one pupil as he experienced the pleasure of understanding. A range of suitably pitched 'booster' classes for all pupils in Year 6 has contributed to their achievements in the recent national tests.

112. On-going assessment procedures are well developed in mathematics. National test results are thoroughly scrutinised for pointers towards improvement. They are used to provide a basis for target setting at individual and whole-school level, for curriculum revision and the setting of appropriate levels of challenge and support for the pupils at differing levels of achievement. Termly assessments are used to identify weaknesses in pupils' learning. Yearly, formal tests provide information that helps to determine what supplementary learning arrangements need to be made for pupils in Years 3 to 6. Provision for pupils in Years 1 and

2 is made on the basis of their performance in tests at the end of the Reception year. Pupils with mathematical talents are given access to an 'accelerated maths' group run by the headteacher.

113. The subject is led by a well-informed and dynamic coordinator. An updated policy and common short-term planning sheets are among the improvements envisaged, together with an increased emphasis on 'multi-step' problem solving. An area of weakness not listed, is the limited application of mathematics in other subject areas, though occasional examples were evident in art and design and design and technology, for example. Support for pupils' self-assessment of their progress is also underdeveloped. A new and exciting development is the involvement of Year 6 pupils in 'Transition Maths', a scheme to enhance continuity in learning as pupils move towards their secondary education.

SCIENCE

114. In the 2001 National Curriculum assessment tests at the end of Year 6, the school's results were well below the national average and below average for schools in similar contexts. There have been considerable variations in results since the last inspection when standards were judged to be in line with national expectations. The varying capacity of some groups of pupils to achieve, accounts for the dip in standards in the last two years. However, preliminary results for 2002 are much better than in 2001 and indicate that significant progress has been made. Standards in Years 1 and 2 have been maintained at a satisfactory level since the previous inspection. Inspection judgements show that standards are in line with national expectations at the end of Years 2 and 6. Good-quality teaching throughout the school has played a major part in the good progress made by all pupils, including those with special educational needs.

115. By the end of Year 2, pupils achieve average standards in all aspects of science. Pupils describe and understand the differences and similarities between themselves and other living things. They discuss where different animals live and why they choose that particular place. They know that the changing seasons greatly influence the behaviour of most creatures. For example, when looking at the changing habits of the bear, pupils in Year 1 discovered that it was one of several animals that hibernate and why. Pupils in Year 2 have a sound understanding of the life cycle of humans and other animals, recognising the essential conditions needed for survival. Pupils are given some opportunities to carry out investigative work but, as yet, have no firm understanding of the concept of a fair test. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to ask questions or to learn how to recognise when a test or comparison is fair when seeking answers.

116. By the end of Year 6, pupils have made good progress in their ability to carry out and record their investigative work. They have a sound understanding of fair testing and use additional investigations to confirm their original results. Pupils use and build on their previous knowledge and scientific understanding. In Year 6, for example, pupils quickly assessed the need for a parallel rather than a series circuit to enhance more than one feature in the models they had built. Pupils have considerable knowledge of materials and how changes occur when different processes are applied.

117. The overall quality of the teaching is good throughout the school. Some very good teaching was observed in Year 6. Teachers are confident and have very good subject knowledge. Lessons are well planned, with relevant objectives tailored to the needs of all abilities. Teachers use questioning effectively to extend pupils' learning. They provide extra support for pupils with special educational needs who also benefit from help given by fellow pupils when carrying out cooperative group tasks. Class management is good and there is skilful use of praise and encouragement. As a result, pupils build on firm foundations and

deepen their knowledge and increase their understanding in a step-by-step way. In Years 3 to 6, they develop the ability to observe, describe and record their findings as a result of challenging investigative work. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly although this usually takes the form of a tick or an encouraging comment and does not normally include targets for the pupil. The teachers use pupils' work in science to help them develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils are required to record their work in science in their own words without recourse to worksheets. Observations and measurements are recorded in different ways, for example, in written accounts, diagrams and graphs. Teachers have high expectations for the quality of the content and presentation of pupils' work. ICT, however, is not yet used sufficiently to support pupils' work in science.

118. Pupils learn well because they have very good attitudes towards their work in science. Most pupils work hard, cooperate with others, take pride in achieving their tasks and enjoy learning about the subject. They show interest in and enthusiasm for the practical tasks given to them and carry out their investigations sensibly and responsibly.

119. The subject is led well by an informed and enthusiastic coordinator. She has supervised effectively the introduction of a good new scheme of work based on national guidelines and is working with the rest of the staff to develop more comprehensive and useful procedures for assessment. Educational visits to places, such as the local soap industry museum and nearby nature trails, contribute positively to pupils' learning in science. Resources are adequate and improving. In response to the lack of good-quality books for investigative work highlighted in the last inspection, a significant number of appropriate books has now been purchased.

ART AND DESIGN

120. By the end of both Years 2 and 6, pupils' attainment in art and design is in line with national expectations. Standards at the time of the last inspection have been maintained though, currently, pupils appear to cover a narrower spectrum of work due to reduction in the teaching time available to the subject. This has resulted from more pressing curricular priorities, giving cause for senior management concern. Findings are very similar to those reported previously, though the overall quality of teaching has improved. It is now generally good, and occasionally very good, leading to good progress by the pupils. Teachers have benefited significantly from the guidance of a visiting art and design teacher.

121. Pupils of all abilities achieve well during Years 1 and 2, making good use of the learning opportunities provided. These have included the drawing of townscapes, using pastels. Stimulated by the paintings of Lowry, pupils have produced modern townscapes in which people are dwarfed by massive buildings. The pupils have clearly absorbed Lowry's message, though they could not articulate it or remember the artist's name. Inspired by African masks, pupils have also contributed portraits and designed patterned borders to make an impressive textile hanging. Large portraits of monsters show pupils' ability to mix colours to achieve interesting effects. Teachers sometimes use artwork, including paintings, pencil drawings and collages to support work in mathematics and science. Examples include attractive collages using geometrical shapes and labelled drawings in support of science, for instance. Though such examples are limited in number, they show effective use of pupils' artistic skills.

122. The achievement of all pupils in Years 3 to 6 is also good. They all have sketchbooks, which are generally used productively to achieve various results when working with pencil and charcoal, experimenting with colour and achieving perspective in their work, for instance. All pupils respond enthusiastically to the creative opportunities on offer in art and design lessons and show that they can achieve good standards when the quality of teaching is

particularly good. A striking example was a lesson stimulated by the work of Braque. Not only did the pupils produce attractive collages based on the style of the artist, but they also understood how the artistic elements he used came together to create different effects. For instance, they showed appreciation of how to combine colour, line, texture, shape and layering and were able to discuss their own strategies using these terms. An incidental aspect of this lesson was its impact on pupils' vocabulary as they sought to describe the characteristics of the materials they were using and shaping. The positive effect of this in-depth learning on pupils' ability to assess their own work was a striking reminder of the importance of pupils' familiarity with key artistic elements if their full creative potential is to be realised. The three-dimensional work of pupils in Years 3 to 6 is also good, though the range of materials used is insufficient. Younger pupils have made masks, using photographs of African examples as a stimulus. Pupils in Year 6 have built up human figures using frameworks covered with mod-roc. The attractive results faithfully reflect different postures and movements.

123. Pupils' work in art and design makes a valuable contribution to their cultural development, including their multi-cultural awareness. The school has supplemented this aspect of its provision through membership of a local arts network for primary schools. The range of artistic opportunities provided is limited, however. These limitations include a shortage of three-dimensional work and too few opportunities to use textiles. The work of renowned artists to demonstrate variations in the use of artistic techniques and elements is also much underdeveloped, due to the fear that this will result in the mere copying which was criticised during the last inspection.

