

INSPECTION REPORT

RUSSET HOUSE SCHOOL

Enfield, Middlesex

LEA area: Enfield

Unique reference number: 130958

Headteacher: Julie Foster

Reporting inspector: Mike Kell
13101

Dates of inspection: 7th – 8th May 2003

Inspection number: 254785

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	11 Autumn Close Enfield Middlesex
Postcode:	EN1 4JA
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs. P. Smith
Date of previous inspection:	6 th – 10 th July 1998

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Russet House is a mixed community special school for pupils with autism aged between three and 11 years and the assessment of Nursery and Reception aged children with complex needs. Overall, pupils have below average attainment on entry to the school. There are 70 pupils on roll, which is approximately average for a school of this type, and over 80 per cent of these are boys, which is also typical of schools for pupils with autism. There are 43 pupils of compulsory school age, eleven in the Reception class who are rising five years of age, and 16 part time pupils in the Nursery, aged three and four, with eight attending either morning or afternoon sessions. Pupils are referred to the nursery so that they can undergo statutory assessment in order to determine whether Statements of Special Educational Need are required and which is the most appropriate school placement for them. All pupils in Years 1 to 6 have a Statement of Special Educational Need. There is a wide socio-economic and ethnic mix, in keeping with the school's intake from the whole of the borough. Approximately equal numbers of pupils from white British and black or black British (African) backgrounds constitute half the total number of pupils of compulsory school age. Other ethnic backgrounds represented include white Irish and other white backgrounds, Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi) and black Caribbean. There are 27 pupils with English as an additional language but none of them is at the early stages of acquiring English. A quarter of full time pupils are eligible for free school meals.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Russet House is an effective school. It promotes pupils' personal development and communication skills extremely well. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. The academic achievement by pupils is satisfactory. Leadership and management are good. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Links with parents are excellent. There are exceptionally good mechanisms for supporting parents and involving them in their children's education.
- Provision for pupils' personal development is very good. Pupils behave very well and have very good attitudes to school. They make very good progress towards their personal targets.
- Highly skilled staff in the Nursery and Reception classes are very effective in carrying out detailed assessments of pupils' needs in order to identify the most appropriate provision and to provide information for Statements of Special Educational Needs.
- A variety of therapies, joint working with other agencies such as the health service, constructive relationships with other schools, and links with the community are used very well to enrich and extend pupils' learning.
- A well managed core team of very experienced and knowledgeable teachers and support staff provides a valuable resource for the borough of expertise in working with pupils with autism.

What could be improved

- The arrangements for planning the curriculum at all levels and for evaluating the quality and range of learning opportunities provided for pupils.
- The assessment and recording of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in different subjects of the curriculum and in the corresponding areas of learning for Nursery and Reception pupils.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made satisfactory improvement since it was last inspected in July 1998. Some key issues identified at that time have been addressed very effectively. All statutory requirements are now in place and the provision meets the needs of all pupils as identified in their Statements of Special Educational Need. The quality of individual education plans has improved and there are better procedures for assessing and monitoring pupils' personal development. However, there has not been as much progress in curriculum planning and procedures for assessing pupils' academic progress. High staff turnover, with the recruitment of new teachers with little experience of pupils with special educational needs, has meant that the priority for new teachers was to learn the skills associated with working with pupils with autism and the priority for senior managers has been to provide the direct support, guidance and training required in order to maintain standards.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets.

Progress in:	by Year R	by Year 6	Key	
speaking and listening	B	A	very good	A
Reading	C	B	good	B
writing	C	C	satisfactory	C
mathematics	C	C	unsatisfactory	D
personal, social and health education	A	A	poor	E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	C	B		

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

The school's focus on the communication needs of pupils means that they achieve particularly well in developing communication and social skills through an appropriate variety of methods. All pupils also make very good progress in personal development due to the high emphasis placed on personal, social and health education in many aspects of the school's work. Language / communication and personal, social and health education are the two areas that form the basis of IEP targets. These targets are generally specific, although on occasion ways of assessing whether these have been achieved are not clearly defined and this makes it difficult to evaluate pupils' achievement, although the plans are always carefully monitored and reviewed. Overall, pupils' academic achievement in the Nursery and Reception classes is satisfactory but on occasion it is restricted by a disproportionate amount of time being devoted to free play compared with the amount given to more structured activities. Pupils in the primary department make satisfactory progress in the different subject areas of the curriculum.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils enjoy coming to school and participate enthusiastically in all activities both in and outside the classroom. They interact positively and appropriately with staff and visitors.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils behave very well in formal situations, like lessons, and during less structured times such as breaks, snack times and when moving around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. High quality relationships exist between staff and pupils and there are very good procedures for promoting, monitoring, and assessing all aspects of personal development.
Attendance	Very good. Attendance is well above average for this type of school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 – 6
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

