

INSPECTION REPORT

**ST MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC VOLUNTARY AIDED PRIMARY
SCHOOL**

Houghton le Spring

LEA area: Sunderland

Unique reference number: 108849

Headteacher: Mrs K Laythorpe

Lead inspector: Mr N Tonge

Dates of inspection: 1 – 3 December 2003

Inspection number: 257876

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Primary
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	4 – 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	192
School address:	Durham Road Houghton le Spring Sunderland
Postcode:	DH5 8NF
Telephone number:	(0191) 553 6535
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr J Reed
Date of previous inspection:	16 March 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Michael's RC Primary School is situated in a semi-urban area on the outskirts of Houghton-le-Spring and is part of the conurbation of Sunderland. It serves the parish of St. Michael's and also takes pupils from St Mary's, Easington Lane. Pupils travel from a wide catchment, covering neighbouring villages, and some need to travel by bus to school. There are 194 pupils on roll, they are almost exclusively of white British heritage and they come from a mixture of private and municipally owned houses. About 10 per cent of pupils join the school after Year 1, which is typical for most primary schools. Approximately nine per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is below the national average. Fifteen per cent of the pupils have special educational needs, which is below the national average and none of which have a statement of special educational needs. Their needs are predominantly learning difficulties. There are no pupils with English as an additional language. Attainment on entry to the school is typical of their age but represents a wide spectrum of ability. