

INSPECTION REPORT

ASHDON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Saffron Walden, Essex

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 114964

Headteacher: Ms Cara Caldock

Lead inspector: Cherry R Jackson

Dates of inspection: 8th – 10th December 2003

Inspection number: 255371

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Primary
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 – 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	101
School address:	Ashdon Saffron Walden Essex
Postcode:	CB10 2HB
Telephone number:	01799 584 219
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Penny Speller
Date of previous inspection:	6 th July 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Ashdon is a small village school close to Saffron Walden in Essex. The roll has been rising since its last inspection in 1998 but is still small at 101 pupils. Numbers of boys and girls are reasonably well balanced except in Year 1, which has more girls. Year groups are small so, apart from the reception class, the pupils are taught in classes which contain two year groups each. The Ashdon pupils are predominantly of white British background with one or two white pupils from other countries. Very few children learn English as another language and there are currently none. This year the number of pupils with special educational needs is well below average, although in the previous two years it was two or three times higher than it is now. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is also well below average. The pupils' socio-economic circumstances are varied but predominantly above average. Their attainment on entry to the school is also above average. This is a change from the time of the previous inspection in 1998 when it was average. The school gained a Healthy Schools award in 2003.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
5358	Cherry Jackson	Lead inspector	Science, art and design, design and technology, Foundation Stage
9569	Jan Leaning	Lay inspector	
11982	Ray Morris	Team inspector	Mathematics, information and communication technology, music, physical education.
16492	Robert Lever	Team inspector	English, geography, history, religious education, special educational needs

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a sound and improving school, providing satisfactory value for money. Some notable strengths outweigh past weaknesses. The school is now offering a satisfactory education throughout. The pupils' achievement is satisfactory for their capabilities; their attitudes, values and personal qualities are very good. They learn diligently through teaching which is always at least satisfactory and is improving. The governors and relatively new headteacher are leading the school well towards improvement. The headteacher's aspiration and purposeful initiation of change are excellent. Management is sound. Pupils and their parents are very positive about school. The ethos is very good; the quality of the education is sound with many strengths.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are

- The pupils' achievement is good in music with standards that are well above average.
- In art and design, the pupils' achievement and standards are unsatisfactory.
- The reception class children are achieving satisfactorily, but they do not have enough independence and the class is very expensive.
- The pupils' personal development is very good and their relationships, responsibility and sense of self worth are excellent.
- There are some inconsistencies in the quality of the teaching and learning.
- Good leadership is ensuring that the school improves.
- The pupils have a good curriculum with a very good range of activities to enrich it.
- The school provides good care and fosters excellent relations with the parents.

The school has made a satisfactory improvement since the last inspection in 1998. Since then, and before the arrival of the present headteacher, the test results fell. Through re-organised teaching arrangements and careful self-evaluation, results are improving. Now, previously weak achievement in Year 2 mathematics and English, and Year 6 mathematics, are already better in lessons this year than for last year's classes.

The need to implement the Essex Agreed Syllabus for religious education has been satisfactorily addressed. The school's previous strengths in personal development for pupils, care and relationships have been maintained and improved.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
English	C	C	A	A*
Mathematics	A	D	E	D
Science	B	D	C	B

*Key: A - well-above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 2.*

The pupils' achievement overall is sound. In the above table, Ashdon's Year 6 results are compared with those of other schools which started with similar Year 2 scores. English is a strength. A* indicates results within the top five percent of similar schools. A weakness in mathematics is evident.

The children start school with above-average standards and they are reaching above-average standards. Achievement across the school is sound. Most reception children are likely to exceed the standards expected for their age by the end of the year. Years 1 and 2 are better at English and mathematics than other Ashdon classes of their age in the recent past. In Years 5 and 6, achievement is improving. It was good in about a third of the lessons, where the teacher facilitated independent working for the pupils; they concentrated well and learned swiftly then. Their standards in mathematics are improved this year. Both boys and girls achieve satisfactorily.

The pupils' personal qualities and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very good. Their behaviour is very good, their attitudes are very positive and their commitment to learning is excellent. Their very good punctuality and attendance support their progress well.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good in many aspects. It is sound overall and improving. The teaching is satisfactory and improving. It is good in the Years 5 and 6 class and in English and mathematical investigations throughout the other classes too. All the teachers focus their pupils well on lessons but the quality of the lesson planning is inconsistent.

The curriculum is good with many enriching opportunities, like instrumental music and French. The new laptop suite is a good tool for learning and independence. The pupils have very good support, care and guidance. Effective target setting in writing helps them know clearly where they are aiming. The excellent partnership with parents helps the pupils to feel secure to learn.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership of the governors and headteacher is good. Management is satisfactory. The governing body is very well informed and works well with the headteacher; they are improving the pupils' achievement. The governors ensure that statutory requirements are met. A large budget surplus from the past is helpfully being spent for improvement.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The parents are very positive about the school. The parents feel that the headteacher and teachers know their children well. The parents appreciate the way in which any concern is resolved swiftly. The pupils like their school, especially meeting friends and learning new things.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are

- Improve the provision and leadership in art and design so that the pupils fulfil their potential.
- Continue to improve the quality and consistency of the teaching across the school to raise pupils' achievement further.
- Increase the reception pupils' independence so that achievement is better than satisfactory, and commensurate with the cost of the class.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects

The pupils in the reception class to Year 6 achieve **satisfactorily** and reach above-average standards. In Years 3 to 6, there is some good achievement.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement for the reception children is sound, but the pupils are not independent enough.
- The school's actions to improve standards for Years 1 to 6 in mathematics and English are showing a good effect, with some good achievement in Years 3 to 6.
- The pupils' achievement is good in music.
- Achievement in art and design is unsatisfactory for the pupils in Years 1 to 6.

Commentary

Trends over time and 2003 results

1. Test results for Year 2 suggest that standards were below average in English and mathematics three years ago but have now improved to average.
2. Average results are not good enough for Ashdon pupils, who start school with above-average standards. Comparison with schools with similar proportions of free school meals suggests underachievement for Year 2 at Ashdon, for the last four years. In 2003 mathematics achievement looked sound but in English achievement was still unsatisfactory. In science the 2003 data indicates good standards and sound achievement.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 2 - average points scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
Reading	15.8 (15.9)	15.7 (15.8)
Writing	14.3 (14.1)	14.6 (14.4)
Mathematics	17.1 (15.3)	16.3 (16.5)

There were 15 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. Year 6 results show that over Years 3 to 6 the pupils have made better progress since the end of Year 2, when their test scores were low. English results have been improving well since the last inspection, showing very good standards and good achievement for the last two years. Mathematics standards have been average for the last four years, although that is unsatisfactory achievement for Ashdon pupils. Science results for Year 6 for the last three years show that standards are above average, with satisfactory achievement and a slight year-on-year improvement.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 6 - average points scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	29.5 (28.5)	26.8 (27.0)
Mathematics	26.5 (27.5)	26.8 (26.7)
Science	29.5 (28.6)	28.6 (28.3)

There were 12 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. In the reception class the children are on target to exceed the goals expected for them in all six areas of their Foundation Stage curriculum. Their achievement is sound and good in one area, knowledge and understanding of the world, and in reading and dance. This is due to demanding teaching and lessons with a dance specialist. The children are not independent enough in their small class, where staffing levels are high and costly and the adults do too much for children.
5. The pupils in Years 1 to 6 are achieving satisfactorily and reach good standards. Achievement is sound for religious education which was unsatisfactory at the last inspection. Music is a strength in the school; the pupils' achievement is good, with standards that are consistently above average. This is due to rich music provision and skilled specialist teaching to support the class teachers. In art and design the pupils do insufficient drawing and achievement is unsatisfactory.
6. The pupils with special educational needs make sound progress towards their specific targets. Gifted and talented pupils, similarly, make sound progress.
7. For Years 1 and 2, achievement is satisfactory this term. For example, their books show continuous improvement in writing, due to appropriate challenge.
8. For Years 3 to 6, in English the pupils are making good progress to catch up after low test results in Year 2. Mathematics achievement has been a concern in the past, but is sound with Years 5 and 6 progressing well this year. The more able are already at Level 5 in number, which would usually be expected at the end of the year. In science, the good teaching for this class is supporting very good achievement. The pupils' strengths derive from well planned lessons where they are can think and operate for themselves at a level appropriate for their abilities.
9. The school is setting appropriate targets for Year 6, carefully building in a level of challenge. They have met them recently except for mathematics in 2003.
10. Over the last few years boys in Year 2 did not achieve as well as girls. There was no evidence of that during the inspection so that recent improvement has dealt with the problem. In Year 6, compared with boys and girls nationally, Ashdon boys have done very well over recent years and the girls, well, but not quite as well as the boys. The school has been providing focussed small-group work in mathematics to support girls, which is successful.
11. During the last two years standards and achievement have improved due to the headteacher's rigorous leadership; she has initiated changes in class organisation, staff development and monitoring of standards and quality; all have made a good contribution.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

12. Pupils' attitudes, values, behaviour and other personal qualities are **very good**. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very good. The pupils' attendance is very good, well above the national average.

Main strengths

- In discussion, pupils are confident, interested and friendly; their responsibility, commitment to school and sense of self worth are all very high.
- Pupil behaviour is very good in lessons and around the school.
- The good assemblies are thoughtful, with a strong spiritual and moral element.

Commentary

13. The pupils are polite, kind and considerate and are very keen to come to school. From their entry into the reception class, they settle quickly to work, are enthusiastic learners and enjoy challenging tasks. The reception children are likely to meet or exceed their early learning goals in personal development by the end of the year.

14. Behaviour in the school is very good; relationships are excellent, a strength of the school. The adults who work in school are very skilful at developing pupils' confidence and self-esteem, which helps to promote their spiritual development. Rewards and sanctions are fairly and consistently applied and good behaviour is recognised, praised and valued. The weekly 'sharing' assembly celebrates success both in and out of school and parents are invited to attend. Many do. No bullying was seen during the inspection and pupils know that it is unacceptable, what to do if it occurs and they do not think that it is a problem. Pupils take seriously their responsibilities around the school such as taking registers and older pupils caring for the younger ones at playtimes. They are unfailingly responsible in their self-management.

15. Pupils' commitment to learning and to their school community, are excellent, including for those with special educational needs. On questionnaires the pupils showed that they like school, and find out new things in lessons; they like making friends at school and think the other children are friendly.

16. The pupils' social and moral development are enhanced by the broad range of extra curricular activities. These create a strong sense of identity in a caring community and a real understanding of right and wrong. Pupils support various charities such as the Air Ambulance, Food Aid and Red Nose Day. Spiritual development was fostered well during the inspection by a lesson on circus skills which gave the pupils a really good experience and a real sense of awe and wonder when the leader showed them how to spin plates. Assemblies are of very high quality with very good spiritual elements. Opportunities for reflection are planned very well; for example in a Year 6 lesson on learning skills, pupils were running a 'movie' in their head and then using their imagination to complete the story. Good provision for cultural development, including understanding of other cultures, supports the school's ethos very well. By the time they leave the school most have a good understanding of the cultures and beliefs of others, in spite of the difficulty of visiting many other faith communities. The school's ethos is also enhanced by the respect with which pupils treat each other at work and play. The pupils handle resources with care and respect the school premises. In the playground pupils play sensibly and happily with each other; there is good supervision and no one is left out.

17. The very good standards of the previous inspection have been maintained and improved to ensure positive opportunities for pupils to achieve their best.

Attendance in the last complete reporting year (%) 2002/2003

School data:	95.6	School data:	0.0
National data:	94.2	National data:	0.4

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

18. Attendance is **very good** and well above the national average. The pupils enjoy school, attend regularly and are very punctual to school and to lessons; the very occasional problems are appropriately referred to the education welfare officer. The procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are very good and are helpfully shared with parents. The school is not complacent and has set a target for further improvement. There have been no exclusions in the last three years.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is **sound** overall. Whilst the teaching is satisfactory, other features of the quality of education such as the curriculum, the care of pupils, and the relationships with the parents, range from good to excellent.

Teaching and learning

The teaching and learning and assessment are satisfactory; they are improving currently and already show some good features. There are, however, some inconsistencies in quality.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well organised teachers and caring learning support assistants all help the pupils to stay on task.
- Clear, swift lesson introductions and skilful questioning help pupils to think and respond clearly.
- The use of information and communication technology across the curriculum is increasingly effective.
- The good teaching for Years 5 and 6, in English and mathematical investigations, supports the older pupils' independence well.
- The deployment of the learning support assistants is not efficient enough.
- The quality of the lesson planning is inconsistent, varying between unsatisfactory and very good.
- The lessons do not involve the pupils enough in evaluating their own learning.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in [number] lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	0	12	13	0	0	0

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

19. The quality of the teaching was good at the last inspection but achievement has declined since. The governors, head and senior management team are determined to raise the pupils' achievement by improving the quality of the teaching. Their measures are proving successful.

20. There is a basis of sound teaching and learning evident in all the classes. The teachers know what they have to teach and make good use of the school's schemes of work; they prepare very well for their lessons, have resources to hand and make sure they start promptly so that the pupils waste no time. The teachers take account of the targets set in individual education plans for the pupils who have special educational needs and use appropriate methods for them. The learning support assistants give particular help to these pupils.

21. The teachers introduce lessons clearly and economically, giving helpful demonstrations and reminders so that pupils focus swiftly. The teachers skilfully ask appropriate questions which ensure that the pupils concentrate. In response, the pupils answer clearly and thoughtfully.

22. The teachers use information technology increasingly effectively, to help the pupils add to their knowledge from the Internet or CD ROMs. Their history work showed that older pupils had usefully found out from the Internet about people in the news. In the Year 1 and 2 class, the teacher makes helpful use of the school's Smartboard, (a large whiteboard on which a computer screen can be seen and controlled by touching the board itself) for demonstrations or explanations to be seen by the whole class at once.