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

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, and some lessons are taught well. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Teachers and experienced nursery nurses and learning support assistants have very good understanding of autism and therefore they are able to support pupils in all aspects of their learning and personal development. Teachers and learning support assistants are particularly skilled at promoting pupils' communication skills through appropriate ways including sign, symbols, and the picture exchange communication system (PECS), and methods such as the Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH). Pupils' behaviour is also well managed. This teamwork and consistency of approach to individual needs is a strong feature of lessons. Consequently, pupils understand what is expected of them and know what they are required to do and support is at hand to encourage and facilitate their learning. As a result, pupils work hard and maintain concentration so that their learning overall is satisfactory. Teachers make good reference to pupils' targets in individual education plans through providing activities that meet their needs and individual behaviour plans are carefully constructed and implemented. However, teachers' short term planning does not always have the same sharpness in showing how pupils are going to acquire new subject-specific skills, knowledge and understanding. Understandably, consideration for pupils' communication and social needs is given a very high priority and underpins all of the school's work, but on occasion this clouds teachers' planning to the detriment of academic achievement. At these times, there is an over emphasis on identifying how particular learning experiences will contribute to promote pupils' personal development and insufficient focus on sharply defined subject-related learning objectives that will support their academic progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a good quality and range of learning opportunities. There is a satisfactory statutory curriculum in place and this is supplemented very well by the input from a range of therapies (art, music, speech and language, occupational), the use the school makes of the local community, and links with other schools that enable groups and individual pupils to integrate with their mainstream peers. However, different levels of planning and subsequent monitoring are at the early stages of development in ensuring curriculum breadth and balance.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Acknowledgement of pupils' individual communication, behavioural and social needs is successfully incorporated into all aspects of the school's work and underpins everything that it does. Adults provide very good role models and consequently the overall provision for pupils' social and moral development is extremely good and pupils achieve very well in these areas. Provision for promoting pupils' spiritual and cultural development is good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. There are good mechanisms in place for child protection and very good systems for ensuring pupils' welfare. The school has very good procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal development. Procedures for assessing and monitoring pupils' academic progress are satisfactory.

Excellent home/school links make a significant contribution to pupils' learning.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher has balanced very well the time spent on inducting, supporting and training new teachers with little previous experience of pupils with special educational needs with developing other areas of the school's work.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Good. A knowledgeable and experienced governing body fulfils its responsibilities well and is involved in the life of the school. Governors have a good understanding of autism and support the school well in fulfilling its aims.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. Some aspects of the school's work are monitored and evaluated very well, such as maintaining the quality of teaching and learning despite staffing difficulties, and pupils' personal development. However, more robust systems are required to evaluate curriculum planning and delivery and the academic gains pupils make.
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory. Short term targets are reflected in an annual development plan, but the school's longer term strategic direction is not yet fully formulated. In part it is restricted by the lack of response by the local education authority to the school's expansion proposals but realistic alternative spending priorities are at an early stage of being articulated

	should permission not be granted.
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The school applies the principle of best value satisfactorily in its spending decisions.

PARENTS’ AND CARERS’ VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about their children’s progress. • The school works closely with them. • They feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions and problems. • The school is well led and managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework pupils are given. • More activities available outside the classroom. • Some parents expressed concern about the lack of appropriate provision in the borough for their children when they leave Russet House.

Parents are overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the school and the inspection team agrees with their positive comments. It also agrees that there are few opportunities for pupils to engage in activities outside lessons, but transport arrangements and relatively short lunch times make this difficult. The team considers that homework is generally appropriate to the needs of pupils but it believes that more opportunities could be provided for older and higher attaining pupils to work at home. The team appreciates the concerns expressed by parents about their children’s transfer to their next school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Links with parents are excellent. There are exceptionally good mechanisms for supporting parents and involving them in their children's education.

1. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and the work that it does with their children. These views are underpinned by the quality of the communication between home and school, which parents describe as exceptional.

2. Very high quality home/school links make a significant contribution to pupils' learning and development. These links provide parents with information about behaviours associated with autism, they support them in dealing with situations that may cause stress or difficulty, and they enable communication and behaviour strategies to be applied consistently in both the home and school environments. Therefore, pupils make very good progress in developing their communication and social interaction skills and their behaviour improves significantly. One parent described the situation accurately and succinctly with the phrase "You don't have to cope on your own".

3. The school begins to forge links with parents very quickly following referral. 'Early Bird' is an early intervention programme through which the school provides vital and valuable support to parents of very young children when a diagnosis of autism is first made. This twelve week scheme requires a weekly commitment from parents and takes the form of a training programme during which they learn about the features associated with autism. In addition, parents are provided with strategies that help them to deal with a variety of everyday situations. During this period video footage may also be taken of their children and this is invaluable in enabling school staff to show parents how their children are reacting in specific situations and how adults respond. This footage also provides an important historical visual record from which parents are able to see how their children have made progress.

4. There is a part-time home/school liaison teacher on the school staff and she is very effective in helping to develop the early links with parents and then sustaining and building upon them. This is a pivotal role as it involves providing a service to both parents and school staff and it is a crucial element in the spectrum of services and support that the school provides for its parents. For example, at one level it means offering practical advice after visiting the home of a nursery aged child who was finding it extremely difficult to separate from his mother when the taxi arrived. At other times it means observing in class a pupil who has been referred to her by the class teacher prior to discussing specific matters of concern with parents. This teacher also provides a contact point and an effective liaison between school staff and other therapists who may be involved with pupils and their parents.

5. The school works equally hard to encourage parents to come into school. A very welcoming and well furnished parents' room contains a wealth of leaflets in a variety of languages that reflect the ethnic mix of the school. There is also a library for parents and a great deal of other informative literature about services such as childcare and parents' centres. The school also provides parents with information through well-attended workshops that it arranges and organises and which cover a variety of relevant topics.

6. Parents feel that they are kept very well informed about what is happening at school through home/school diaries and they are equally enthusiastic about the extent to which they are kept informed about their children's progress. Termly newsletters are sent home informing parents of the topics to be covered in the forthcoming weeks and parents appreciate this information as it gives them an opportunity to share in their child's schooling.

There are open evenings each term when parents can look at their children's work and talk with staff and they value greatly these opportunities to be 'kept in the picture'. Annual Reviews of pupils' Statements of Special Educational Needs are well attended and equally effective in maintaining close liaison with parents. These review meetings are well organised and managed and parents are strongly encouraged to be full participants.

7. The support that the school provides for parents extends outside the normal school year. School staff organise and run a three-week holiday playscheme for pupils and their siblings in conjunction with The Friends of Russet House and this provides both social experiences and extended opportunities for behaviour and communication strategies to be reinforced.

8. A particularly impressive feature of the school's partnership with parents is the way in which it is always trying to improve what is already a very effective relationship. Ideas range from relatively straightforward practical developments, such as finding more efficient and cost effective ways of translating documentation, to more extensive and innovative ideas linked to its outreach function within the wider community. This would involve enabling staff to run regular courses for parents at the point where a diagnosis of autism is first made irrespective of whether their child attends Russet House.

Provision for pupils' personal development is very good. Pupils behave very well and have very good attitudes to school. They make very good progress towards their personal targets.

9. Pupils' personal development, particularly promotion of their social and communication skills and the development of confidence and self-esteem, is central to the school's work. It is very successful in achieving these aims because by the time pupils leave the school they communicate effectively using words, signs or symbols and have independent self-help skills. The school is also very effective in helping pupils to manage their own behaviour and some pupils make excellent progress in this area as they learn to take responsibility for their own actions and understand the consequences of what they do.

10. The school's underlying culture and ethos of developing mutual respect and meeting individual needs underpins the very good progress that pupils make in these areas of personal development. Much of the school's success is founded on the very high quality relationships that exist between staff and pupils and therefore staff feel secure about having high expectations of pupils. The quality of these relationships also means that pupils develop understanding of what is expected of them and have the confidence to attempt things as they know that support and guidance is always at hand. Consequently, pupils enjoy going to school and they participate enthusiastically in all the activities the school has to offer. Therefore, for example, during registration periods teachers expect pupils to react to their name and to participate in greetings songs and as this procedure is followed consistently throughout the school pupils learn the routine and respond accordingly. Staff have similarly high expectations in more practical areas, such as developing independence in Nursery pupils as they change for physical education lessons and expecting them to remove their photograph and name from the board and put them away at the end of the school day.