124. There is also very limited use of ICT in art and design lessons, though it was observed making a very positive contribution to pupils' art inspired by Braque. It is the school's policy to enrich pupils' education through visits to museums and art galleries, but relatively little use has been made of such opportunities in art and design as yet. The coordinator is aware of weaknesses in the breadth of the provision and is poised to introduce a revised curriculum in the very near future. This will include planning to support progression in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. The school also recognises the need to develop a manageable but effective system for assessing pupils' progress as well as procedures for evaluating the quality of its provision for art and design.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

125. Pupils' attainment in design and technology has not improved since it was judged at the time of the last inspection to be unsatisfactory by the end of both Year 2 and Year 6. Few weaknesses identified at the time have been remedied. Teaching, learning and planning remain unsatisfactory. With one significant exception in Year 6, there was no design and technology work on display around the school. Discussion with pupils indicated that they had few memories of having designed and produced any useful items. Little teaching time is allocated systematically to the subject in most year groups.

126. Achievement in Years 1 and 2 is unsatisfactory. A small group of pupils in Year 2 were observed cooking, supported by a class assistant working to planning by the class teacher. As a practical lesson with literacy opportunities in the form of writing out instructions, numeracy elements linked to various measurements and appropriate emphasis on food hygiene, it was satisfactory and much enjoyed by the pupils who benefited significantly from the social opportunities provided. They had made a sketch of a gingerbread man before starting and assessed its actual appearance and taste at the end. However, they had been given no design choices other than in decoration so they had little to say about how the product might be improved. Discussions with pupils showed they had little recall of previous work in the subject, though they remembered making 'concertina books' with wallets to hold

them, a learning task which, with appropriate guidance, has potential for the sequence of designing, constructing and finally evaluating suitability to purpose with a view to improvement which is central to the subject.

127. Pupils in Year 1 were observed evaluating sailing boats made from 'found materials', a motivating assignment stimulated by the need to provide transport for the imaginary Barnaby Bear's travels. However, the appropriateness of cardboard containers for making toy boats and the suitability of the actual sails for providing power were not considered, though the effectiveness of the models could easily have been tested if suitable materials had been readily available and sailing tests undertaken. Improvements might then have been suggested. These various examples demonstrate teachers' inadequate understanding of the principles of the design and technology process and the limits it sets on pupils' learning.

128. Pupils in Year 6 were in the process of completing a very effective application of their scientific knowledge to the making of models in which electrical circuits, with switches and motors, produced a variety of movements and lighting effects, using the same principles as those used in everyday life. Currently, they were in the evaluation and improvement phase of the design and technology cycle and were very stimulated by the challenges involved. They recalled making greeting cards with levers and teddy bears with moveable limb mechanisms, both appropriate assignments, which raise questions about the quality and effectiveness of construction. The pupils showed an emergent awareness that the design and technology process is central to the making of the man-made objects used in everyday life. For instance, one pupil was very quick to pick out the inadequacies of an item of furnishing in the room that did not serve its purpose.

129. Though pupils' attitudes towards the learning opportunities provided are generally very good, teachers have an inadequate understanding of its principal requirements. Their planning does not usually provide satisfactory support for pupils' progress, including that of the potentially talented and those with special educational needs. The examples given combine to demonstrate the significant weaknesses and underdeveloped strengths in the current provision. Though improvements in the curriculum are imminent, pupils' progress remains uncertain unless other improvements are also undertaken. There is a narrow range of materials available and no use of ICT to support designing or control. Currently, the leadership and management of design and technology is unsatisfactory in practice, teachers do not have a clear grasp of National Curriculum targets, there is no monitoring and evaluation of the provision and no system for assessing pupils' progress. Resources have been improved recently, but require supplementing.

GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

130. Standards in geography and history are typical of those expected at the end of Years 2 and 6, and pupils of all abilities are making satisfactory progress. Due to timetabling arrangements, few lessons were observed during the inspection. Nevertheless, a scrutiny of completed work, discussions with pupils, and the teachers' planning indicate that the subjects are taught well. Pupils enjoy their lessons and learn well because they are interested. However, the breaks between the times when these two subjects are taught are often too long to build skills consistently and systematically. At present, insufficient attention is paid to this building of knowledge and understanding steadily and effectively. The interweaving of both subjects, and their linking with others is a good structure and a sensible approach, but, despite the plan by the coordinators to teach the subject on a regular basis, in fact teachers complete work when they want to fit it in. They do what they do well, but the standards could be improved if these subjects were taught more frequently. A two-year, rolling programme of topics ensures that mixed-age classes do not revisit subjects already studied. The school has maintained the improvements in these subjects since the time of the

last inspection.