23. Areas of strength, where the teaching and learning are good, are in English, in mathematical investigations and in the Year 5 and 6 class. The teaching in these areas supports the pupils' independence well. Work at the right level for individuals gives them a challenge. The use of individual targets for writing helps pupils take responsibility because they know where they are and what they have to learn next. The good opportunities for the pupils to discuss their work in pairs and groups, ensures that during the same short period everyone has a chance to contribute and learn. The range of additional support strategies in English for pupils who need re-enforcement in certain areas is well provided. The careful marking validates the pupils' efforts and stimulates further thinking.

24. The school is not making best use of the learning support assistants. During lessons they are often moving around the classroom helping individuals on an ad hoc basis. There is more effective practice in the Extra Literacy Strategy work, when learning support assistants are responsible for a named group of pupils, with a very clear objective and set of activities for them. This enables the assistant to concentrate and manage the pupils' learning. During whole class sessions the assistants' activities are not always well organised. At best they are supporting an individual but they are often simply listening with the pupils. The deployment of the learning support assistants is not specific enough on the lesson plans.

25. The quality of the lesson planning is stronger in English and for Years 1 and 2 and Years 5 and 6; work in these classes is usually different for different abilities. There are, however, lessons through the school where one task is set for all the pupils which is too hard for some to do and too easy for others so that they are not using their capacity for independent work. During the inspection this happened in Years 3 and 4 and in Years 1 and 2. Lessons are sometimes planned with over-long inputs from teachers. Whilst the pupils pay good attention when this happens, it restricts their independence unnecessarily. Some teachers are writing and storing their lesson plans on computer, in order to revise, re-use and share them. This is very helpful for oversight but is not done consistently across the school.

26. The teachers use a suitable range of tests and tasks to assess the progress pupils are making. Evaluative discussion with pupils is not as well provided. At the ends of lessons the teachers usually have a summing-up section. These sessions tend not to be as good as the starts of the lessons. The final sessions are often too short. The pupils do not have enough opportunity for consolidation or evaluation of their own learning. At the ends of lessons the teachers make very brief record of their evaluations; better discussions with the pupils would give them more to say.

The curriculum

The curriculum is **good**. It is broad and balanced and is planned to ensure that pupils learn progressively and without repetition in their mixed-age classes. The school provides very good opportunities for enrichment, including extra curricular clubs and activities. The quality and quantity of accommodation and resources at the school are satisfactory to meet the needs of the curriculum.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils have very good opportunities for an extended curriculum.
- Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is good.
- The school prepares pupils well for secondary school.
- The library accommodation is poor.

Commentary

27. The curriculum is generally well planned to provide good breadth, balance and continuity in learning. A clear plan ensures that pupils do not repeat work in their mixed age classes. The guidance of the National Primary Strategy is well used with a regular literacy hour and numeracy lesson each day. Time is tight to fit everything in and a few parents and pupils would like more physical education, although the school is providing as much as others do. Whilst time allocations for the different subjects are broadly average, one or two practical sessions for art and design or design technology are too short for pupils to finish complex tasks. Religious education now meets the requirements of the Essex Agreed Syllabus. New schemes of work follow national advice, except in art and design where the scheme of work allows a great deal of teacher flexibility and so imposes a heavy responsibility to ensure full coverage of the National Curriculum. Planning for the Foundation Stage curriculum, in the new reception class, is being carefully developed but does not yet relate the needs of the pupils to the topics and areas of learning in their curriculum.

28. The teaching of French and recorder playing to all the pupils ensures equal opportunities within a very rich curriculum. The pupils make visits locally and further afield. They have visited nearby churches, and the school has cordial relations with a local Buddhist community so that Ashdon pupils have local contact with other races and religions. They also receive visits from drama and

music groups. During the inspection a very successful circus workshop enthused pupils as they developed physical skills. The school offers extra music tuition for piano, guitar, woodwind and violin. There are specialist instructors to teach dance and football. The extensive range of inputs from parents and visitors supports and extends the work considerably. A very good range of clubs, extra activities, visits and visitors enhance the curriculum. These include very good sporting opportunities for netball, football and athletics. Other clubs offer very good enrichment for music and dance.

29. The good provision for pupils' personal development leads to pupils' very good attitudes and positive relationships. The school has been granted the Healthy Schools award. Sex education is appropriately taught as part of the personal, social, and health education and science curricula. Issues of puberty are addressed appropriately with older pupils and the subject is handled sensitively. The pupils can learn about their own strengths and weaknesses from regular lessons in thinking skills for Years 3 to 6. Circle times (when a class sit in a circle to discuss events and feelings important to individuals) and assemblies give good opportunities for pupils to explore a range of personal themes. The pupils have good opportunities to take responsibility. They also participate, with good understanding, in community projects and take an active role in raising money for charities throughout the year.

30. The parents report that the attitudes fostered at Ashdon give the pupils a good start in their secondary schools.

31. The school provides appropriately for pupils with special educational needs. Individual education plans have clearer targets than at the previous inspection. Arrangements are sound in ensuring needs are met whilst still ensuring full access to the curriculum and inclusion within the school community.

32. Outdoor facilities are good. There are extensive grounds, which the governors plan to develop further. Inside accommodation is adequate for the number of pupils. The library accommodation is poor and plans are in hand to improve or relocate this. Resources to support the curriculum are generally adequate. The laptop computers are a good provision for information and communication technology and across the curriculum. The school has appropriately identified non-fiction books for younger pupils as an area for improvement.

Care, guidance and support

The school makes **very good** arrangements for the care, welfare and safety of the pupils and this support is at the heart of the school's ethos. The school seeks and values the pupils' views very well. The teachers' monitoring of the pupils' attainment is sound and improving. Very good relationships ensure that pupils know that they will be looked after carefully.

Main strengths

- The rewards system successfully promotes very good behaviour.
- The parents are confident that their children are cared for very well.
- The induction of pupils entering school and those transferring to the secondary schools is managed very well.
- Procedures for child protection, health and safety, attendance and behaviour management, including procedures to prevent bullying, work very successfully.
- The teachers monitor the pupils' attainment in writing and set effective targets for individuals.

Commentary

33. The school provides very good care for its pupils, within a firm, consistent atmosphere where the children feel very happy and secure. The staff know the children and their families, very well, are caring and committed and strive to meet each pupil's individual needs. Pupils receive very good support as a result of the excellent relationships that exist between them and the staff. Very good arrangements ensure health and safety, with all required safety checks, first aid training for staff, and careful risk assessments. Clear guidelines ensure that staff understanding of child protection procedures is very good.

34. The behaviour policy includes strategies to address any bullying. It is used very effectively, and ensures that pupils work and play together exceptionally well, in a totally inclusive atmosphere.

35. The teachers give sound guidance to the pupils, using a sound range of tests and observations to track their progress. Good records of pupils' personal development are kept and form a basis for advice. Suitable academic targets are set for Year 6, using appropriate software. Good, effective target setting for writing is ensuring that the pupils know where they are and how to improve.

36. The extensive range of visits helpfully includes one to the "Curious Crew" who give a safety day for older pupils where they learn how to cope with emergencies. Good opportunities for pupils to be involved in the community help them to give care too; for example, they will be planting seeds around the village donated by the Ashdon Gardening Club.

37. The school seeks and values the pupils' views very successfully through the regular meetings and discussion at the school council meetings and through the 'suggestion box'. The recent purchase of desks and the refurbishment of the toilet provision have been carefully discussed with pupils to ensure pupil satisfaction.

38. There are very good links with the nearby playgroups; children and their parents are welcomed in school: there are meetings, shared activities and staff visits; consequently, pupils settle in very happily. Liaison with the two main secondary schools promotes the pupils' well being very well, with many opportunities for shared activities, taster days and other visits that lead to a very smooth transition. The headteacher is, helpfully, on the steering group for this liaison.

39. These very good standards of care have a significant effect on pupils' attainment. This is a good improvement since the last inspection.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has **excellent** links with parents. Parents provide very good support to their children's learning and strongly appreciate the school's regular and effective communication and its welcoming approach. Links with the community are very good and links with other schools are good.

Main strengths

- Parents are very pleased with their links with the school and feel welcome there.
- Parents appreciate the wide range of information given in user-friendly format which they receive.
- Parents are successfully involved in their children's learning.
- Parents are confident that the school handles complaints or concerns very well.
- Very good links with the community, and good links with local schools, support and extend the work of the school.

Commentary

40. The parents consistently receive very good-quality information about the school. Regular meetings are very well attended and provide very good opportunities for parents to discuss their children's progress. Newsletters keep parents well informed about future events and celebrate the school's successes. The meetings for parents of the new reception class to explain how skills are taught are particularly appreciated. The pupils' annual reports are clear and helpful with targets for improvement and an opportunity for parents and pupils to respond. Parents are very pleased with the progress their children make; they say that they are very well informed and that very good teaching encourages children to work hard. The parents of pupils with special educational needs are well informed and speak highly of the support their children receive. The parents generally feel that the staff know their children very well.

41. The school prospectus and the governor's annual report to parents are clear and informative. Many parents help in school on a regular basis and almost all support their children well at home. Procedures for dealing with complaints are efficient and the school handles any queries or concerns very well. The school seeks and responds to parents' views very well so that parents recommend each other to talk to the headteacher with any issues. Parents give very good support to the parent teacher association, which is successful in raising funds that are used well to enhance provision.

42. Links with the local community are very good; older pupils are aware and articulate about them. The pupils visit the village church and the ministers from different denominations come into assemblies. The village holds its pantomime in school and pupils from Year 6 take part. There is very good support for productions, concerts and for the fund raising activities and the community makes use of the school's facilities. A pupil has recently won a competition to design a logo for the Community Safety Action Team; after discussion pupils decided to try to improve road safety awareness in the village with the £500 prize. The pupils are being successfully encouraged to develop links with pupils in a school in Australia, through e-mail. The pupils are involved in regular sporting activities with other schools in the area.

43. There are good links with the two main secondary schools and the school is part of a family of local schools. There is close liaison before pupils' records are passed on. The local playgroup joins in school activities, which is beneficial for the playgroup and means that children are very familiar with the school before they come. These good links make a very good contribution to pupils' progress.

44. This area of the school's work was good at the last inspection and is further improved now.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The headteacher and governors provide **good** leadership, and management of the school is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths

- The headteacher's excellent sense of purpose and high aspirations are having a marked impact on standards.
- The governors are knowledgeable and focus their efforts on raising standards and improving resources.
- The head's and deputy's monitoring and development of teaching are improving the quality of education.
- The deputy head's leadership and management in English have helped secure rapid improvement.
- School improvement planning is firmly based on measurable outcomes for the pupils.

Commentary

45. The headteacher has high aspirations for raising standards and pursues these with purposeful rigour. With the governors, and the recently appointed deputy headteacher, she has established clear priorities for improvement and is working effectively to deal with these systematically. As a result, the leadership of the school is good and there are signs of significant improvement. Leadership of other key staff is sound, with a strength in the progress being secured in English. Here, rigorous assessment has been established and the information gained is being used to identify specific targets for improvement in pupils' writing. There is an expectation that other subjects will develop in the same manner and there is tangible evidence, for example in mathematics where standards are also rising, that this is happening. There has been sound improvement in leadership since the last inspection.

46. There is a regular programme of lesson observation by the headteacher and deputy. They provide the teachers with helpful feedback on their teaching, identifying strengths and discussing areas for further development. This is effectively improving the quality of teaching. The school places considerable emphasis on providing training and support for staff. All have access to courses

provided by the local education authority and other providers, and senior staff also lead school-based activities to disseminate good practice. The need for, and cost of, staff training is identified in the school's improvement plan, although staff do not yet formally evaluate its impact on teaching, which would be useful.

47. The school improvement plan identifies detailed priorities for development, and is firmly focussed on measurable improvements. It is drawn up by the headteacher and governors after analysis of the school's performance. Information is sought from comparisons with national statistics, and written reports from senior staff and responsible governors on how they view the school's performance. Subject co-ordinators also produce action plans, but the quality of these is inconsistent as some do not make it clear how the planned action will make a difference to standards.

48. The governing body is effective because individual governors keep themselves informed about what is happening in the school. The governor who takes a special interest in numeracy, for example, makes a weekly visit to observe the pupils learning. Together with other governors who visit, she provides a written report for termly meetings of the full governing body. These are comprehensive and complement the detailed statistical information provided by the headteacher. As a result, governors are knowledgeable and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, including attainment of boys and girls and pupils with special educational needs. Recently, this has led to extra support for a group of girls lacking in confidence. The governors ensure that statutory requirements are met. There has been good improvement in governance since the last inspection.

49. Management is satisfactory. The school's self-evaluation of its performance is realistic, and its improvement plan outlines appropriate priorities for development. Although good procedures for lesson planning have been introduced, they are not yet fully embedded throughout the school. The headteacher models good management in her role as co-ordinator of the provision for pupils with special educational needs. Generally, the subject co-ordinators have developed sound management roles although leadership of art and design lacks oversight of standards and provision. The governors keep track of the school's budget and recommendations from local authority audits are promptly implemented. The school has carried forward a sizeable proportion of its budget for a number of years, but this surplus is now being used specifically to raise standards. Pupils' satisfactory achievement and the use of available funds indicate that the school provides satisfactory value for money.

Particular aids and barriers to raising achievement

50. There is a productive climate for learning throughout the school and good capacity for continued improvement due to the expectation of high standards of teaching and the broad and balanced curriculum. The headteacher is rightly held in high esteem by parents, and pupils' behaviour and attitudes are very good. The accommodation of the small building is limited which constrains development a little but the school is making thoughtful use of what it has.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	352,970	Balance from previous year	60,433
Total expenditure	327,999	Balance carried forward to the next	24,971
Expenditure per pupil	3,313		

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING AND SUBJECTS

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

The provision for the reception children is **sound**. Although this has not changed since the last inspection the school is in the middle of redeveloping this area of its work with the clear intention of improving provision and raising standards. Since the last inspection, reception children have been put in a class of their own; this is helpful since their curriculum differs from that of the older pupils. The ratio of adults to children is very good in the new class as there are a teacher and a learning support assistant for the 14 children. The cost per pupil is high. The school intends to achieve better value for money by raising standards.