11. The consistently high expectations that are evident throughout the school and the very good role models that staff provide mean that pupils make very good progress in the areas of social and moral development. They develop understanding of the potential impact of their actions on other people and therefore they consider the needs of others, such as riding bicycles safely on the playground during break time and reminding each other to 'be careful'. They queue to use outdoor apparatus and wait patiently for their turn to use bicycles and participate in ball games. Pupils are encouraged to respect other people from the time they

enter the school. This includes listening to others and taking note of how others respond in situations so that one Reception class pupil told the rest of the class and the teacher to “give him more time” when a classmate struggled to respond quickly in a greetings session. Similar courtesies are evident during snack times because pupils are accustomed to the routine and expectations and staff reinforce appropriate behaviour through their interactions with the pupils and with each other. Consequently, pupils are extremely well behaved and polite. These sessions are very pleasant social occasions, such as the class of seven year olds who maintained conversation throughout as they ate their waffles using toppings they had made themselves with one exclaiming quite spontaneously “This is delicious!”.

12. Very skilled teachers, nursery nurses and learning support assistants promote pupils’ personal development particularly well because of their detailed knowledge about autism and its impact on all aspects of pupils’ social development. Therefore they are able to implement carefully constructed and managed programmes that meet individual pupils’ needs. These programmes include the use of specific teaching methods such as TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children) and the application of clear behaviour management plans. A variety of communication approaches are also employed such as gesture, signing and PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System). Staff are particularly adept at implementing these different specific approaches in addition to constantly supporting language development through modelling appropriate comments and responses. All of these techniques are very effective in promoting pupils’ communication skills, acceptable behaviour, and appropriate relationships.

13. Staff monitor and support pupils’ personal development very well through observation, individual education plans (IEPs), day-to-day notes and weekly records. Effective assessment records show that by the time pupils leave the Reception class they have made good progress in speaking and listening and very good progress by the end of Year 6. Teachers generally set detailed communication and personal and social targets in IEPs and pupils make very good progress towards achieving these personal targets by the time they leave the Reception class and by the end of Year 6.

Highly skilled staff in the Nursery and Reception classes are very effective in carrying out detailed assessments of pupils’ needs in order to identify the most appropriate provision and to provide information for Statements of Special Educational Needs.

14. Staff in the nursery maintain communication very well with fellow professionals prior to children entering the nursery following their third birthday. The local authority’s pre-school team is based in the school and this aids close liaison so that joint home visits are planned and the family is invited into the nursery before the child begins. Events such as this enable decisions to be made with respect to issues such as whether the child will attend for the longer morning, or shorter afternoon, session depending upon the child’s likely response. The very close links that department staff make with parents at this very early stage are crucial in establishing an effective support framework that continues throughout the child’s time in the school.

15. The school has very well-established and systematic procedures for assessing and recording pupils’ development and for reviewing and responding to the range of evidence that has been gathered. Staff are very skilled, experienced and perceptive in carrying out careful observations of children in both informal and more structured situations and these records form the basis of much of this evidence. Details from the close monitoring of how pupils communicate and how they react in different social situations are meticulously recorded. These observations also focus on how different children learn and details of these individual learning styles are also recorded. When children enter the nursery with a diagnosis of

autism, or if it is strongly suspected, department staff carry out autistic-specific assessments. Assessment tools such as the Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS) provide staff with an indication of children's location on the autistic spectrum. Consequently, staff accumulate a very detailed portfolio of evidence of what these young children are able to do, how they react and communicate in social situations, and features of their behaviour. Staff measure and record these baseline assessments extremely well.

16. Staff are equally very good in using the results obtained from assessment procedures. They utilise the information to build on the relationships with parents that are created when children first enter the nursery. As staff give parents increasing amounts of information they also provide a support mechanism to help them understand and manage their children. This support system includes explanation of the strategies that are considered the most appropriate for meeting children's needs following assessment, such as the use of TEACCH and PECS. School staff are also very adept at using assessment information as the basis for initial target setting and implementing the strategies that have been identified as being the most appropriate.

