

INSPECTION REPORT

CHIPPING HILL INFANT SCHOOL

Witham

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 114827

Headteacher: Mrs J Gould

Lead inspector: John Messer

Dates of inspection: 29th September – 1st October 2003

Inspection number: 255788

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant school
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4-7 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	97
School address:	Church Street Witham Essex
Postcode:	CM8 2JL
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr B Fleet
Date of previous inspection:	1 June 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This small infant school gathers pupils from a wide area across the town that it serves. Pupils come from mixed socio-economic backgrounds. Most children arrive at school with broadly average standards of development in each area of learning but this varies from year to year; in some years there is a higher than usual proportion of pupils with levels of attainment that are below average. Nearly all are from white English speaking families although a small number are from ethnic minority backgrounds. A very small number, around 2 per cent, do not speak English at home. A below average proportion of pupils, around 10 per cent, are entered on the school's record of special educational needs and of these a very small number have statements of special educational need because they need considerable help with their learning. The proportion of pupils who enter or leave the school part way through this stage of their education, around 10 per cent, is broadly average. The school received a 'School Achievement Award' in recognition of its improved performance in the national tests for pupils in Year 2 in 2000.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
15477	John Messer	Lead inspector	Mathematics, science, art and design, design and technology, music, physical education, special educational needs, English as an additional language.
1311	Barry Wood	Lay inspector	
23048	Di Wilkinson	Team inspector	The Foundation Stage, English, information and communication technology, geography, history, religious education.

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	8
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	11
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	16
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, AND SUBJECTS	18
AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE	
SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	31

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good school. Teaching is mostly good and enables pupils to learn effectively, so that, by the end of Year 2, they attain standards that are above average in the core subjects, English, mathematics and science. Parents provide strong support and help pupils to achieve well. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The standards that pupils attain in reading and in information and communication technology are well above average and in English, mathematics and science they are above average.
- Pupils' behaviour is very good and they have very positive attitudes to learning.
- Pupils are very well prepared for the next phase of their learning in junior schools.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- The curriculum does not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop their creativity and imagination.
- The quality of teaching is mostly good and there are examples of very good teaching.
- In a few lessons the teacher's expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving are too low.
- The school has forged strong links with parents who are very pleased with the education provided for their children.

The school's effectiveness has improved since the last inspection - its performance in national tests for pupils in Year 2 has improved in reading and writing. Standards in science, information and communication technology, art and design and history have improved. The key issues raised at the time of the last inspection have been tackled successfully. There is now a brisk and business-like start to the school day in all classes. The annual reports to parents are now very good. The curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage has been developed well. The attainment of children on entry to the school is somewhat lower than at the time of the last inspection.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 2, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2002
reading	A	A	A	A
writing	A	A	A	A
mathematics	A	B	C	C

*Key: A - well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average
Similar schools are those with similar percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals*

Pupils' achievement is good. Pupils settle quickly into school and achieve well in the Foundation Stage and most are on course to attain the goals that children are expected to reach by the end of reception. All pupils achieve equally well. Pupils' achievement is good in Years 1 and 2 and they attain standards that are well above average in reading and above average in writing and mathematics. The above average results are not reflected in the national test results in mathematics; standards are now higher than at the time of the tests. Pupils in this school do much better in national tests in reading and writing than those in similar schools. Pupils' achievement is very good in information and communication technology and most attain standards that are well above average. Pupils also achieve well in art and design, design and technology and history and they attain standards that are above average.

Pupils' personal qualities are very good overall, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils have very good attitudes to their work; they are eager to please and keen to succeed. They are confident and discuss their work sensibly. They enjoy coming to school. All, including those with special educational needs, those from ethnic minorities and those whose home language is a language other than English, work and play happily together. Behaviour is very good. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a good quality of education. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. The teaching in reception is good and occasionally very good and in this class a good foundation is laid for future learning. The teaching in Years 1 and 2 is mostly good and pupils learn effectively. There are examples of very good teaching in all year groups but, in a small minority of lessons, teaching is less effective because expectations of pupils' performance are too low. Warm relationships help pupils to learn confidently. Teachers and classroom assistants assess pupils' performance and keep careful records. However, records are not always used effectively to fill in the gaps that have been identified in pupils' learning and are not always used to show pupils how they can improve their work. The teaching of reading and information and communication technology is very good and enables pupils to learn rapidly and attain high standards. The curriculum is enriched by a good range of educational visits.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher provides good leadership and the governing body provides strong support. Governors take a keen interest in the school and have helped to produce an excellent school prospectus. Finances are managed well and the governing body has been prudent in conserving money to offset the fall in income caused by a falling school roll. The management of provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. The headteacher and curriculum co-ordinators have been successful in developing a curriculum that is relevant to pupils' needs and is managed well so that all subjects are taught in sufficient depth.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very pleased with the education provided for their children. They particularly appreciate the good teaching, the fact that teachers expect pupils to work hard and do their best, the way staff encourage their children to become mature and independent and they value the good arrangements that help children settle in when they start school. Pupils themselves are also pleased with their school and are proud to be members of the school community.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are:

- Provide more opportunities for developing pupils' imagination and creativity.
- Raise teachers' expectations so that challenge for all pupils is consistently high.
- Use assessments of pupils' performance to show them how to improve their work.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects.

Most pupils achieve well in reception and in Years 1 and 2. Most attain standards that are above average in the English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 2.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Reading and information and communication technology are taught very effectively and this helps pupils to make very good progress and attain standards that are well above average.
- Pupils attain standards that are above average in English, mathematics, science, art and design, design and technology and history.
- Pupils' achievement in reception, Years 1 and 2 is good so that, from an average starting point when they enter school, most attain standards in most subjects that are above average by the time they leave.

Commentary

1. The baseline assessments of children's early learning, which are evaluated soon after they start in the reception class, show that in recent years most of the children enter the school with average attainments. There are no children who are in the highest band, which signifies very advanced learners, nor are there any in the lowest group, which signifies children at exceptionally early stages of development. Pupils settle quickly into the reception class where their achievement is good. Most are likely to attain the early learning goals in four of the areas of learning by the end of the reception year. In those areas that deal with physical and creative development there was insufficient evidence available to make judgements about the standards that children are likely to attain by the end of reception.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 2 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
reading	17.8 (17.6)	15.9 (15.8)
writing	16.3 (15.9)	14.8 (14.4)
mathematics	16.4 (17.1)	16.4 (16.5)

There were 26 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. Pupils' achievement is good in Years 1 and 2 and this is largely reflected in the school's performance in the national tests. In 2003 all pupils attained the national target of Level 2 in reading whilst nearly all attained this standard in writing and mathematics. The results in 2003 were especially encouraging because this group of 26 pupils comprised an unusually high proportion of pupils with special educational needs. The proportion of pupils in this group that exceeded the national target of Level 2 and attained the higher Level 3 standard was significantly above national averages in reading and writing although in mathematics it was below the national average. The school's disappointing result in mathematics was partly because the school was concentrating hard on improving standards in reading and writing. It was also because the group that took the tests came from a starting point that baseline assessments indicate was significantly below average in mathematics. The close focus on improving literacy skills helped to improve the school's overall performance in reading and writing which were better than in 2002 and has always been maintained at levels that are significantly above national averages. However, the trend in mathematics has been downwards over the past two years. The co-ordinator for mathematics is now leading a drive to improve standards. The school's main focus this year is on improving standards in mathematics. Early

indications are that the standards that pupils are likely to attain by the end of this school year will show a marked improvement on last year's performance and will be above average.

3. Pupils enter the school with standards of attainment that are average and less than three years later most attain standards that are generally above average. This confirms the school's success in promoting good achievement. All pupils achieve well because the learning needs of individuals are identified and work is pitched at levels that enable all to succeed. Also the leadership of the school has promoted a strong sense of teamwork among staff and this promotes a consistency of approach to teaching and learning. The leadership has promoted a commitment among pupils, teachers and classroom assistants to work hard and do their best.
4. Pupils from different groups achieve equally well. Those with special educational needs are provided with tasks that enable them to succeed. Higher attaining pupils are presented with challenging work. Those with English as an additional language are well supported and achieve at least as well as all the others. Those from ethnic minority groups are extremely well integrated and their achievement is good.
5. Pupils use computers confidently and demonstrate a good range of well-developed skills. Their achievement is very good, due partly to the good support provided by the co-ordinator for information and communication technology who has helped to raise expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving. The high standards pupils attain in information and communication technology and in their reading are particular strengths of the school.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Their moral and social development are very good and their spiritual and cultural development are good, making these aspects of the pupils personal development good overall. Pupils' attendance and punctuality at school are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils enjoy their school and quickly gain a very good understanding of the school's expectations of their behaviour and performance.
- Pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour contribute well to their enjoyment and interest as well as to the smooth running of the school.
- The very good relationships throughout the school enable pupils to feel confident and safe.
- The very good moral and social provision helps to shape the pupils' attitudes and behaviour.
- A small minority of pupils have poor attendance which adversely affects their achievement and family holidays taken during term time means that some pupils miss important lessons.

Commentary

6. The headteacher makes a determined effort to focus parents on ensuring that their children attend school. Most parents respond conscientiously, but holidays taken in term time have a significant impact on the school's attendance record. The school has well-established attendance and registration procedures and works closely with the Education Welfare Officer to improve attendance.

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

Authorised absence	
School data	6.1
National data	5.4

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.1
National data	0.2

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

7. The headteacher and staff have created an environment full of enjoyment and purpose where pupils quickly acquire self-discipline. Classrooms are calm as teachers and pupils build high quality relationships and mutual trust. All pupils have a good understanding of where the boundaries of acceptable behaviour have been set and of the school's expectations of conduct. There has never been a need to resort to excluding pupils due to unacceptable behaviour. All pupils make very good progress in developing positive attitudes and conduct themselves well. Pupils listen carefully to their teachers and show high levels of concentration when working alone and very good co-operation when working in groups or exchanging ideas. Around the school pupils are relaxed and polite. They play safely together without fear of bullying or harassment. Pupils learn to value each other's differences and the varying contribution each makes to the school's many activities. Pupils are given meaningful opportunities to take responsibility such as, for example, the play leaders, identified by wearing bright red hats, who help to organise playground games.
8. The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is a powerful force in the school that helps to produce a strong ethos. It positively shapes the school life of all pupils and ensures that they are well prepared for the next stage of education. The school is sympathetic to pupils' feelings and emotions as can often be seen during the school's interesting assemblies when social issues are explored sensitively. Pupils are taught a sound knowledge of the practices and customs of other faiths. Through persistent reinforcement of moral issues in the classroom and during assemblies they develop a keen sense of justice and fair play. Pupils develop pride in their school, and the school's ethos is strong in valuing the individual. It encourages them to think deeply about issues, and expands their confidence and self-esteem within the context of friendship and working together in a mutually supportive learning environment. The school uses the local community well to promote understanding and pupils are keen to explain their own cultural roots and traditions. The small number of pupils from other cultures have opportunities to celebrate their own cultural backgrounds that enrich the life of the school.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	81	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	8	0	0

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

9. Children in the Foundation Stage achieve their early learning goals in personal, social and emotional development many weeks before the end of the school year. Across the school pupils' achievement in their attitudes, behaviour and personal development are good. They develop a maturity and sensible attitudes to work that stand them in good stead for when they transfer to the junior stage of their education.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a good quality of education. Teaching is always at least satisfactory and most of it is good. There are examples of exceptionally good teaching in Year 2. The majority of teachers plan work carefully, based on a detailed analysis of pupils' learning needs. Pupils' learning is effective and enables them to attain standards that are generally above average by the time they are ready to leave the school. The good leadership provided by the headteacher and curriculum co-ordinators encourages an ethos that promotes effective learning.

Teaching and learning

Across the school teaching and learning are good. Assessment is good, but could be used better.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most of the teaching is good and promotes good progress and there are examples of exceptionally good teaching that lead to highly effective learning.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are very good and humour is used well.
- Classroom assistants make a major contribution to the quality of teaching. Most teachers maintain high expectations but in a few lessons teachers do not expect enough of pupils.
- Opportunities are sometimes missed to show pupils how to improve their work.
- Teachers do not provide enough activities that fire pupils' imaginations.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 27 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	3	15	8	0	0	0

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

10. Teachers are very sensitive to the needs of each individual pupil. They plan their lessons thoughtfully and ensure that tasks are modified appropriately to match pupils' varying stages of development. They ensure that all pupils are treated fairly and encourage, for example, shy pupils by allowing them time to collect their thoughts before responding to questions. Where teaching was most effective the pace of the lessons was brisk and the teachers worked energetically as they urged pupils to extend themselves. In most classes there is an insistent sense of urgency in promoting pupils' learning. Lessons are carefully prepared and most provide pupils with tasks that promote effective learning and good achievement. Most lessons have clear learning objectives that detail the new skills to be taught. This is not always the case. In one art lesson for example, the new skills to be taught were not precisely defined and the objective was rather vague, 'To select suitable media to make a chosen image'. Consequently pupils consolidated previous learning but learned no new skills. The headteacher has been largely successful in promoting a consistency of approach through introducing a revised teaching and learning policy that sets out clear guidelines for effective teaching. She has also ensured that a good programme of monitoring and evaluating teachers' lessons has been maintained. There are examples of exceptionally good teaching in the school.

Example of outstanding practice

An exciting science lesson in Year 2 enabled pupils to extend their understanding very well by applying their knowledge of electrical circuits.

'The dolls in the dolls' house are afraid of the dark and need to have the place properly lit inside and out.' One group fell on the batteries, wires and bulbs and succeeded in using tape to fix ceiling lights to several rooms. They worked well co-operatively and when the need for bedside lights was raised, the circuits became more complicated as bulbs were arranged in series. As the number of bulbs increased their brightness faded. One boy ingeniously clipped batteries together to solve the problem. One group used a computer program expertly to create labelled circuit diagrams to challenge pupils in another class – some of the circuits would work and others were cunningly drawn with something disconnected so they would not. Another group worked hard at fitting together torches and discovered how to arrange the positive and negative ends of batteries and to test bulbs. Others created circuits to light models they had made from Lego. The teacher urged all groups to work quickly in order to finish in time to demonstrate their achievements to the class. The pupils worked industriously. The teacher used the digital camera to keep a record for assessment. The pace of learning was exceptional.

11. Opportunities are sometimes missed to show pupils how to improve their work. Careful records are kept of pupils' progress and attainment. However these are not always used to enhance pupils' learning. When sharing books with individuals, for example, a member of staff might record that a pupils' reading did not flow but was jerky. This information is not always used to show the pupil how he might include more expression in his reading or to set a short-term target detailing precisely how he could improve his performance. Similarly in science assessments, for example, a careful record is kept of pupils who did not grasp concepts during the completion of a unit of work but this information is not always used to fill the gaps in pupils' learning that have been identified.
12. Opportunities to exploit pupils' love of imaginary worlds are not grasped by all teachers. Although the quality of teaching is mostly good, a fair number of lessons lack inspiration because lessons are insufficiently rooted in stimulating, adventurous activities. In a few lessons in mathematics, for example, there was too much instruction and not enough purposeful investigation. In science, skills are usually taught effectively but work on forces, for example, did not embrace an imaginative, purposeful scenario. There are examples of exciting practice to draw upon. In Year 1, for example, the classroom assistant dressed up, as everybody has to before entering the magic house. Once inside one pupil waved a wand and reported that he was a magician who had taken the space ship to Saturn where he had fought aliens who had 'a hundred and thousand heads'. The classroom assistant helped to develop the pretence and a magical world of make belief stimulated pupils' creativity well. Such imaginative teaching is too infrequent.
13. Teachers do not always expect enough of pupils and on such occasions the time allocated to teaching pupils new skills, or in developing greater knowledge, is not used as effectively as it should be. In a science lesson in Year 1, more able pupils did not achieve as much as they could because they were not extended. In a lesson in mathematics work was too easy for some pupils. In a lesson in religious education a great deal of time was spent creating 'Thank – you' cards that did little to advance understanding. However, the pupils' questionnaire revealed that pupils consider that they do find out new things in lessons. On occasions when pupils were asked what was going to happen to the models or pictures they had produced they did not know. When asking the teacher it sometimes emerged that this was still under consideration. When there was no clear destination for the work, whether it be part of a class book, a display or a presentation to others, the tasks lacked purpose.
14. Teachers create conditions that help pupils to feel valued members of their class. Gentle humour is used well and opportunities are grasped to make learning fun. In a music lesson, for example, pupils were urged to blow their recorders gently and not to make sounds like a strangled elephant. This helps to build very good relationships and helps pupils to feel confident about expressing their views and feelings. Classroom assistants work closely with teachers and, under the teacher's direction, often teach groups on their own. In the mixed Year 1 / 2

class, for example, this works well when the teacher takes out the more advanced pupils and leaves the classroom assistant in charge of following the teaching programme for the others. Pupils themselves are generally pleased with the quality of teaching that they receive and nearly all parents consider that the teaching is good.

The curriculum

The breadth of the curriculum and opportunities for enrichment are good. The staffing, accommodation and resources are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good quality and richness of curricular opportunities are helping pupils to achieve well.
- The school has very good arrangements to ensure that all pupils' needs are met especially well including the good provision for pupils with special educational needs.
- Pupils are prepared very well for the next stages of education.
- The good number of teaching assistants and the quality of staffing, accommodation and resources helps to ensure that the curriculum is taught well.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop their skills and knowledge in creative ways.

Commentary

15. The curriculum is well planned and this maintains the provision found at the time of the last inspection. Great care has been taken to provide learning activities that pupils find interesting and relevant so that they achieve well. The curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage is good and meets their needs effectively. Many activities help children to make progress in a range of different areas of learning and there is a strong emphasis on their personal, social and emotional development as well as the key skills of literacy and numeracy. The school has adopted a topic approach to learning and is currently developing links between the different subjects of the National Curriculum. This is helping to make the curriculum more meaningful for pupils and is beginning to have a positive effect on pupils' learning. Increasingly opportunities are provided for pupils to use their literacy, numeracy and computer skills across the curriculum. This has had a significant impact in information and communication technology where it has helped pupils to achieve especially well. The curriculum is enriched effectively through a good range of visits and visitors, which helps learning to come alive for pupils and promotes good achievement. For example, pupils in Year 2 thoroughly enjoyed their visit to the Braintree Museum as part of a Victorian history topic.
16. The school is very good at ensuring that the needs of all its pupils are met especially well. This is because, from the time they enter the school, staff keep a careful check on the progress individual pupils are making and any difficulties they may have. Staff have identified that some pupils are very shy and are reluctant to speak out in whole class sessions including 'Circle Times', which are special times set aside for sitting together and reflecting on social or personal issues. Arrangements have been made for these pupils to take part in a separate discussion session, called 'Bubble Time', with an experienced and specially trained classroom assistant. In these sessions her sensitive probing and questioning encourages all in the group to take part. Likewise, the most able pupils work with a teacher who helps them to extend their speaking and listening skills well. Strategies such as these mean that all pupils are very well included in all that the school has to offer.
17. Although there are a few occasions when pupils are not provided with work that is sufficiently challenging, support for more able pupils is generally good. In most lessons teachers maintain high expectations of their performance their achievement is good. Pupils from different social and ethnic backgrounds are supported equally well. Pupils with special educational needs are supported very well. Their needs are assessed very soon after they start school and careful checks are kept on their progress as they move through the school. Learning support

assistants make a strong contribution to the teaching of these pupils so that most achieve well and attain standards that often exceed what might reasonably be expected, given the low starting points in the learning of many.

18. Pupils are prepared very well to move on to the next stages of education. Good induction arrangements and the caring ethos of the school help children to settle well. The good teamwork amongst staff also helps to ensure a very smooth transition between the reception and Year 1 classes. Not only does the school help pupils to develop very good attitudes to work, but it also encourages them to welcome new challenges and become adaptable in what they do. This, together with pupils' good achievement, ensures that they have the skills and self-assurance to move on to a new school with confidence. Good arrangements have been made for teachers from both local junior and secondary schools to work with groups of pupils. This also helps the pupils to look forward to the next phases of their learning.
19. The good school management has ensured that the school is well staffed by suitably qualified teachers. The school's good leadership has promoted a strong commitment to working hard as a team determined to have a positive influence on pupils' learning. There is a good level of classroom and learning support assistants who make an effective contribution in whole class and group activities. The accommodation has recently been improved and staff have organised this very well to create a productive learning environment. The outdoor resources are especially good and include a pond and wild area, a secret garden, courtyard and adventure playground. Staff use these very effectively, for example in helping children in the Foundation Stage to develop their observational skills. There is a good level of resources and these are also used effectively to support learning. For example, the quantity and good quality of a range of books are helping pupils to achieve very well in reading.
20. Thorough planning emphasises the importance of pupils acquiring a broad platform of skills and knowledge across the whole curricular range. As a result, pupils make good gains in their learning and achieve well. However there has been too much emphasis on developing mechanical skills and less on applying these skills in creative ways. For example, most pupils write in correct sentences with accurate spelling and good handwriting. However, the content of what they write is not so good and the vocabulary they use is not as interesting and imaginative as it could be. Although a greater emphasis on encouraging pupils to participate in role play has been introduced, facilities to stimulate imaginary activities are limited and there are too few opportunities for pupils to pretend and to make believe. The headteacher is aware that the lack of opportunities to develop creativity has been a weakness in the curriculum. The recently introduced strategies that she has introduced have not been fully implemented in all classes.

Care, guidance and support

The school ensures pupils' care, welfare and health and safety very effectively. It provides them with very good support and guidance and is highly effective in involving them in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's very good health and safety procedures provide a secure environment for all pupils.
- Child protection procedures are very good.
- Pupils are soon made to feel part of the school through good induction procedures.
- Adults listen to pupils and value their views.

Commentary

21. The headteacher has strengthened many aspects of the support, guidance and welfare of pupils. Systems and procedures to promote pupils' welfare are rigorous and are carried out by caring and enthusiastic staff. The school receives good support from outside professional agencies. The school maintains a strong emphasis on pupils' care and welfare, which contributes effectively to pupils' good development and is greatly appreciated by parents.