51. Most children have attended some form of pre-school provision. They start school with above-average attainment and with very good attitudes to learning, which help them to show better-than-average performance in their class.

52. Sound teaching results in the children achieving satisfactorily overall and making good progress in reading, knowledge about the world and dance. The adults know the children well and manage them with clear guidance. As the class is small, the children can work with an adult more often than in most Foundation Stage classes. Whilst this gives them good opportunities to practice their language and personal skills it also is having the effect of reducing their opportunity to make decisions and be independent. They do not have time in their day for as many choices as they would in a larger class.

53. The adults are working hard to develop the curriculum. At the moment this is sound, covering all the areas of learning and the stepping stones the children should achieve; and it is good for knowledge and understanding of the world because subjects are especially interesting for the children. The teacher has clear objectives for the class and chooses activities which relate suitably to the objectives. Currently the adults and the children are spending too long at low levels in the curriculum. Both the teacher and the learning support assistant, usefully, observe children to make assessments of their attainment but at the moment assessment is not targeted well enough to show the higher capabilities of the children. Most could be working at higher levels in the Foundation Stage curriculum, or beyond. The system for lesson planning is still under development. It is painstaking, but does not bring together the needs of different children and the demands of the curriculum.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in personal, social and emotional development is **sound**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The children collaborate in their work and play and support each other's ideas and wishes.
- Their concentration is good.
- The care the adults give sometimes prevents children from being as autonomous as they could be.

Commentary

54. The children are mature for their age; they bring positive attitudes to school, which are fostered appropriately there. The reception class is a secure and caring environment within the larger community of the school. The children are comfortable and confident within it. They can engage in gentle conversation with an adult or speak out clearly in a group. They work well in pairs and groups, with or without adults. They treat each other supportively; for example, one boy of the three at the sand tray said he wanted to make a mountain, and the others spontaneously decided to help him. The teaching is sound. Routines and expectations, well established by the adults, are easily adopted by the pupils. They follow instructions to go from one activity to another without strife, expecting to find everything enjoyable. The occasional child who has difficulty being part of a large group is well known and cared for by the staff.

55. Sometimes the children have more help from adults than they need. For example, the children have a snack-time each day with an adult when they practice sharing the table and the social event. This is carefully laid out for them by an adult and does not extend into teaching them how to lay the table and serve each other. Similarly, adults fasten up coats for children who could be learning to do it themselves.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Provision in communication, language and literacy is **sound**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The children are articulate and competent.
- Whole-class sessions where books are shared are successful.
- Adult questioning can be too simple.
- The children do not have enough opportunities to draw and write for their own purposes.

Commentary

56. The teaching is sound with strength in teaching reading. The children's speaking and listening is good: they use names properly in conversation with adults, and usually speak in sentences.

57. Their talk is not always developed at high enough levels. Quite often in their work with adults and each other, they are working comfortably but are not stretched. More able children are not targeted to use their language in more complex ways. The exception is when sharing books with their teacher. Individuals who had been fidgeting because they were bored sat up and took notice when challenged to interpret the book. The teaching was good here. In their reading, the children know many letters and can sound out words.

58. The well-planned class focus on posting letters has helped the children see the purposes of writing. All have had the valuable experience of posting a letter home. This stress on how writing carries important meaning is timely and appropriate learning for the group. They worked well with their teacher too on letters to Father Christmas, and remembered the capital letters where they were needed. The children draw and make letters competently, when they are directed to.

59. The school day is full and carefully planned, but does not offer enough space or encouragement for individual drawing and writing to be done and valued.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Main strengths

- Carefully arranged activities with an adult give the children mathematical opportunities.

Commentary

60. No teaching was seen but children's work shows that they are learning to count read and write low numbers, sort shapes. Making paper chains for Christmas was a very relevant way of practising repeating patterns, as children had to follow their own order of colour loops in the chain. They are progressing steadily.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

Provision in knowledge and understanding of the world is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The children achieve well and reach very good standards.
- The class has a computer to seven children and many children can use them independently.
- In activities where they are directed by an adult the children do not make enough choices about tools and materials.

Commentary

61. The children have very good levels of knowledge of everyday items, For instance, a group were able to say that the fat they were working with included sunflower oil and that when heated, it would melt. They are interested to learn and are confident enough to ask questions. They are mature with their computers. For example, one girl worked well alone, with good control of the mouse and was able to explain what she was doing.

62. Their teacher carefully prepares interesting activities and ensures that the class make good use of both inside and outside space for their activities. During the inspection, they had the useful experience of melting fat and mixing it with seed to harden and form balls to hang out for the birds. Helpfully, all had bowls to do their own mixing. This was interesting and successfully accomplished, involving the children well in something quite demanding that they could not have managed alone. This was good teaching. In contrast, a group making Christmas decorations had everything prepared for them, including a design, and had no decisions of their own to make.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in physical development is **sound**.

Main strengths

- The children use tools accurately, and outside toys, sensibly and safely.
- In their dance, the children's skills are very good.

Commentary

63. The teaching is sound. The adults give sensible guidance to which the children respond maturely. The outside play area is narrow but the class make good and well controlled use of the space. When making their Christmas decorations, the children were in good control of their fine movements. There is a strength in the dance provision. Dance is taught in the school hall which allows them enough space. The teaching here is well supported by a specialist instructor, accompanied by the two adults from the Reception class, who all focus well on helping the children do their best. The children have accurate control of their movements.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Provision in creative development is **sound**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The children have a good sense of rhythm and sing well.
- Their paintings are mature for their ages.
- Whilst the children do draw, this form of communication is undervalued enough at the moment.

Commentary

64. The teaching is sound, with adults leaving children space in the day to work at painting from choice, deciding what to do for themselves. The children can competently outline clear shapes and fill them accurately with paint. They finish their work well and can be articulate about what they have represented. They enjoy exploring colour, shape and texture; they have produced some subtle representations of autumn leaves. Whilst the children can draw to an appropriate standard, there is insufficient personal drawing in their classroom and their teacher reports that they tend to take it home. The children would be capable of drawing to a good standard if they were encouraged.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 and 2

ENGLISH

Provision for English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils attain above-average standards.
- The teaching is good and so pupils learn effectively.
- The pupils behave very well and are attentive.
- The management of the subject is good.
- The library is inaccessible and small.

Commentary

65. The pupils enter with above-average skills in English and have maintained these over their time in school so that their achievement has been sound. However, their progress has been erratic over time. Over the past few years, pupils have left Year 2 with low standards when compared with similar schools. Pupils in Year 2 this year are achieving better and reaching improved standards. They are on course to exceed the national average and Year 1 pupils are presently on course to be better than this. There has been a significant improvement for those leaving Year 2 at level 2 in reading and level 3 in writing. Last year pupils in Year 6 showed very good achievement in relation to their attainment four years before. The present Year 6 pupils are on course to reach above-average standards. This shows good achievement after Year 2 and sound achievement over their time in school.