17. Preliminary findings are presented to parents and other professionals at an initial review meeting that school staff arrange six weeks after the placement begins. Proposed targets and the strategies designed to help children achieve them are presented in the form of a draft IEP and the idea of Statements of Special Educational Needs and the processes involved in producing them are also discussed. However, staff are sensitive to parents' feelings and needs at this time and therefore the review meeting is frequently backed up by a home visit in order to clarify further what was discussed. The school maintains close links with the local education authority (LEA) throughout this process so that staff fulfil a very important role in bridging the gap between parents who are feeling anxious and LEA officers who are managing the formal and extended process of producing a statement of special educational need.

18. Following the first review meeting staff are very vigilant in terms of maintaining ongoing assessment of pupils. In particular they monitor IEP targets, which focus solely on communication/language and personal and social aspects, although children's achievements in the different areas of learning of the early years curriculum are also monitored. Assessment of children may also extend into observing how they respond in a mainstream nursery if it is felt that this may be the most appropriate longer term provision. School staff support children during these visits and the aim is for them to integrate for one session a week over a period of approximately six weeks. Staff maintain ongoing support and guidance for parents throughout by working with them to implement strategies at home and by directing them to other agencies and organisations that may offer assistance, such as parents' centres.

19. School staff co-ordinate a second review meeting that is held early in the summer term at which reports proposing the best long term placement are discussed. Once again, the detailed information on children's developing achievements and progress provided by school staff is the cornerstone upon which a statement of special educational need is produced and the most appropriate provision for the child is determined.

A variety of therapies, joint working with other agencies such as the health service, constructive relationships with other schools, and links with the community are used very well to enrich and extend pupils' learning.

20. The school provides a satisfactory curriculum based on the areas of learning of the Foundation Curriculum for its pupils in the Nursery and Reception classes. Pupils in the primary department receive a satisfactory curriculum that fulfils the requirements of the National Curriculum. However, the overall range and quality of learning experiences are good because learning opportunities are supplemented extremely well by the input of a range of different therapists, the school's links with other educational establishments and agencies, and its use of the local community and resources. These factors contribute significantly to giving pupils a variety of rich and rewarding experiences. There has been an increase since the previous inspection in the range and quantity of therapeutic support provided for pupils. Speech and language, art, and music therapists all make significant contributions to pupils' personal and academic development.

21. The school recognises the value of the input from speech and language therapists by purchasing additional time. The great strength of the provision is the way in which therapists work collaboratively with school staff and other therapists. Although sessions are generally one to one or working with pupils in pairs on a withdrawal basis, therapists maintain links with what pupils are doing in the classroom. They do this through procedures such as acknowledging pupils' IEP targets in their work and replicating strategies used by class teachers. In addition, there are short weekly informal training workshops run by the therapists focusing on issues that are identified by teachers. Speech and language therapists also support and liaise closely with parents. They are involved in the initial assessments of pupils in the early years department, they attend the termly parents' meetings and participate in the annual reviews of pupils' statements of special educational need.

22. Links with representatives from other agencies are also initiated very well in order to support pupils' development, and the value the school places on their input is reflected in the fact that these services are bought in either wholly or partially. Health services such as occupational therapy and psychotherapy, and other colleagues like a dietician and educational welfare officer, all make significant contributions to the overall management of pupils' many and diverse needs. The most impressive feature of these links is the way in which the school co-ordinates them through effective channels of communication so that information is shared between agencies and with parents so that consistency is maintained.

23. Music and art therapies are also valued highly by the school and, once again, the school buys in both services. The therapists tend to work with individual and small groups of pupils with the most severe language and communication difficulties, such as very limited eye contact, and they focus on developing pupils' awareness of their surroundings and their skills of social interaction. The great value of these additional therapies lies in the contribution they make to promoting these aspects of pupils' personal development and their effectiveness is enhanced by the close liaison that is maintained between the therapists and classroom staff. This is possible because on occasion class-based staff accompany groups of pupils and, overall, there are efficient mechanisms for feeding back information to class teachers.