22. The school is very vigilant about potential risks to children. Child protection procedures conform to local statutory guidelines and staff receive regular refresher training. The headteacher demonstrates good leadership over health and safety issues and, with a governor, undertakes regular audits of the school premises. The school provides a safe environment for pupils and staff.
23. The provision of support and guidance based on monitoring individuals is very good. Academic performance is systematically tracked over the pupil's time in the school. The personal development of pupils is recorded and issues are discussed among staff. Teachers' sure knowledge of pupils enables them to write well-informed reports for parents. Teachers create good individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs.
24. The headteacher and staff give a very high priority to the pastoral care of all pupils, and pupils know that they can trust their teachers and other staff to listen to their problems and anxieties. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and those who speak a language other than English at home, show an obvious happiness in their school life and feel that they can undertake a learning adventure surrounded by friends and people they like.
25. The induction of pupils new to the school is good, and is greatly appreciated by parents. Pupils rapidly fit into the school family and support the promotion of the warm, friendly school ethos.
26. The school is very effective in consulting with pupils and seeking their ideas. It routinely calls for their views through personal and social education sessions in class. Pupils can also express their views through the school council. The interviews conducted with pupils when they leave the school are noted and acted upon.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The partnership with parents is very good. The links with the local community are good. The links with other schools are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher has maintained a very good partnership with parents.
- The information for parents about the school and their children's progress is excellent.
- Most parents support the school well through helping in school, ensuring their children's regular attendance and helping their children at home.
- The school has developed a very good relationship with the junior school which smoothes the transfer of pupils to the next stage of education and all pupils benefit greatly from their contacts with the community.

Commentary

27. The headteacher gives a very high priority to developing harmonious relationships with all parents and developing good relationships with parents features in the school development plan. Parents greatly appreciate the quality of education that the school provides for their children. They especially appreciate the standards of work that their children demonstrate and the high standards of behaviour promoted by the good teaching. They know that their children like school and make good progress. They realise that the school's values and attitudes support their children's very good personal development and that the school has a rich agenda of activities outside the classroom, which extend the learning opportunities well. Most parents show confidence in all aspects of the school and with the headteacher's leadership and management. They feel that their role as parents is valued and respected.
28. Parents are provided with an excellent range of information about the school and their children's progress. The statutory information for parents is highly informative and reflects the ethos and

character of the school. Annual reports to parents are comprehensive statements of the academic year's work and what children can do in all national curriculum subjects. They also contain targets for the following year. Both parents and pupils contribute to the reports. Parents feel comfortable with the opportunities they have to discuss their children's progress with teachers.

29. Parents have signed the home-school agreement and most fulfil their pledge through ensuring their children's regular attendance and assisting them with homework. The school creates a range of opportunities for parents to enter into discussions about how they might help their children. Meetings are held to explain new education strategies and the school produces well-written information leaflets. Many parents are energetic in helping the school and attending functions. All these factors contribute well to supporting pupils' achievement.
30. The school has a good reputation in the local community. Pupils learn the value of helping older people and welcome a range of visitors into the school who support their education. The school has developed very good links with the local junior school. Parents receive good advice as the time for transfer approaches, and the school's positive pastoral care produces an anxiety-free transition. The school takes its role within the Witham small schools' cluster seriously and has effective relationships with the secondary school. Older pupils from local junior schools visit and Project Trident students from the secondary school assist in classrooms. .

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides good leadership and has maintained a strong determination to improve standards. Teaching and support staff make an effective contribution to leadership and management. The school is organised efficiently and the curriculum is managed well. The governors support the school well and provide good governance.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher has a clear vision for improvement and provides good leadership through her exceptionally good understanding of the type of provision that enables pupils to learn effectively.
- Governors are well informed and make a strong contribution to school developments.
- The examples of exemplary teaching are not shared enough so that all teachers can develop a clearer understanding of how to improve their practice.

Commentary

31. The headteacher has a very good understanding of how young children learn best. She has introduced a revised teaching and learning policy based on best practice and this is having a positive impact on developing the consistency of teaching. The headteacher has been particularly effective in working with less experienced teachers so that they teach confidently and effectively. Provision for children in the Foundation Stage, for example, has improved significantly as a result of the teamwork between the headteacher, the Foundation Stage co-ordinator and classroom assistants. As is often the case in small schools, there is no deputy headteacher but all teachers share in leading curricular developments. Although several are relatively new to the school, most of the co-ordinators are having a major impact on maintaining and improving standards. The co-ordinator for information and communication technology has, for example, been highly successful in helping teachers to improve standards. The co-ordinator for organising provision for pupils with special educational needs has also been successful in ensuring that learning opportunities for these pupils is very good. The co-ordinator for organising appropriate provision for gifted and talented pupils has helped teachers to develop a better understanding of how to meet the needs of these pupils in their classrooms. The co-ordinator for mathematics is currently taking a strong lead in generating improved standards. The headteacher herself has played a major part in improving standards in reading and writing.

32. There are examples of exemplary teaching in several classes but these are not always captured and celebrated. As a result, opportunities for teachers to learn from colleagues and model their practice on the best are not always grasped.
33. Governors maintain a close interest in school developments. Many visit the school regularly and make significant contributions. One governor, for example, has taken a major part in assisting with the production of the excellent school prospectus and annual report to parents. Others help with science activities, which not only supports teachers but also helps governors to gain a better insight into the school's provision. Governors maintain close relationships with parents and are well aware of parents' views and opinions about provision for their children. Governors are also very aware of issues regarding racial equality. They have a good set of policies that help to underpin the fairness of approach provided for all pupils so that each is helped to flourish. They monitor policies informally by noting, for example, that school councillors are elected from different ethnic groups.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	330,124	Balance from previous year	63,913
Total expenditure	332,048	Balance carried forward to the next	61,989
Expenditure per pupil	3,046		

34. The governing body have managed finances prudently. The large under-expenditure in recent years has been deliberate policy to cushion against the expected large reduction in income this year caused mainly by a drop in numbers to fewer than 100 pupils. This year £50,000 from reserves will be needed to maintain staffing and resources at current levels. At the end of the current financial year, therefore, it is anticipated that the reserve will be less than 4 per cent of the school's income. A specialist financial adviser visits the school each fortnight to assist with maintaining the school's accounts. She prepares budgets and advises the governing body on financial allocations. However, governors tend to accept this support too readily and do not always challenge the decisions made in their name. All school accounts are kept meticulously. Although the expenditure per pupil is significantly above the average for primary schools, it is typical of the expenditure pattern in small infant schools. Governors are very aware of the principles of best value and apply them well. The pupils' good achievement, the good teaching that they receive and the productive climate for learning that has been established result in the school providing good value for money.

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Children start part time in the reception class in the term before their fifth birthday, becoming full time after this. At the time of the inspection, the autumn born children had only just begun to attend full time and spring born children were attending for mornings only. Induction arrangements are good and this helps children to settle in to school quickly. The prior attainment of children varies from year to year, but overall it is broadly average. At the time of the last inspection there were weaknesses in the provision for children in the reception year. The provision is now well managed and the teacher receives good support from the headteacher. The previous weaknesses have all been addressed effectively. Provision is good and meets the needs of children well. The wide range of activities motivate and stimulate children and there is an appropriate mix of activities which are led by an adult and those that children can choose for themselves. When they are encouraged to choose activities, there are occasions when several children, particularly the more able, are not given any specific goals to extend their learning. Assessment is frequent, thorough and effective in helping staff to plan for the next stages in learning. Teaching ranges from satisfactory to very good and is good overall. The main strengths are the quality of planning and the organisation and management of the classroom. There is good teamwork between the teacher and classroom assistant. Very good relationships are formed and the teacher's enthusiasm is infectious. A notable feature of the teaching is the knowledge that adults have of individual children. This helps them to plan well to meet children's specific needs. The good provision and positive attitudes that children form helps them to learn effectively so that they make good progress and achieve well. Most of the children in the reception class are likely to reach, and some to exceed, the early learning goals by the time they enter Year 1.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in personal, social and emotional development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The warm school ethos supports this area of learning particularly well.
- Good induction arrangements help children to adopt very good attitudes to school.
- Teaching is very good.
- Children achieve very well and the majority exceed the early goals for learning by the time they enter Year 1.
- Many children make very good progress and are ready to take more responsibility for their own learning.