66. Teaching and learning are good now, as they were at the previous inspection. The teachers manage lessons well and insist on good behaviour. In response, the pupils are very attentive and concentrate well on their tasks. They enjoy their work, behave well and have very good relationships. Lesson planning is thorough and work is well matched to pupils' needs. In a Year 1 and 2 lesson, there were very clear objectives for what the pupils were to learn. There was a good range of teaching strategies to keep pupils' interest. The good use of the laptop projector supported the clear teaching. In the Year 3 and 4 class, the teacher skilfully taught the key features of poetry and pupils were able to identify similes and metaphors in the poem "The Highwayman". Year 5 and 6 pupils made good progress in distinguishing between autobiography and biography. They showed good understanding of Roald Dahl's feelings in the extract from "Tales of Childhood." Any pupils experiencing difficulties have valuable extra support which enables them to achieve in line with their peers. They make good progress against the targets in their individual education plans. There is good support through the Extra Literacy Strategy and the Early Reading Research project.

67. The newly appointed deputy head has made a good start to managing the subject. He monitors lesson planning and work well, and has already monitored lessons and provided valuable written feedback to colleagues. The pupils' work is well moderated against national levels and assessment informs target setting well. Targets for improving writing are a recent initiative, which is already proving effective.

68. There is a sufficient range of books and materials to support learning, although non-fiction books for the younger pupils have been appropriately identified as an area for development. The library accommodation is poor. It is damp, cramped and not easily accessible. The school is planning either a refurbishment or a relocation, which should improve matters. The use of computers is developing appropriately and pupils are learning to write and edit directly on the screen, and to use multimedia presentations.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

69. There are sound opportunities to develop literacy across the curriculum. There are good examples of extended writing in religious education and history. In science, the pupils write up their findings from investigations, with Years 5 and 6 working well, independently. They extend their technical vocabulary in science, geography and information and communication technology. In physical education, they listen carefully and follow instructions safely and sensibly. In all subjects, the pupils listen well and are articulate and confident speakers.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Older pupils are particularly well taught and make good progress.
- The teaching of mathematical investigations is good.
- Mathematics is used effectively to support the pupils' learning in other subjects.
- Planning is sometimes weak and so some lessons are less effective as a result.

Commentary

70. Standards of pupils' attainment in Years 2 and 6 are above average. This represents satisfactory achievement over time. However, standards in mathematics fell after the last inspection so that the current Year 6 pupils achieved below average standards in their Year 2 national tests. Action taken by the school since then, particularly in the last two years, has resulted in significant improvements in teaching so that the achievement of this group has been good since then.

71. Teaching is sound and good for investigations. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace, teachers have high expectations, and pupils are encouraged to apply what they have learnt to new situations. This was illustrated in a Year 3 and 4 lesson on two and three-dimensional shapes which started with an activity to revise previous learning. Pupils had quickly to identify and explain the properties of regular and irregular shapes. The great majority used terms such as vertex, edge and face confidently, and provided accurate descriptions of a rhombus and trapezium. They then used their knowledge to predict what a shape could be when only a small part of it was visible. Comments such as "it's an acute angle so it can't be a square" demonstrated a good level of knowledge. The emphasis on mathematical investigations engages pupils' interest and they work industriously to find solutions. Year 5 and 6 pupils, for example, used algebraic notation to investigate sequences of numbers, while those in Years 3 and 4 calculated the number of combinations in a double cone that could be obtained from six different flavours of ice cream.

72. Effective use is made of information and communications technology in lessons. Year 1 and 2 pupils, for example, benefited from using a large clock projected onto a Smartboard. They quickly learnt the position of the hour hand at half-past the hour and, because they could control the hands by simply touching the board, their interest remained high and the lesson was productive.

73. Where there was too much teacher-led activity, the teaching was less effective. As a result, pupils were given too little time to practise what was being taught and they made insufficient progress in the lesson. A recent emphasis on improving teachers' lesson plans has had a significant impact on the quality of teaching, but the quality of plans is still inconsistent. In the most effective lessons, the plans provided explicit guidance on the deployment of the teaching assistant, and clearly showed how higher-attaining pupils were to be provided with a task to match their capability.

74. When they are well directed, teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils learning and pupils with special educational needs are carefully supported. Year 3 and 4 pupils, for example, were helped when the teaching assistant drew faces on the three-dimensional shapes to remind them of the mathematical term, while a Year 6 pupil received valuable help with his visual discrimination so that he was fully included in the class activity.

75. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. There is a helpful action plan which identifies appropriate priorities for improvement and relevant training for staff. Pupils' test results are analysed and their work is scrutinised to evaluate the school's work. Lesson observations and discussions with teachers are also used to establish areas for development. The recent emphasis on problem solving is an example of this, but the school has yet to use the information to set targets as effectively as it does in English. The provision of mathematical games for Year 1 and 2 pupils to play with parents is a good use of homework. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Mathematics across the curriculum

76. Many effective opportunities are provided for pupils to use their mathematics in other subjects. In science, for example, pupils in Years 1 and 2 compare hand sizes by presenting their information in a block graph, while those in Years 5 and 6 use a spreadsheet to calculate the cost of a balanced diet. Years 3 and 4 present and interpret data in a frequency chart as part of their work in geography.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **sound**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils bring good sense and competence to practical experiments.
- The teaching is good for Years 5 and 6.
- In about half the lessons seen during the inspection, the tasks given to the pupils were not well matched to their ability.

Commentary

77. Standards in science are above average and the achievement of the pupils throughout the school is satisfactory. National tests results for Year 6 in 2003 and the previous two years indicated the same. This is an improvement from the last inspection, when standards were satisfactory. Standards are rising swiftly in the oldest class this year, with the pupils making rapid progress. The pupils are having good teaching here and they work well with understanding, competently expressing their findings in their own words.

78. Both boys and girls are knowledgeable in science; Years 1 and 2 are learning to categorize living things while Years 5 and 6 understand how electrical circuits must be constructed. They are all good at scientific enquiry, managing themselves maturely during their experiments and investigations. For example, Years 3 and 4 swiftly and efficiently conducted an experiment that involved pouring and measuring water. Years 5 and 6 could maintain an impetus of their own; they concentrated quietly and independently on making electrical circuits; they discussed with each other and were not demanding of their teacher. The teachers expect that pupils will be responsible, and they are. Overall the pupils' attitudes towards learning science are very good, which is an improvement from the last inspection.

79. The teaching in all the classes is sound as it was at the last inspection. Lessons are always carefully prepared with suitable resources to hand so that the pupils go straight to work without fuss. The school grounds, the willing and knowledgeable parent community, information and communication technology, resources, instruments for measuring and collecting evidence are all well used by the teachers so that the pupils feel supported by their community and their school to learn. The teachers all plan their lessons with clear objectives and suitable activities. They do not always plan different tasks for different abilities in their class. Thus, in one lesson, more-able pupils were recording their work in a form simpler than they could have managed and less able children were having to have a good deal of adult support to record on the same format, which was too hard for them. In both cases the pupils could not use their independence. In Years 5 and 6 better planning ensured that different ability groups had different tasks and ways of recording them so that achievement was better. The pupils throughout the school with special educational needs have useful support in science from learning support assistants and achieve soundly. In the classrooms the teachers all help pupils remember and think with useful questions and explanations. This is often

a strength, but if overused, results in too much teacher talk and insufficient opportunity for pupils to think independently. The teachers mark the pupils work clearly and positively. In Year 6 the marking explains what is done well and what needs to be done. The teacher's writing asks the pupils think more deeply with open questions like: "How do you know?" and to help them improve.