131. One lesson each of history and geography was observed during the inspection in Year 1. The teacher had carefully planned the work around the subject of bears. This topic was very well chosen to be relevant and interesting to the pupils. Planning indicated well-integrated skills, and the two subjects were woven very well through literacy work. The teacher taught both lessons very well. In geography, they were planning and following a journey for Barnaby Bear whilst in history, pupils were discussing the similarities and differences between old and new teddy bears. Pupils sorted the teddy bears into the correct chronological order, and many of them used time language accurately, for example 'before', 'after', 'newer', and 'a long time ago'. They also had a very good discussion about whether things were really old, or whether they could be made to look that way, realising that one of the bears fell into this category. They realised quickly, that they should not be fooled by the evidence before them, but check and look carefully, using what they knew. As they discussed the old and new properties, they used very good skills of enquiry to ask and answer questions about the past. The teacher had prepared a very good written follow-up task which enabled the pupils to record their ideas and findings logically and clearly. Their classification and labelling was very methodical and carefully carried out. This enabled the teacher to assess how well they had understood and interpreted what they had found out.

132. In geography, pupils had excellent opportunities to use globes and maps, as well as to consider what other articles would be important on a journey. Other very valuable discussions concerned the geographical features that might be encountered during such a long journey from Widnes to McCarthy, in Alaska. They considered, in a very mature way, what it would be like to live in a place with so many mountains and bears, and expressing their own views about it, for instance, 'I don't want to live with so many grisly bears about!' and 'It would be nice to have all those trees.' Pictures, stories, information texts, and the teacher's imaginative interpretation of McCarthy enabled pupils to demonstrate their growing understanding of human and physical features and to consider the impact of people on the environment.

133. In Year 2, pupils' historical enquiry has included work about the ancient Britons and the Romans. In considering life in World War Two, pupils' books indicate they have a good understanding of life at that time, and how children must have felt as evacuees, away from their parents. In discussions, they demonstrated real empathy, drawing similarities with children they knew who had been forced to leave one parent behind, in difficult circumstances. The teacher makes good use of literacy skills, particularly in history, to write accounts and letters. She also plans well to use a good variety of sources of evidence, including photographs, eyewitness accounts, pictures and stories. This enables pupils to find out about and consider what life was like in the past. Learning about the lives of famous, influential people, such as Anne Frank, pupils begin to understand and recognise why people behaved as they did, why events happened, and how those events have shaped life today. In geography, they have carried out a survey of where they live. They have recorded how they get to school, as well as the different types of houses and homes they live in. Because some of them live in a communal home, and some live in a caravan, they have had very good opportunities to compare and express their views. Such issues are handled sensitively, ensuring that pupils from all different backgrounds are included appropriately in lessons and are enabled to make the same progress as their peers. Pupils have illustrated very well their observations on a landmark walk around the area. One exciting feature for them, is the bridge over the river, which is not far away, and they talk about this, demonstrating a growing understanding of the changes in the river and its use at different times.

134. Throughout Years 3 to 6, pupils build upon these skills in history and geography. However, work is generally sparse, because the subjects are taught intermittently. Work is

generally well planned, and teachers work hard to make it relevant to the pupils. For instance, in geography in Year 3 and 4, the pupils have used globes, maps and resources from papers and magazines, to follow and study the countries engaged in the recent football World Cup. Through this, they have asked themselves about the landscape, the rainfall, the people and land use in many varied and different countries and continents. They have had good opportunities to use a variety of information sources such as books, encyclopaedias, atlases and the Internet. Their class world map has a display of flags and capital cities. In these ways their teacher has created good opportunities to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding of places and to consider similarities and differences. For instance, in one lesson, the pupils noted that France is a much bigger country than England, but England is much more densely populated. This prompted a good, short discussion about available space, and pupils expressed views, indicating they had thought about such differences in the countries they have studied. Older pupils have studied the importance of water in our lives, looking at it from many different points of view. In a very good lesson observed during the inspection, the teacher had planned an interesting, scientific experiment to filter water, and this produced many interesting discussions, as the pupils realised how difficult it was to get clean water, and consequently how important it was for health and hygiene. This very practical and enlightening experiment increased the pupils' understanding very well. Subsequently, they recorded their results clearly and methodically.