Commentary

35. The school's very caring ethos and the effective learning environment provide a good foundation for learning from the time children enter the school. This, together with the effective arrangements that help new children to settle happily, contributes to the very positive attitudes that children develop towards work. The relationships between all adults in the school and the children are very good. This helps children to feel secure, to develop self-esteem and to attempt new things. Many activities are planned throughout the day to enhance learning. A range of opportunities are planned in which there is a good balance of focused group or individual learning, where children work with the teacher, and activities which children choose for themselves. Children achieve very well. They try hard both in activities directed by the teacher and when they work on their own. Because the activities are interesting and relevant and often involve first hand learning experiences, children sustain concentration for a long time. Even when not directly supervised, children work very well together and relationships are always harmonious. Children willingly accept responsibility and are very good at organising their

own resources and clearing away at the end of the session. The very good progress they are making means that many children are ready to move on to taking greater control over planning and carrying out their own work.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Basic literacy skills are taught well.
- The needs of individual children are met especially well and so achievement is good.
- Children are often encouraged to develop their imagination through a wide range of well-planned activities.

Commentary

36. Learning is very well managed, with children being given a wide range of activities to promote their language and literacy development throughout the school day. For example, in whole class sessions, discussions are very well managed and encourage children to listen intently and respond confidently as they extend their speaking skills. Adults make sure that all children have a chance to participate in discussions, with the shy and less able children being supported and encouraged. By the time they enter Year 1, most children are confident speakers and have developed good listening skills. Very good attitudes to reading are being promoted through the choice of stories that stimulate and interest children, as well as visits to the library to choose books to take home. The teacher organises a range of very well chosen activities to promote awareness of the link between letters and the sounds they make. By the time they enter Year 1, the majority of children are beginning to recognise some common words, to spell out simple words using the sounds and to 'tell' the story with the help of the pictures. As well as being taught to write their letters in a formal way, children are given a whole range of activities in which they can practise their writing for different purposes. This approach works well and with support most children make good attempts to write sentences. The more able children write independently. In all aspects, most children are likely to achieve the early learning goals with a higher than average proportion exceeding them. Provision for creative writing has been introduced successfully, with the 'home corner' being specifically used to promote writing. For example, during the inspection, it was a railway ticket office and groups of children were acting out the roles of ticket clerks well. On another occasion the corner was set up as the home of Jack in the story of 'Jack and the Beanstalk'. Children engaged in lots of imaginative talk about what was at the end of the beanstalk and enjoyed reading the letters the 'Giant' had sent down to them.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in mathematical development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Numeracy skills are promoted well in a good range of activities throughout the school day.
- Teaching is good and on occasions it is very good.
- Children enjoy their learning and they achieve well.

Commentary

37. The teacher takes every opportunity to promote children's numeracy skills. For example, the registration period is used well to check numbers present. Activities where children are counting for a particular purpose, such as the number of passengers on the class train, are

promoting numeracy skills well. In one very good lesson, the wide range of activities motivated the children especially well. There were computer games, activities that involved joining in the singing of number rhymes on audio tapes, placing spots on the wing cases of ladybirds, fishing for metallic fish using magnetic fishing lines and creating play dough caterpillars with a set number of body parts. Here the teacher used good questioning strategies that challenged children's thinking, 'How many more did we put on?' and 'How much longer is it?' She also paid close attention to detail, explaining, for example, how the number nine can be printed in different ways but each means the same. The class theme also promotes numeracy by challenging children to count the carriages on the train. Very good attention is paid to the needs of children with different prior attainment and the classroom assistant provides very good support for the less able children. A range of mathematical activities such as dice games which children can choose to do throughout the day, and counting rhymes and songs all help children to develop very good attitudes to learning. As a result, by the end of the school year, the majority of children are likely to be able to count to 50, place numbers in order to at least 20, complete simple written calculations and use standard units of measuring length. They are likely to exceed the early learning goals.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Learning is interesting, and is encouraged through many first hand experiences.
- Children's observation skills are promoted well.
- Children are helped to gain a good general knowledge of the world around them.
- Children achieve well.
- Computer skills are especially well taught so that children achieve very well and attain a good range of expertise.

Commentary

38. The curriculum has been well planned to stimulate children's interest. For example, before they made fruit salad, the children visited the local supermarket to choose the fruit for themselves. On a visit to a farm children were gaining a good understanding of different animals, what their babies were called and what they ate. A comprehensive range of activities such as these help children to develop a wide knowledge. An especially good feature of the curriculum is that activities are linked very well to the class topic. For example, as part of the topic about the 'Three Little Pigs', the children learnt about different types of houses and made rubbings of different building materials so that they could recognise the texture. During the inspection the class 'went on a train ride' round the school grounds. This helped children to develop their observation skills. Good learning took place, when children studied the spiders' webs they had encountered. On this journey the older children took digital photographs of the different features they found. The teacher printed out the photographs and used them with the younger children to match them to the places they saw on their 'train ride'. Children's introduction to information and communication technology is especially good. Children enjoy using the listening centre and are beginning to operate it independently. Children use the mouse competently and are developing confidence in using the keyboard. The rich range of interesting learning activities and the good quality teaching means that the vast majority of children are on course to attain the early learning goals by the end of the school year and a significant proportion will exceed them.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

39. Only limited evidence was obtained during the inspection so it is not possible to make an overall judgement about the provision or about the standards that children attain. However, curriculum planning shows that good activities are provided. Staff have made good arrangements for

children to have daily outdoor play activities in spite of the difficult access to the secure play area. Children also use the hall and adventure playground and there is a good range of resources to encourage physical development, including wheeled toys and climbing apparatus. Children also cut, stick and mould materials well. In the activities observed, children were developing their manual dexterity appropriately and most were holding pencils and brushes correctly.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

40. It was not possible to see sufficient activities in this area to make an overall judgement about provision or overall standards. Curriculum plans show that good opportunities are available for children to participate in a range of creative activities. As part of the school's drive to promote creativity in learning, there is a good emphasis on role-play and children participate very enthusiastically in dressing up sessions. During the inspection the 'home corner' was set up as a railway ticket office related to the class topic. Children loved issuing tickets and informing 'passengers' of the time of the next train. In this aspect of their creative development children are achieving well and reaching above average standards.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGE 1

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Reading is taught very well, so pupils' achievement is very good and most attain standards that are well above average.
- Pupils achieve well in speaking, listening and writing, and most attain standards that are above average by the end of Year 2.
- Pupils' achievement in the creative aspects of English is not as good.
- Teaching and learning are good and the subject is well led and managed.
- There are many good opportunities for pupils to use their literacy skills in a range of other subjects.