80. The new subject co-ordinator is a very appropriate role model for colleagues. She is well supported in this new role by a senior manager and has a clear understanding of what needs to be done to maintain and improve the quality of provision.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths

- Recently purchased equipment provides a good resource which underpins effective teaching.

Commentary

81. Standards in ICT at the ends of Years 2 and 6 are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. This represents satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

82. The school's recent purchase of a Smartboard, and a set of laptop computers for use with a whole class, is beginning to have a noticeable impact on the quality of teaching. The teaching was good in one of the two ICT lessons observed, and the resources were also used well in a mathematics lesson. The teaching was good in the lesson for Years 5 and 6 because the teacher had clearly explained the purpose of the lesson, and the software being used was suitable for the task and presented an appropriate level of challenge for higher-attaining pupils. As well as using the program to plan how to move an object around a garden littered with obstacles, the pupils were also expected to explain the advantages and limitations of using a computer to model the activity. Their responses were thoughtful, indicated a critical evaluation of the technology and were recorded in a special ICT diary kept for the purpose. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 were also asked to design a town on the computer, but, although the program was appropriate for their level of ability, and the teacher made good use of the Smartboard to introduce the activity, the higher-attaining pupils were not presented with a suitably challenging task. Examples of good work were seen, however, when Years 1 and 2 pupils had written instructions for navigating around the playground, and then applied the principle to program a robot to travel over a set course.

83. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. There is sufficient software available to teach most strands of the National Curriculum; but, as it has been relatively recently introduced, its impact on standards is limited. The pupils' progress is not yet assessed systematically, although the school plans to address this during the current year. The subject co-ordinator maintains a file of work samples, but this is not fully exploited as a resource for teachers because examples are not annotated to show their National Curriculum level. The school has invested in appropriate training for staff, much of it led by the co-ordinator, so they are confident with computers in the classroom. Helpfully, all teachers have access to laptop computers for planning and administrative tasks.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

84. The school is making satisfactory and increasingly effective use of its ICT resources for promoting learning across the curriculum.

85. ICT is viewed as a tool for learning, and the school is investing in suitable software so that its use is becoming an integral part of pupils' work in other subjects. The pupils use computers to print their writing in different sizes and fonts, and add pictures to illustrate it. This supports subjects such as geography, for example, where pupils prepared letters and posters about plans to extend Stansted airport. ICT is used well in mathematics and science when data is collected and presented in different ways. CD ROMs and the Internet are used to research topics in history, and download local maps for use in geography. Younger pupils appropriately use painting programs for

experimenting with simple drawings, while older ones usefully prepare simple computer presentations of their work.

HUMANITIES

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

86. Work was sampled in history and geography, and only one lesson was seen in each subject. It is therefore not possible to form an overall judgement about provision in these subjects. Evidence from the lessons and previous work indicate standards are in line with expectations and good for Years 5 and 6. This represents sound achievement. The new subject co-ordinator has not yet had enough time to monitor provision.

87. In both subjects, it is clear that a range of visits and visitors play an important part in making the work interesting and relevant. In history, for example, a recent visit by a “Viking” brought the topic to life. The residential visit to North Yorkshire helpfully gives pupils first hand experience of a different locality. Pupils use their mathematical skills well in both subjects.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Provision in religious education (RE) is **sound**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- RE contributes well to pupils' personal development.
- Opportunities for first-hand experience of other faiths are limited.

Commentary

88. At the previous inspection, the subject did not meet the requirements of the Essex Agreed Syllabus and standards were below expectations. There is a sound improvement now. The curriculum for RE is now in place and pupils work at appropriate levels, and achieve satisfactorily.

89. Two lessons were observed in Years 3 to 6. The school has been working to improve the quality of its teaching; this effort has impacted on RE. The quality of the teaching and learning was good in both the lessons observed. The pupils behaved well and showed very good attitudes to their learning. In Years 3 and 4 the pupils learned about the life of Mother Teresa. Moral and social issues were handled sensitively. The teacher gave the pupils good opportunities to reflect on the lives of others and offer views on their beliefs, values and actions. In Years 5 and 6 the teacher used ICT well to provide a clear multi-media presentation to extend pupils' awareness of the fundamental importance of the sun and appreciation of why the sun was so widely worshipped in ancient times.

90. Pupils have the chance to reflect on the characteristics of different religions. There are interesting visits to churches and good links with Christian clergy, but limited opportunities to extend such links to other faith communities. They have, however, had visits from the Buddhist community and a Jewish parent visits regularly. Links with Muslim and Hindu communities have proved difficult to arrange. RE contributes well to pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, giving pupils valuable insights into other people's beliefs and a respect for feelings.

91. The new subject co-ordinator has made a sound start in evaluating what needs to be developed.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

92. During the inspection it was not possible to observe any lessons in physical education, or sufficient lessons in music, art and design, or design and technology to make a judgement about teaching. However, evidence from pupils' work, discussions with pupils and staff, teachers' plans and video recordings enabled judgements to be made on the other aspects of these subjects.

ART AND DESIGN

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils successfully use a repertoire of techniques for applying colour.

- They do not draw frequently or skilfully enough.
- The curriculum leadership for the subject lacks sufficient oversight to ensure good provision.

Commentary

93. Standards and achievement are unsatisfactory in art and design. This is a deterioration since the last inspection, when standards were sound. There is a good tradition throughout the school of exploring techniques for applying colour. Pupils work hard at this and produce well finished work. Years 1 and 2 have made images of fireworks with paint and adhesive, which convey a brilliant but smoky atmosphere. Years 3 and 4 conveyed feeling with water colours during their World War topic and have experimented with colour wash and wax resist. Years 5 and 6 have produced landscapes with subtle colours and varied techniques for applying them. The older pupils have also done some sustained, individual, three dimensional modelling.

94. The teachers take trouble to choose interesting work from different artists for the pupils to study. Around the school are pupils' versions of paintings by old masters and contemporary artists. In this work the pupils are achieving satisfactorily; they look carefully and try to see what the artist has seen.

95. There is unsatisfactory achievement in drawing. All the Year 1 to 6 classes are meant to have sketchbooks but only two of the three have. Even in the classes that do, there is no sustained drawing.

96. There is no plan across the school to teach colour mixing progressively. Years 3 and 4 were learning to add white and black to vary tint and shade, something younger children could do. They were underachieving. The one lesson of theirs which could be seen during the inspection was very well managed by the teacher but was only 30 minutes long, insufficient for them to achieve as thoughtfully as they could.