135. In Year 6, pupils make a study of Victorian times, considering particularly the lives of children at that time. Through carefully planned work they are able to see how different life was for children of their age, for example a chimney sweep, a farm labourer or a factory worker. Their writing includes accounts, letters and descriptions, written and organised well, demonstrating good, solid understanding and knowledge of life in past times. It also indicates a growing understanding of the attitudes and beliefs of that time, and how different they are in many ways today. In geography, pupils have made an in-depth study of rivers, contrasting well the fast water through the hills with the slow meanders as it reaches the sea. They have analysed well the changes in landscape through the river's journey. They have used maps and plans competently, for instance, to plot the main rivers in England and Wales, and drawn very good diagrams of a river bed and a valley cut by water. The River Mersey, close by, has provided very good, first-hand evidence. A plotting of rivers worldwide has been followed by an equally in-depth study of mountainous regions in the world. The teacher has planned this work very well and linked it to studies in Coniston, where the pupils spent their residential trip. This experience has had a powerful effect on the pupils, as the environment and terrain are so different from their normal experiences. In a very good lesson seen during the inspection, pupils used maps and atlases to investigate how mountainous environments differ in nature across a range of places. The teacher had planned very clear help sheets, and the pupils' task was to find, sort and record useful information. This research was carried out by different groups investigating different mountain ranges, and each group was to prepare a presentation of their findings, for the rest of the class. The task entailed them sifting through, then deciding upon, the salient points, for example of landscapes, physical features and reasons for climate, as well as noting land use and noticing important features of population. They tackled this very well, using graphical and information handling skills, discussing sensibly what would be important to include, and what they could leave out.

136. The subjects are well led by coordinators who work very closely together, and who expect to interweave the subjects, wherever possible. They have organised a curriculum which meets the needs of mixed-age classes well, ensuring that pupils do not repeat the same topics. They have welcomed the schemes of work given in the recent national guidance and have adopted a sensible form of assessment which takes account of the significant variations in pupils' learning, for example, areas of concern or significant progress. When the sheet of results is filled in, it goes to the pupil's next teacher, to help them to plan for different ability groups, or to make a personal target for a particular child. The coordinators

take in books and monitor teachers' planning, but they realise they do not do this rigorously enough at present. Although they have planned for the subjects to be taught in alternate half-terms, they now realise that this does not happen consistently, and it depends very much on how individual teachers decide to work. They agree that they need to monitor planning more closely, to be sure that pupils' skills are built upon consistently and as a continuous process, in order to raise standards. Because there are gaps at present, the pupils have insufficient opportunities to learn history and geography, and this is the only reason why standards are as they are. The quality of teaching is good overall, pupils are interested and learn well, and the coordinators lead with vision for what they want to do. When they take their next decisions, they can feel confident of the backing of the rest of the staff, because there is a very good willingness to improve and ample capacity to succeed within the school.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

137. There has been some improvement in the school's provision for ICT since the last inspection, but there is still a long way to go before pupils reach the expected standards at the end of both Years 2 and 6. Pupils are more confident in using computers than they were at the time of the last inspection, but standards are still below national expectations and pupils are not achieving as well as they should because they have not had enough opportunity to develop their skills, either through direct teaching or through the use of technology in connection with their work in other subjects. The most significant improvement has come only very recently through the installation of a new computer suite, but as it was installed only shortly before the inspection, staff have yet to become fully conversant with its use, and it has yet to have an impact on standards. Other improvements have been the installation of a small bank of computers in a room used for group tuition and the procurement of resources for the community, now located in the community centre, to which the school has open access.