24. The school is very committed to equality of opportunity and the concept of providing pupils with opportunities to integrate with their mainstream peers. It is able to implement this commitment in practice because the school has very strong links with other educational establishments. These relationships enable the school to provide its pupils with many opportunities through both formal and informal links. The informal links with local nursery and primary schools give groups of pupils many invaluable social experiences and provide increasing opportunities for them to use their developing communication and social skills. These are two-way links with the neighbouring infant and junior schools so that pupils visit another school and play host when pupils visit them. On a more formal basis, structured

programmes are planned for individual pupils that give them opportunities to integrate into a mainstream school that is either local to their home or adjacent to Russet House. Experiences such as this, that are planned by the school, indicate not only the effectiveness of its links but also its knowledge of the status of individual pupils' personal development based on very detailed internal assessment and monitoring procedures.

25. Carefully planned visits to places in the immediate and wider community and visitors into school all contribute to both dimensions of pupils' development, personal and academic. Learning opportunities outside school have included visits to places such as galleries and museums and different places of worship, as well as the more informal use of the immediate vicinity for activities like observational art lessons. Visitors into school have included musicians, actors, artists and people from the local community and these are representative of different ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the school's ethnic composition. All such events promote pupils' social and personal development and communication skills, and a number of them make a strong contribution to their cultural and multi-cultural development. In addition, there are also strong curriculum links that help to develop pupils' subject knowledge.

A well managed core team of very experienced and knowledgeable teachers and support staff provides a valuable resource for the borough of expertise in working with pupils with autism.

26. Russet House school is the base for all provision in the local education authority for pupils with autism. This provision comprises the pre-school support team that is based at the school and managed by the headteacher, the early years and primary departments housed in the school, and outreach support for teachers working with pupils with autism in mainstream schools. As the only dedicated provision within the local education authority is in the nursery and primary phases within Russet House, the role of school staff in supporting colleagues working with pre-school children in the home and teachers in mainstream primary schools is particularly important.

27. Staff within the school constitute a rich pool of expertise. Some teachers have great experience of working with pupils with autism and understand their needs extremely well. Recent recruitment difficulties have presented obstacles to maintaining this level of skill but the very comprehensive and high quality induction, support and training package produced by the school has eased this problem. Skilled and experienced nursery nurses and learning support assistants are equally perceptive in recognising pupils' needs and providing high levels of support.

28. The local education authority recognises the school's strength in providing training, support, and advice for mainstream schools as this area of the school's work is included on its database of effective practice. School staff offer group training courses for headteachers and special educational needs co-ordinators from mainstream schools and in-house training to individual schools. Post-course evaluations confirm the value of this training in terms of introducing the features of autistic behaviour, strategies for managing pupils with autism, and disseminating good practice. The value of ongoing support provided to schools for successfully integrating pupils with autism is also evaluated, on annual basis. Once again, the depth of knowledge of the staff providing that support is recognised and appreciated as it improves teachers' understanding significantly.

29. The transfer from primary to secondary school is a time when both pupils and their parents can become extremely anxious. The school is very good at smoothing this transition but its overall effectiveness in this respect is greatly reduced by the current provision for secondary education within the borough where there is no discrete provision for pupils with autism. Those who require such specialist placements have to travel out of the borough and that frequently entails long distances. Consequently, as the final decisions regarding

secondary placement are taken relatively late and the discrete provision is some distance away, the chances of early and effective liaison between Russet House and the receiving school are limited.

30. The school's impact in improving understanding of autism amongst professional colleagues is not restricted to schools. Staff also work with representatives from the health service, such as dentists and dental nurses, to introduce them to the features of autistic spectrum disorders and to provide them with simple strategies to reduce the potential of difficult situations arising.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The arrangements for planning the curriculum at all levels and for evaluating the quality and range of learning opportunities provided for pupils.

31. In its school development plan 2002-03 the school identifies the review of curriculum policies across the school and consideration of medium term planning in the primary department as two of its priority areas. However, neither of the targets identified address the fundamental principles of curriculum planning that are required to ensure that pupils in the primary department receive a curriculum that progressively develops their acquisition of subject skills, knowledge and understanding.

32. Current planning across the school does not pay sufficient detail to precisely what teachers want individual pupils to learn in areas other than the personal development and communication targets shown in IEPs. Understandably, consideration for pupils' communication and social needs is given a very high priority and underpins all of the school's work, but on occasion this clouds teachers' planning to the detriment of academic achievement.