97. The leadership of the subject is not well enough informed about the work being covered in the school. The curriculum leader does not see other teachers' lessons nor look at their lesson planning and so does not know how the content of the lessons develops across the school nor what the balance is of drawing and other activities. She has led her colleagues away from the national scheme of work for art and design to a less specific one. This was done from idealism, to allow teachers to link art and design to other subjects. Although it does give the teachers more freedom, it has led to an unsatisfactory quality of provision.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Main strengths

- Years 1 and 2 are achieving very well.
- Pupils plan, execute and evaluate well and pay good attention to the finish of their artefacts.

Commentary

98. Standards have improved since the last inspection, when they were average. Only one lesson could be seen, which showed that standards for Years 1 and 2 are well above average and their achievement is good. The pupils had designed a toy which contained a model spider; who was to climb up and down a pipe. The teacher made the task very clear for the pupils and what was needed for success; the lesson plan was excellent, with opportunities for assessing the work well identified. The class worked very purposefully, implementing their designs independently. They used saws and bench hooks, made holes in card and gave particular attention, as their teacher had directed, to the finish of their work, sanding their wood where sawing had made it rough. The only weakness with the lesson was that it was too short for them to remind themselves of last week's design and work on their prototype satisfyingly; most did not finish.

99. Years 3 and 4 evaluate their work well. They thought about finish and quality; for example: "I need to make my folds crisper". Years 5 and 6 have carefully researched how musical instruments are made and played, before making detailed plans for instruments of their own, with drawings, labels and instructions. Afterwards, their evaluations were limited in that they focused more on the

appearance of the instruments than the sound they made; but overall standards for Years 5 and 6 are above average and achievement is satisfactory.

100. The work in the subject shows the pupils to be responsible and to consider needs so that it supports their social and moral education well.

101. The school makes good use of the national scheme of work for design and technology, which ensures that the subject is progressively taught from year to year. The furniture is large, so that accommodation in the classrooms is limited for practical work. Attitudes and behaviour are very good, however, and so this obstacle is partly overcome. The co-ordination of the subject is sound, benefiting from helpful guidance from a senior manager.

MUSIC

Main strengths

- Standards and achievement are good.
- All pupils learn an instrument.
- Extra-curricular tuition and opportunities for performance enrich the curriculum.

Commentary

102. The pupils reach above-average standards in music. The quality of provision and the pupils' active involvement make the subject a significant strength of the school. The consistently good standards across all the pupils are a good achievement for them. All the pupils are taught to play the recorder and a substantial part of their musical learning takes place in these lessons. In the single brief lesson observed, Year 3 pupils talked confidently about the treble clef, explained the difference between crotchets, minims and semi-breves, wrote notes accurately on a staff and successfully played Jingle Bells. A significant feature of their playing was the way in which they listened to each other and adjusted the pitch of their recorder so that the whole group played in tune. This was the result of effective guidance by a knowledgeable teacher.

103. The pupils compose their own short pieces using pitched and un-pitched percussion instruments. They write the notation for these compositions in letter and note form, identifying the melody and ostinato. Their thoughtful written comments on each other's efforts indicate that they listen well. Arrangements are in hand for older pupils to work with a local orchestra and other schools next term, composing music for a joint performance.

104. Varied extra-curricular opportunities are provided. These include the school choir, which is available to all pupils, and visiting teachers who provide instrumental tuition in piano, woodwind, guitar and violin. Their work in music provides good opportunities for pupils' spiritual, social, and cultural development. The school emphasises performance, and so frequent opportunities are provided, notable among which is the annual expressive arts concert, when pupils play, sing and dance for parents and visitors. The choir give regular performances, including a recording produced for the annual Children In Need appeal. The subject co-ordinator is well qualified and provides specialist class teaching for older pupils to supplement that of less confident teachers. The subject is well led and managed and there has been good improvement since the last inspection.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Main strengths

- Parents with specialist qualifications make a very good contribution to provision.
- Resources for teaching are good.

Commentary

105. Although space is limited inside the building the school has a good range of suitable equipment for teaching gymnastics and basic skills for games. Outdoor facilities are good and include a large field for football, cricket and athletics, as well as hard playing areas with markings and equipment for netball and basketball, and a limited range of climbing equipment. Swimming lessons are provided

for pupils in Years 3 to 6 and the great majority reach the target for 11 year-olds specified in the National Curriculum. Specialist instructors provide the lessons at a nearby pool, and the competence of the oldest pupils is extended with basic water safety activities.

106. Parents with specialist qualifications enhance the school's provision. A qualified Football Association coach teaches lessons and provides extra-curricular football and cricket clubs. All junior pupils have the opportunity to play in school teams in competitive matches against other local schools. Specialist tuition in dance is also provided by a parent, planned as part of normal lessons and offered as an extra-curricular activity popular with both boys and girls. Teaching links dance with other aspects of the curriculum, for example representing Moses' flight from Egypt, the movement of mechanical toys linked to design and technology, and when pupils compose their own musical accompaniment. They perform their dances in public and provide a major component of the expressive arts concerts.

107. The subject is well led and managed and, as a result, the school is currently being considered for the nationally recognised Activemark.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Provision in personal, social and health education (PHSE) and citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths

- The school council is effective.
- PSHE lessons are carefully planned to deal with relevant learning for the pupils.
- Teaching in thinking skills helps pupils know and value their preferred ways of working.
- Pupils value themselves and each other.

Commentary

108. The school council is composed of Year 6 pupils representing the Year 3 to 6 classes, and is chaired by a member of Year 6. The council deals sensibly with matters relevant to the school community, like the tuck shop and charity appeals. The chair person is usually able to operate independently of any adult, controlling the meeting fairly and well. The council is a practical consultation mechanism and helps pupils see that their views are important and valued at Ashdon.

109. Everyone takes circle time and PHSE lessons seriously. The pupils report that they gain helpful, confidential advice to support them in their personal lives. The one lesson that was seen during the inspection had an appropriate theme of "friendship" and helpfully dealt with the need to share feelings. The teachers ensure that the subject matter they deal with is relevant to the pupils and they plan carefully for PHSE, as for academic lessons.

110. Years 5 and 6 are having additional lessons in thinking-skills, which have the effect of helping them understand and value themselves and the diversity among their group. During the inspection they were learning that visualisation can be a useful tool to solve problems. A child with special needs in the class was well supported to do this by a learning support assistant. She sensibly helped him by reminding him what the lesson was about.

111. Year 6 pupils know that they are so valuable that the school is going to look at a "negotiated" curriculum later this year which will give them room to say what they would like to learn. Because the pupils are valued, they learn to value other people. They are considerate and sensitive in their relationships. On sports day everyone cheered the contestants who were struggling. The pupils also react sensibly to stress. Even a very young child in the Reception class was able to remain calm when another child insulted her. She calmly said: "I am going to take no notice of you".

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	4
How inclusive the school is	4
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4
Value for money provided by the school	4
Overall standards achieved	3
Pupils' achievement	4
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	2
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	4
The quality of teaching	4
How well pupils learn	4
The quality of assessment	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	4
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	1
The quality of the school's links with the community	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	3
The leadership of other key staff	4
The effectiveness of management	4

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).