138. The provision for ICT was identified as a key issue for action in the previous inspection. The school has been slow to respond to the issue as it has devoted its time, energy and commitment to issues which it deemed, appropriately, to be of greater priority. The steps taken this year have been impressive and indicate the school's serious intent to improve its provision for ICT in the same way as it has tackled English and mathematics. The installation of the computer suite has involved significant reorganisation within an already cramped building and a very large injection of financial resources. The new suite, which comprises 15 multimedia computers, a digital projector and interactive whiteboard, provides the facility for all pupils to receive the intensive practice needed in order to raise their attainment to the expected standard.

139. By the end of Year 2, pupils have only a limited range of skills and are working below the nationally expected level. Pupils' progress has been unsatisfactory because of the very limited use of computers. Pupils have an awareness of how computers and other forms of technology can help them to exchange and share information. They type short pieces of text using a word processor, and type in information from a tally chart to produce a bar chart indicating how many birthdays fall in each month. However, pupils do not use computer programs intuitively and take a long time to produce any writing because of their lack of familiarity with the keyboard. They know that CD-ROMs can be used to store vast amounts of information, but, as yet, they have had little opportunity to use CD-ROMs or the Internet to develop skills which enable them to find out information. Pupils have yet to appreciate how computers can help them to improve their work, and there are very few opportunities for them to produce initial drafts of their work and then go back to improve these after discussion with others or with the teacher. Pupils in Year 2 receive help from an assistant on one afternoon a week. They are taught specific skills and are then tested at a later date to ensure that they have remembered and apply the skills. Such an approach ensures that some progress is

made, but pupils' exposure to new technology is too little and too infrequent to enable them to make adequate progress.

140. By the time they reach the end of Year 6, pupils' competence and confidence in using computers has grown considerably. However, discussions with pupils and examination of the work they have saved during the year show that there are still significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding and that standards are still below, and in some aspects well below, the expected level. Pupils have much more secure basic skills than those displayed by pupils in Year 4. They know how to log on to the computer, locate programs, start new pieces of work and save them into a named file. They know how to move from one program to another by minimising a window and selecting the background application. Pupils know how new technology can be used to find things out, for example, through the Internet, and they have the basic skills to search for a given site, to select certain information and paste it into their own document. However, pupils do not have a great deal of opportunity to use CD-ROMs or the Internet on a regular basis. The strongest aspect of pupils' work is their ability to exchange and share information. Pupils use a word processor to present pieces of writing, and know how to alter the appearance of the text, taking due consideration of their audience. During the inspection, pupils in Years 4 and 5 made good progress in an art and design lesson in producing pictures in the style of Braque, on this occasion, receiving very good help from a student on work experience. The weakest aspect of pupils' work is their understanding of how computers can be used to control or monitor events, and little work has been attempted on this aspect. Although pupils save their work, there are very few examples of extended pieces of work in which pupils review, modify and evaluate their work as it progresses.

141. Although some satisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection, the overall quality of the teaching and learning throughout the school is unsatisfactory, because teachers plan insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop the necessary skills. The teachers' confidence and expertise are improving as they become more familiar with using computers for their own personal use and as a result of training. However, there is still a need for much further training in order to improve teachers' skills in aspects of the curriculum with which they are still unfamiliar. Teachers are making better use of the scheme of work to plan their lessons, but some of the planned activities are not appropriate, given pupils' prior experiences. In one session, for example, a small group of lower-attaining pupils from Year 6 were being shown how to produce a leaflet using a page-layout program. The task tied in very well with pupils' work in literacy and geography, but the planned activity attempted far too much in the given time, and pupils did not have sufficient familiarity with using a variety of different computer programs to really benefit from the session. In contrast, a good session was observed with all of the pupils in Year 6, in which they were being shown how to look for and then extract information from the Internet which was pertinent to their writing in geography. The teacher gave pupils careful instructions, making good use of the large interactive screen so that all pupils could see, and reinforcing what had been taught by getting pupils to explain how to accomplish the task in their own words. As in all other lessons, pupils respond very positively and show good motivation to learn. There is certainly an eagerness to try out the new computer suite, and in the one session that was observed, all pupils were engaged and working hard to put into practice what they had been taught.