33. Staff in the Nursery and Reception classes have in place effective long term plans that identify the overall learning goals for each of the six areas of learning of the Foundation Stage curriculum. This level of planning acknowledges that pupils may be in the nursery and reception classes for more than one year as a rolling programme of six weekly topics ensures a changing curriculum from year to year. These topics link in well with each of the six areas of learning. Consequently, effective long and medium term plans ensure curriculum breadth and balance and identify the range and variety of activities and experiences that will be presented to whole groups of pupils. This provides a sound basis for more detailed short term planning that focuses much more sharply on individual pupils and their learning needs. However, these weekly and daily plans fall short in this respect because they focus on the areas of learning to be covered, with broad goals such as 'early number operations' and 'to extend vocabulary', rather than specific individual anticipated learning outcomes. The lack of precision in stating clear learning intentions means that pupils' small gains in knowledge and understanding sometimes cannot be evaluated against specific criteria.

34. The school has devised a curriculum model for the primary department that has at its heart the development of language, communication, and relationships. The model then identifies the key components of the curriculum that will encourage and contribute to the development of these skills. The different subjects of the National Curriculum are clearly identified within this framework so that pupils receive a relevant overall curriculum that is satisfactorily broad and balanced in terms of the different subjects taught. However, some long term schemes of work are underdeveloped so that there is no coherent overview of how and when the components of different attainment targets of each subject of the National Curriculum will be taught from Years 1 to 6. Consequently, this limited long term planning

means that there are no guidelines for teachers' medium term planning that enables them to ensure that subject-specific skills and knowledge are taught and reinforced progressively as pupils move through the school.

35. Current curriculum planning focuses on the medium term as teachers plan blocks of work for each subject area but as long term planning is limited it is not clear how these blocks link together over time to produce effective programmes of study. These six week blocks of planning also indicate that while curriculum planning is monitored across the school its quality and purpose are not evaluated effectively. For example, there are inconsistencies in the terminology used, with main learning objectives being referred to as 'overall aims', 'focus', or 'unit expectations'. In addition, some staff demonstrate uncertainty about the purpose of such planning. In some cases there are clear links to the subject, such as mathematics planning that had the aims of "developing understanding of the concept of big and small with pupils being able to put sets of objects in order of size". However, on other occasions subject skills and knowledge are ignored completely, such as design and technology planning which aimed "to develop co-operative play".

36. Short term planning in the primary department suffers from the same shortcoming as that in the Nursery and Reception years. Weekly and daily plans show an over emphasis on identifying how particular learning experiences will contribute to promote pupils' personal development and insufficient focus on sharply defined subject-related learning objectives that will support their academic progress. The lack of explicit references to subject skills and knowledge means that it is difficult to evaluate pupil progress.

The assessment and recording of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in different subjects of the curriculum and in the corresponding areas of learning for Nursery and Reception pupils.

37. Pupils' personal development is very well monitored and supported through observational records, IEPs, day-to-day notes and weekly records. The assessment and recording of academic progress is much less robust, reflected in inconsistent practice and lack of clarity about exactly what it is that is to be assessed at the end of each lesson and block of work. These shortcomings in the school's assessment and recording procedures are linked very closely to the areas for development in curriculum planning and its evaluation.

38. Staff in the early years department have a simple but effective way of maintaining ongoing assessment and recording of pupils' achievements during lesson time. These brief notes are then entered in pupil files under the appropriate sections and summarised on work record sheets. However, although there is some information about pupils' acquisition of new skills most of these comments relate to behaviour, social skills and the quality of pupils' responses. In addition, lesson evaluations provide no better than satisfactory information about pupils' achievements because plans do not specify sufficiently precisely the learning objectives of the lesson. Therefore, even though staff do record details of pupils' progress their achievements in each lesson cannot be assessed against sharp learning objectives. Consequently, although teachers know their pupils extremely well and therefore plan future work to meet individual learning needs they have limited recorded assessment information to inform this planning. All pupils have Records of Achievement containing photographs of their participation in activities and samples of their work, such as painting and pre-writing, but there is inconsistency in the quality and degree of annotation. As a consequence, when teachers assess pupils in terms of P levels* towards the end of the school year they do not always have sufficiently detailed assessment information that can inform this levelling process or substantiate the levels if they are moderated across different classes.