Commentary

41. Literacy skills are taught well. Children are given a good start in the reception class and this forms a good foundation for their learning in Years 1 and 2. Teachers explain and demonstrate fundamental skills clearly so that pupils understand clearly and assimilate new learning easily. For example, in a good Year 2 lesson, pupils made good progress in learning to spell new words correctly because of the very good explanation of how to focus on the sounds of constituent elements. In the same lesson, very good strategies were being taught to help pupils plan a story. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' performance as, for example, in another good lesson in Year 1, where pupils were expected to write in sentences including capital letters and full stops. The needs of pupils at differing stages of development are met well with classroom assistants playing an important part in supporting the lower attaining pupils so that they achieve as well as others. Good assessment of pupils' work throughout lessons helps them to recognise their mistakes and to learn from errors.
42. Reading is taught very well and pupils become very proficient at using the full range of skills to help understand what they are reading. As a result, very nearly all pupils reach at least the national target of Level 2 by the time they leave and a good number reach the higher Level 3 standard. The standards that pupils attain in reading are better than at the time of the last inspection. Reading is given a high profile in the school and pupils develop very good attitudes, especially enjoying their visits to the library and choosing books to share with parents or carers

at home. The innovative group reading activities seen in the Year 2 class are also encouraging pupils' attitudes. Groups of pupils are provided with interesting and challenging reading, such as promotion leaflets from supermarkets, advertisements for holidays or places of interest, and letters 'written' by a character in the class story. Pupils are skilled at looking at picture clues, building up often complex words such as 'anxious' by sounding out the letters and using the context of the story to check whether the word will fit. The mature use of these skills also helps pupils to have a good understanding of what they read. By Year 2, very good teaching, using perceptive questioning and prompting, helps pupils to predict what is likely to happen next or how a character might react.

43. Challenging questioning in many lessons helps pupils to listen carefully and to respond appropriately, expressing themselves well. Many good opportunities are provided for pupils to take part in discussions that enhance confidence in speaking. Teachers have high expectations that pupils will write accurately and effectively in both English lessons and in other subjects. By the time pupils leave, most write a neat cursive hand and spell simple common words accurately. A high proportion spell more complex words confidently. Most pupils write in sentences, using the correct punctuation, with a significant number using punctuation such as commas, question marks, exclamation marks and speech marks. Pupils also write in different formats such as poetry, instructions and books they make for younger pupils.
44. As the result of good teaching, most pupils structure their writing well, but only the higher attaining pupils regularly write imaginatively and use an interesting and wide vocabulary. This is because, until recently, this aspect of writing had not been promoted effectively. The subject co-ordinator recognised this as a weakness and has put in place a number of strategies to help bring about improvement. For example, there has been an increased emphasis on the importance of carefully structured role-play activities. In addition, some teachers are also providing good activities to stimulate children's imagination and to use in their writing. For example, in one lesson the teacher acted out the role of a character in a story. Such imaginative teaching is not yet common in all classes. Assessment of pupils' achievement is accurate and careful records are kept. However, when reading with pupils not all staff grasp opportunities to show pupils how they can improve their skills.
45. The subject is well led and managed. The co-ordinator's monitoring and evaluation of both the provision and achievement is very good. As a result, she has correctly identified the strengths and weaknesses in the subject, such as the lack of creativity in writing, and has put in place effective strategies for improvement.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

46. Recent curriculum developments have enhanced curricular links between subjects. This has had a particular benefit in encouraging pupils to use their literacy skills in other subjects. For example, during the inspection, the 'big book' being used in the Year 2 literacy lessons was linked very effectively with the history topic on toys. In many other subjects pupils are encouraged to write. For example, a significant number of pupils wrote a good account of their visit to Braintree museum. There are good opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills through using word processing programs on the computer. Pupils know how the computer helps them to check the spelling and grammar in their work and this also helps them to recognise and correct errors. Class discussions take place in many lessons and pupils are encouraged to share their ideas with others and to listen carefully. This is especially well done in 'Circle Times'.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well and attain standards that are above average.
- Teaching is good and helps pupils to learn effectively.
- Good links are made with other subjects.
- Pupils are not always sufficiently challenged.
- Pupils do not always have sufficient opportunities for practical work.

Commentary

47. Pupils' achievement is good in Years 1 and 2 so that, by the end of this school year, pupils in Year 2 are likely to attain standards that are above average and similar to those attained at the time of the last inspection. Teaching is often lively and encourages pupils to enjoy their learning. Most lessons start with a brisk, quick fire question and answer session. In one good lesson for pupils in Year 2 pupils were challenged to use their knowledge about measuring straight lines to discover how to measure curved shapes and a large elliptical shape. They suggested tying string to one end of the shape and then measuring the string but realised that the result would be inaccurate because of the knots. Eventually they hit on the idea of using a tape measure. Most are good at estimating lengths and use mathematical terms, such as 'multiples', accurately. Pupils in Year 2 are fascinated by patterns in number and one boy explained clearly why the answer to adding two even numbers together would always be an even number and that adding two odd numbers together would also always equal an even number. Many pupils have an understanding of number that is well above average. Pupils in Year 1 investigated the number of cubes that they could hold in one hand and created good charts to illustrate and clarify the data they had collected.
48. Although the teaching seen was good overall, lessons were less successful when too long was spent on question and answer sessions and too few opportunities were provided for pupils to engage in practical work. This was seen in a lesson for pupils in Year 1 where pupils patiently answered simple questions, such as, 'I have four cakes and eat one. How many have I left?' This work was too easy for most of the pupils in the group. The lesson lacked opportunities for pupils to actually handle real objects and work independently on practical investigations.
49. Links with other subjects help to consolidate understanding well. In Year 1, for example, pupils collect data on the weather and use their well-developed computer skills to create clear block graphs to illustrate their findings. In a PE lesson pupils in Year 1 had to run around the hall before stopping on a small mat in the shape of a square, triangle, circle or rectangle. In art and design they had to use regular shapes to create houses, people and vehicles. Pupils' thinking and speaking skills are developed well when they are required to explain their thought processes and how they arrived at particular answers to problems. Above all pupils have a great enthusiasm for the subject and enjoy responding to the challenges set. A teasing problem is displayed on each class 'Challenge Board' each week and 'challenges' are also set for homework; this extends learning well.
50. The subject co-ordinator is very experienced and has very a good understanding of the subject as well as how pupils learn best. She has produced good plans to improve standards. The leadership of the subject is at least satisfactory but the co-ordinator has not yet had sufficient opportunity to have a major influence on improving standards. This year the school has determined to mount a strong campaign to improve standards and the co-ordinator has already taken a strong lead in this direction. This includes good initiatives such as planning workshops to extend teachers' skills, promoting homework challenges and preparing a day when parents can come into school to participate in lessons.

Mathematics across the curriculum

51. Pupils use the numeracy skills that they have developed in many other subjects. In a scientific investigation, for example, they carefully measured distances in centimetres. In history they used a time line to calculate the age of Florence Nightingale, who was born in 1820 and died in 1910. In art and design pupils create colourful symmetrical patterns that reinforce their

understanding of shape and space. Computers are used well to organise and present data from the surveys that pupils conduct. They have, for example, produced clear block graphs and pie charts to illustrate traffic surveys and favourite places for holidays. One excellent initiative involved visiting the local supermarket to purchase snacks during 'Healthy Food Week'. This visit provided especially powerful learning opportunities.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils attain standards that are above average.
- Teaching is mostly good and helps pupils to achieve well.
- Teachers' expectations of the more able pupils in Year 1 are not always high enough.
- Work is not presented in dedicated science books or folders so pupils are not always sure what areas of their learning relate to this subject.
- Good links are made with other subjects.

Commentary

52. The standards that pupils attain are similar to those found at the time of the last inspection. Teachers write thorough lesson plans that promote the step by step, progressive development of skills, knowledge and understanding. As a result pupils' learning builds sequentially, week by week, as they cover each strand of the National Curriculum programmes of study. All teachers use scientific vocabulary accurately and this helps to promote consistency and leads to mostly good achievement. Consequently pupils develop a good understanding of the subject and, by the end of Year 2, they attain standards that are above average. Pupils have a very well developed understanding of how to control all variables when conducting an experiment. Pupils conducted a good project and explored fair tests on finding out which of four different types of kitchen roll would be best for mopping up tables after lunch.
53. The quality of teaching varies from excellent to satisfactory. Where teaching is exceptionally good pupils are given good opportunities to experiment and the pace of learning is rapid. In contrast to the exceptionally good teaching and learning seen in several lessons, the achievement of a small group of able pupils in Year 1 was much more limited. Pupils here showed that they had a grasp of the principles of friction and gravity and they understood how to control variables in order to conduct a test fair. However, in one lesson, although they consolidated their previous learning well, they learned little that was new. These able pupils demonstrated that they were capable of using their good understanding of gravity and friction to organise experiments themselves. Instead the lesson was strongly controlled by the teacher, whose expectations were not high enough. The benefits of having a small group selected according to ability were not fully exploited.
54. Pupils' work in this subject is not presented separately but is collected in a general book that includes work in other subjects, such as history and geography. There are no clear links between the different pieces of work in these books and this caused some uncertainty about what pieces of work concerned science and which pieces referred to other subjects. In a discussions with pupils in Year 2 about their work, for example, one remembered working on houses from the olden days and another cited experimenting with Chinese writing as an example of an interesting scientific activity.
55. Good links are made with other areas of the curriculum. In PE, for example, pupils feel their chests and note the increase in their heartbeats when they have exercised. One able pupil explained that this was because your blood is rushing through your veins more quickly because your muscles need more energy. There are also links with health education as when pupils sorted pictures of different foodstuffs into healthy and unhealthy categories. Assemblies are

used well for pupils to demonstrate what they have found out. In one assembly an exceptionally articulate pupil explained how the class had tested the soles of different shoes to determine which gave the best grip.

56. The school has not identified this subject as an area of high priority at present. The subject co-ordinator provides satisfactory leadership and has been successful in ensuring that resources are at least adequate to support teaching and learning.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well and their knowledge of different applications, and their skills in using them, is well above the expectations for their age.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- The leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- The lack of a computer suite means that pupils often have to share a computer when they are being taught new skills.
- The curriculum is very well developed and good arrangements have been made for the skills to be taught as part of learning in other subjects.

Commentary

57. Children in the reception class are helped to develop good skills in controlling the computer and operating programs. As a result, from Year 1, teachers can concentrate on introducing pupils to different programs and applications. This helps pupils to make very good progress and achieve especially well. Therefore, by the end of Year 2, they reach standards that are well above average. Pupils are very confident in loading, saving and printing their work and use many of the icons to control programs. They have well developed word processing skills, changing the type, size and colour of the font and importing graphics into their work. Pupils know how to operate data handling programs and input data to produce both bar graphs and pie charts. They are competent in using art programs, changing the colour and breadth of the 'brush', knowing how to infill and change or delete the colour. Under supervision, pupils use the Internet to research work in other topics and can send and receive electronic mail. As soon as they enter the school, children in the reception class are taught to take digital photographs. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 print these out and use them in their work. Pupils also have a good knowledge of how to operate programmable robots and other technology such as listening centres.
58. Good improvement has been made in the provision since the last inspection and all teachers are confident in teaching the subject. Teaching and learning is now very good and this is a major reason why achievement is so high. Teachers have especially high expectations of what pupils can do and the pupils accept this challenge well. They work very enthusiastically and their attitudes to learning are very mature. Pupils are very keen to learn new things because teachers make lessons interesting and exciting. A very good example of this was seen when the Year 1 teacher showed her class what would happen when the data they had collected on toys was entered into the computer. The resulting block graph drew gasps of amazement. Teachers' explanations are very good and this helps pupils gain a very good understanding of how different programs operate.
59. Much of the current provision has been introduced by the relatively new subject co-ordinator. She has ensured that her good expertise has been effectively shared with other staff and has arranged for good training in conjunction with the local education authority. This is the main reason for teachers' increasing confidence in teaching the subject. The co-ordinator is also continuing to adapt the curriculum so that information and technology skills can be taught across the full range of National Curriculum subjects and this is having a beneficial effect that

gives pupils a good number of opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge. She has also introduced a new assessment program for staff which will provide very good information about the progress pupils are making and the levels at which they are working.

60. When teaching the whole class group, the school's laptop computers supplement the number of computers in the classroom. In these lessons the class is organised and managed very well. However, inevitably, there are four pupils to each computer and this means they have to wait for their turn to practise the new skills they have learnt. Consequently learning time is sometimes wasted and pupils' progress and achievement is hindered. The school is therefore aiming to provide a computer suite with sufficient computers to solve the problem.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

61. Current curriculum development is emphasising the teaching of new skills in conjunction with learning in other subjects. In this the school is already very successful and this has helped pupils to understand the uses of information and communication technology in everyday life. In addition, this approach has also given pupils a greater number and range of opportunities to learn and practise new skills. For example, in a history lesson seen during the inspection, Year 1 pupils were learning how to enter data about their own, parents' and grandparents' favourite toys. The resulting graphs helped the pupils to gain a good understanding of changes over time. In another lesson with a literacy focus, the pupils were learning about simulation programs when they were taught how to operate a story program about Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Information and communication technology skills are also used well in literacy and numeracy lessons. For example, pupils used a publishing program to produce a poster of Flatford Mill, importing the digital photograph they had taken and then choosing the style, size and colour of the font to produce a suitable sentence. Pupils also use the computer in some of their mathematics work; for example, to identify patterns or to check the accuracy of their calculations.

HUMANITIES

62. History and religious education are reported in full below. A great deal of pupils' work over the past school year was analysed, teachers' plans were studied and discussions were held with subject leaders. Geography was not a focus of this inspection. Provision and standards are therefore not reported on in any detail. However, scrutiny of planning and pupils' work show that the full requirements of the National Curriculum are being met. For example, by the time they leave, pupils have learnt about their local area and can compare Witham with a city or seaside environment. They have also completed an independent study of a different area that they have visited.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is at least good and sometimes very good.
- Learning activities are made relevant and interesting.
- Pupils work hard, achieve well and reach standards above those expected for their age.
- A good range of visits helps pupils to learn from first hand experiences.

Commentary

63. Standards are above average and this represents an improvement since the last inspection. Although it was only possible to observe one lesson during the inspection it is evident from pupils' work that they have been taught well. Their work is carefully recorded and there is a good emphasis on helping pupils to gain historical knowledge through developing their enquiry

skills, for example through using pictures or artefacts. The one lesson seen was very good. Very good use was made of a homework activity in which pupils had surveyed their parents and grandparents as to which toys they had played with as a child. In this topic particularly good links had been made with other subjects so that both literacy and information technology skills were also developed. For example, in the lesson seen, a 'Big Book' was used to help the pupils identify similarities and differences between the teddy bears they own and those from the past. The quality of the discussion resulted in pupils becoming highly motivated and very enthusiastic about their learning, which was consequently very good.

64. As in the lesson observed, the activities planned are relevant and interesting. For example, although pupils do learn about some famous national figures in the past, they are also encouraged to find out about historical figures they might be interested in. This resulted in some good independent investigative work.
65. The good quality teaching and curriculum help pupils to acquire new skills and to learn historical facts easily. Pupils are encouraged to be 'History Detectives'. For example, in a very good lesson pupils in Year 2 recognised that the type of materials available in the past prevented earlier toys from being washed in a washing machine. One pupil noted that a toy from a children's television programme contained the same characters as the front of an annual. He deduced that they must have been produced in the same year and the inscription in the book gave a good indication about the date when the toy was made. Pupils also recognise many of the differences between a seaside holiday in Edwardian times and one today and the ways in which school was very different at both 100 and 50 years ago. Both the quality of the provision and standards have improved since the last inspection.
66. As part of the school's emphasis on learning through first hand experience, many opportunities are provided for pupils to visit places of historical interest such as Flatford Mill and Braintree Museum. The museum not only gives pupils the opportunity to learn about the past through studying artefacts from different eras, but pupils were also able to visit classrooms set up as they would have been during Victorian times or for evacuee children. These visits resulted in pupils gaining a good understanding of what life was like in the past.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Learning contributes well to pupils' personal development.
- The subject is well led and managed.