142. The leadership and management of ICT over the last year have been satisfactory. From a detailed development plan, much has been accomplished and a platform established from which the school can proceed to improve standards and the rate at which pupils progress. But much more remains to be done. In following a recognised scheme of work, the school has a basic structure for the curriculum, but more needs to be done to ensure that teachers are familiar with all aspects of it and thought given as to how each unit of work can tie into other aspects of the curriculum. There is still very little use of ICT in other subjects, even in areas where pupils already have the skills, such as drafting and redrafting work their work in English. There is, similarly, little use of common applications, such as spreadsheets and data-handling programs, to enhance pupils' work in mathematics. Staff have a basic framework for assessment of pupils' competence, but it is not yet being used. Ideas for pupils to have journals in which they record their use of computers and for staff to keep a more detailed record of their usage of ICT have yet to be implemented. However, the subject has a detailed action plan for the coming year, which includes the need to monitor more closely what is happening throughout the school, and which provides a good framework for future development. Some in-service training has already been planned for the start of the new school year and a particularly good feature is the appointment of a teaching assistant to provide full-time technical support and teaching assistance within the computer suite. The school has appropriate policies to ensure safe access to the Internet. The school has already analysed its own weaknesses, has taken the first steps to rectify them, has detailed plans for the coming year and a staff who have already shown great commitment to other initiatives and the capacity to succeed.

MUSIC

143. Although standards in singing are excellent, some aspects of the curriculum for music are covered in very little depth. As a result, there have been no significant improvements in the school's provision for music but, overall, the satisfactory standards found at the last inspection have been maintained.

144. Pupils in Years 1 and 2, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in developing their singing skills. They clearly enjoy singing and sing very well, sweetly, melodiously, and with clear diction and appropriate expression. By the end of Year 2, pupils sing a good repertoire of hymns and songs, in some of which they use actions to enhance the meaning of the words. They clap rhythms accurately. When accompanied by staff on the piano or the guitar, they follow carefully and in time. As a group, pupils refine and adjust their singing as they become more familiar with new words and tunes. They create rhythms and textures on a range of percussion instruments to accompany their own singing. Pupils do not have the opportunity to explore sounds imaginatively or to create sequences of sounds, for example, to illustrate a story musically. During their singing lessons, pupils practise their reading, speaking and listening skills as they learn the words of new songs.

145. In Years 3 to 6, all pupils continue to make good progress in the development of their singing skills. Excellent standards in choral singing are reached by the end of Year 6. Pupils have considerable experience singing for an audience, both within school and in the community, and this is apparent in their performance. All pupils have very positive attitudes and behave very well. They sing with great confidence and joy. They articulate words clearly, without forcing and with appropriate expression. They respond to the mood of hymns during acts of collective worship. Listening to their singing during the opening assembly at the start of the inspection week was a special and moving experience. Pupils listen to a variety of music on these occasions and are becoming familiar with the music of some well-known composers. However, they have very little opportunity to create, develop and process their own musical ideas through to a conclusion in order to produce their own unique compositions. Pupils practise their reading and writing skills when they write their own lyrics

to established songs with enthusiasm.

146. On balance, the quality of teaching and learning is good. One teacher has a great deal of experience in the teaching of choral singing and others play the piano and other musical instruments. This has a positive effect on the quality of singing, but teachers do not allocate sufficient time for pupils to compose their own music or for them to evaluate their work.

147. Extra-curricular activities provide an important enrichment of the curriculum for music. A percussion group runs for pupils after school, and a small group of pupils has lessons from one teacher on the guitar. A small number of pupils has been offered the opportunity to join the choir in the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, and one pupil now sings in this choir. Pupils regularly sing in the community, and recently sang at the Lord Mayor's Open Day at the Town Hall. Future venues include singing with the Irish Guards at the Annual Service of Remembrance in the centre of Liverpool. All pupils have an opportunity to take part on these special occasions.