39. Records of pupils' achievements in the primary department also suffer from inconsistent practice and lack of annotated evidence and examples of moderation. In addition, subject-specific achievements cannot be assessed accurately against what teachers want pupils to learn because these objectives are absent from short term planning. Therefore the weekly record sheets tend to focus on behavioural and personal development issues rather than academic progress. This inconsistent practice and inappropriate focus is exemplified in a science assessment that simply recorded that the pupil "got frustrated and angry but told an adult and was praised" whereas in another class a teacher assessed and recorded accurately how a pupil recalled aspects of number work in a mathematics lesson.

40. The school's procedures for monitoring assessment information and the way P levels are determined, and the way in which it responds to the results of these analyses, are at an early stage. Therefore, at the most simple level there is no evidence that class weekly record sheets are scrutinised sufficiently closely to the extent that teachers are being advised that statements made are not specific or detailed enough. There are also some deficiencies at a whole school level, with examples of how the school has analysed information to which it has had access but without the subsequent courses of action that demonstrate how it has responded to these analyses. For example, the school rightly reports that pupils "score less well (generally) in English than mathematics and science" and that "standards of working may vary from teacher to teacher" but there are no hypotheses as to the underlying reasons for these outcomes or how the school intends to address them.

**P levels give performance indicators for pupils with special educational needs. There are eight levels leading into the Level 1 descriptors of National Curriculum subjects.*

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

41. In order to build on the strengths of the school the headteacher, staff and governors need to:

1. Improve the quality of the curriculum and its monitoring by:
 - Producing long term plans for all subjects in the primary department that provide a coherent overview of how and when the components of different attainment targets of each subject of the national curriculum will be taught from years 1 to 6.
 - Developing medium term planning in the primary department that expands on the detail of long term plans. Blocks of work for each subject area should identify the key knowledge, understanding and skills that teaching aims to develop.
 - Refining short term planning for each lesson by identifying clearly the stepping stones for learning in the early years department and subject-specific learning intentions in the primary department.
 - Ensuring that all teachers use common terminology in their planning.
 - Introducing a robust system for evaluating planning and monitoring class timetables to ensure pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum.

2. Develop more effective procedures for assessing pupils' academic achievements and progress by:
 - Ensuring that pupils' work is annotated so that records of work can be evaluated by reference to the context in which the work was produced.
 - Assessing pupil achievements against the subject-specific learning intentions identified in short term plans in order to inform future planning.
 - Developing systems for recording pupil achievement against 'p' and national curriculum levels.
 - Regularly and rigorously monitoring and evaluating class assessment records and developing clear procedures that identify how the outcomes of the analyses of data are to be followed up.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	17
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	16

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	0	7	10	0	0	0
Percentage	0	0	41	59	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 five percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	70
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	13

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	27

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	5
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	11

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3

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)

TEACHER ASSESSMENT								
	Number at each level							
	W	1	2	3	4+	Disapplied	Absent	U
English	5	3	1	0	0			0
Speaking / listening	4	4	1	0	0	0	0	
Reading	5	3	0	1	0	0	0	
Writing	5	4	0	0	0	0	0	
Mathematics	3	6	0	0	0			0
Science	4	5	0	0	0			0

TEST AND TASK RESULTS									
	Number at each level								
	W	1	2C	2B	2A	3	4+	Disapplied	Absent
Reading task	6	2	0	1	0			0	0
Reading Comprehension tests			1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Writing	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spelling			0			0		0	0
Mathematics	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group

No of pupils on roll
14
1
3
0
0
0
0
0
3
2
1
1
3
13
1
0
1

Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0

No ethnic group recorded

0

0

0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YN– Y2

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	12.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	5.0
Average class size	6.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: YN – Y6

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	585

Financial information

Financial year	2001/02
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	£
Total income	1051597
Total expenditure	1057271
Expenditure per pupil	17052
Balance brought forward from previous year	118691
Balance carried forward to next year	113016

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	4
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	4

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1.5
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	70
Number of questionnaires returned	35

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	74	17	9	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	65	26	3	0	6
Behaviour in the school is good.	61	36	3	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	19	48	23	3	6
The teaching is good.	77	20	3	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	77	23	0	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	80	20	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	30	3	3	3
The school works closely with parents.	80	20	0	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	89	11	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	68	26	0	0	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	58	24	6	0	12

Other issues raised by parents

Some parents expressed concern about the lack of appropriate provision in the borough for their children when they leave Russet House.