Commentary

67. Only two lessons were observed and in these teaching and learning were satisfactory. Other evidence is taken from pupils' responses in assemblies and in 'Circle Times' as well as the scrutiny of their written work. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and by the end of Year 2 they reach the standards described in the locally agreed syllabus. This is a similar situation to that found at the time of the last inspection.
68. Good arrangements have been made for the introduction of the new locally agreed syllabus. Learning is focused on the theme for the week, which is introduced to pupils during assemblies. As well as ensuring that pupils gain a secure understanding about Christianity and different religions, the school emphasises the importance of learning to live in a community and to respect other people who might be different. Good opportunities are taken, both in assemblies and also 'Circle Times', to explore themes such as forgiveness. Pupils also gain a sound knowledge about festivals from different faiths such as the Christian Harvest, Diwali and Hannukah and what they mean to the faith communities. During the inspection, pupils in Year 2

were learning how a church is decorated for Harvest Festival and that we should be grateful to farmers for providing food. They developed a sound understanding of the reasons for harvest celebrations.

69. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The subject co-ordinator has a good knowledge of both the quality of the curriculum and teaching in the school. She is supportive of colleagues and has set out good strategies for development. Although the subject has not been an area of focus over the past year, her arrangements for the implementation of the new locally agreed syllabus are good. She is providing good support for colleagues and has set out effective strategies for development.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

70. Art and design and design and technology are reported in full below. One very good games practice lesson was observed as well as a part of a lesson in gymnastics but there was insufficient evidence available to make judgements about dance or the school's overall provision for physical education. A music lesson taken by a visiting teacher and a recorder group practice taken by a peripatetic teacher were observed but there was insufficient evidence to make an overall judgement about provision in music across the school. However, it is clear that music is well established in the school's curriculum and that pupils learn quickly. In the recorder group they were reading a simple line of notation and playing the notes accurately.

Art and design

Provision in art and design is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils produce work of high quality where teachers maintain high expectations of their performance.
- In the best lessons new skills are taught methodically.
- Teachers' lesson planning does not always specify what new skills, knowledge and understanding will be taught during the course of a lesson.

Commentary

71. The standards that pupils attain are above average and this represents a significant improvement since the last inspection. Most of the teaching is good and this helps pupils to achieve well. In one particularly good lesson pupils in Year 1 studied the work Quentin Blake, who illustrates many children's books. The pupils were invited to comment on the artist's style, 'I don't like it because it's a bit scribbly and he's left some white bits.' The teacher's quiet voice and measured approach led pupils to concentrate hard on the artist's techniques. The pupils were charged with completing the drawings as quick as a flash. Armed with a good understanding of how the artist drew and coloured his work the pupils had a go at producing pictures in a similar style. The results were stunning; full of movement and so precisely observed that the similarities of style shone through the pupils' work. The teacher's high expectations of the pupils' performance contributed greatly to the high quality of the finished product.
72. Specific skills are taught systematically and good links are made with other subjects. Pupils develop a good range of techniques as they move up the school. In one effective lesson the classroom assistant played a major part in demonstrating specific skills because she had particular expertise in this subject. Pupils were required to draw the teddy bear that was sitting in front of them and to colour their drawings. In this lesson close attention to detail resulted in work of high quality. The class examined sticks of charcoal and the classroom assistant explained that it was burnt wood and was the same material that is commonly burnt on barbecues. The skill of maintaining a light touch with this medium was explained as well as how

to study an object closely before sketching an approximate outline. Pupils drew beautiful pictures of teddy bears and coloured them sensitively with watercolour washes. Good links were made with the work pupils had been completing in history, where they studied toys from different periods, and literature, where they were studying a beautifully illustrated book about teddy bears.

73. Teaching is less successful where the skills to be taught during the course of a lesson are less clearly defined. In one such lesson pupils thoroughly enjoyed creating pictures of robots made from metallic paper as well as sparkly dolls for the class toy factory but their repertoire of skills had not been significantly extended.
74. The subject is led and managed well. Thanks in part to the subject co-ordinator's enthusiasm and expertise, standards are now higher than at the time of the last inspection. The co-ordinator assesses samples of pupils work across the school and offers advice on where improvements can be made. The digital camera is used well to capture examples of good practice.

Design and technology

Provision in design and technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils develop a good range of skills and a good understanding of how their designs should influence what they make.
- The quality of teaching is good so that pupils achieve well and attain standards that are above average.

Commentary

75. Most pupils develop a good range of skills and attain standards that are above average. Standards have been maintained since the last inspection.
76. Teaching is good and it is especially effective where the work has a clear purpose. Pupils in the mixed Year 1/2 class have made a good range of toys in their toy factory. They used the design office in the factory to create their designs and consider how to package their products for sale in the class toyshop. The marketing team had to consider the setting of the sale price. This helped them to gain a good understanding of the processes involved in manufacturing.
77. Good links are made with different subjects. In one good lesson pupils were intrigued by the simple sliding mechanisms they had made to make a train run along a railway line or a mouse to run up a grandfather clock. The teacher grasped the opportunity to make a connection with the work pupils had been doing on forces in science. She asked pupils to analyse whether the toys were being pushed or pulled to make them work. They analysed toys brought in from home in the same way and it was often difficult to determine the forces involved. Teachers challenge pupils to use construction kits to make models that contain specific moving parts or that are designed for specific purposes, such as exploring the ocean bed.
78. The cycle of design, make, evaluate and improve is well established across the school. Skills are taught systematically and pupils learn effectively. In Year 1 pupils designed teddy bears and made the bears following the principles of their designs closely. They described how they used their working drawings to make patterns which they used to cut out accurately shaped sections of material. The designs involved sewing and pupils stitched the two sides of the bears together neatly and with painstaking care. They produced work of good quality because the teacher set high standards.
79. The subject co-ordinator provides good guidance for colleagues and sets high standards. She has a good understanding of the subject and has helped to support colleagues in ensuring that

the subject maintains a high profile in the school's curriculum. The subject features in the school development plan and good plans have been devised to incorporate ICT skills into the planning, making and evaluation cycle.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

80. It was not possible to collect enough information to make a full report on this area of the curriculum. The school has a good policy for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and a good programme outlining how this will be taught to each year group. It is clear that the school supports pupils' personal development well. They gain in maturity and confidence because they are enabled to succeed and because teachers and support staff are constantly praising good efforts and achievements. All staff treat pupils with respect and listen carefully to their views or concerns. They are given many opportunities to demonstrate their successes and explain their work both in class and in assemblies where positive attitudes are consistently celebrated and reinforced. All pupils are made to feel highly valued members of the school community.
81. Social development is supported equally well. Pupils are encouraged to work and play amicably together. Older pupils take responsibility for interacting with younger ones as play leaders. Staff seize upon examples of pupils being considerate or kind to one another during the everyday life of the school and praise selflessness. It was evident that this positive approach encouraged good social interaction and enhanced pupils' self-esteem.
82. Health education is promoted well. Healthy eating is encouraged and the school organised a 'Healthy Snacks Week' to raise awareness. Physical education lessons are used well to encourage an appreciation of the benefits of regular vigorous exercise. Pupils are supported well in gaining an appreciation of their responsibilities towards others through classroom discussions about sharing responsibilities for classroom management and about supporting charities to help those less fortunate than themselves. A school council has been established and photographs of the elected councillors are displayed prominently. This area of the curriculum features in annual school development plans for further improvement.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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