148. The coordinator provides satisfactory leadership, in which the major strength is the very good input which results in such good standards in singing. However, the subject leadership has not ensured that the curriculum offered to pupils is sufficiently broad, and there has been no monitoring of teaching and learning throughout the school. The coordinator has recently implemented a new scheme of work, but this has not yet had time to have any effect on the broadening of pupils' musical experience.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

149. The picture in physical education is very similar to that reported at the time of the last inspection. Pupils of all abilities make satisfactory progress and attain standards which are appropriate for their age by the end of Years 2 and 6. During the inspection, it was possible to observe only a small number of physical education lessons and, because of the time of the year, nearly all of these were games lessons. It was not possible, therefore, to evaluate pupils' attainment and progress in dance and gymnastic activities.

150. Throughout the school, the pupils participate in physical activities with enthusiasm and a good sense of discipline. They follow instructions carefully and, when shown how, try hard to improve their performance. There are no noticeable differences in the performance or progress of pupils with special educational needs or of other groups of pupils. All pupils participate well in warm-up activities and, from Year 2 onwards, understand what happens to the body when they exercise. The staff have a good awareness of health and safety issues, and pupils respond to safety issues appropriately. By the end of Year 2, most pupils have a good awareness of others, finding their own space to work in and avoiding other people when moving during their warm-up sessions or when practising with a ball. They show appropriate skills in controlling a ball, and most pupils can pass a ball accurately to a partner using different types of throw. By the end of Year 4, throwing and catching skills have improved and pupils are developing the ability to strike a ball using different bats and rackets. In one of the lessons observed, pupils were keen to beat the record for the number of times they could bounce a ball consecutively on a bat. Boys and girls participate with equal enthusiasm, although the boys' ability to use a skipping rope is markedly inferior to that of the girls. No games activities were observed in Year 6. The school places great importance on teaching the pupils to swim, and all pupils visit the baths at some stage during the year. Although no swimming lessons were observed, the school's records indicate that pupils achieve good standards in swimming. Nearly all pupils achieve the national expectation for swimming by the end of Year 5. Those pupils who cannot swim by then, generally a small number of pupils who have joined the school at a late stage, have a further opportunity to learn in Year 6.

151. On the basis of the three lessons observed, the quality of teaching and learning in physical education is good. All of the teachers have received training through a national scheme for sport, and this has given them appropriate confidence and expertise to teach the subject well. Their lesson plans reflect the input and structure of the scheme, and provide an appropriate range of activities, with emphasis on developing pupils' skills, whilst at the same time enabling them to derive enjoyment from physical activity. The teachers set the right tone for lessons by changing into appropriate clothing, and they demand high standards of discipline and participation from the pupils. The teachers provide good instruction and help pupils to understand how to improve their performance by getting other pupils to demonstrate good technique. In one of the lessons observed, the teacher had organised too many activities to take place at the same time, which made it difficult to provide appropriate teaching input for all of the activities.

152. The pupils' positive responses, enthusiastic participation and good levels of discipline contribute well to their learning. Time is not wasted on unnecessary matters of discipline, and pupils listen well when the teacher or other pupils are speaking. In some lessons, too much of the evaluation comes from the teacher, and not enough opportunity is given to the pupils to contribute their views or to develop the ability to evaluate their own or others' performances.

153. The coordinator manages the subject well. The school continues to offer its pupils a broad and balanced programme for physical education. The curriculum is enhanced through a wide range of extra-curricular activities, such as a gymnastics club, indoor athletics and dance. On their residential trips, pupils have the opportunity to pursue outdoor and adventurous activities, such as team-building exercises and orienteering. The school enters many local sports competitions and fields teams for rugby, football, netball, cricket, cross-country and swimming. In recent years, the school has been very successful in athletics. All pupils are encouraged to participate, and all who turn up to practices get the opportunity to represent the school. The school's physical amenities for physical education are somewhat limiting, but staff do not let this detract from what they offer the pupils. The school hall is small in size and pupils have to contend with furniture and other obstacles which have to be stored in the hall.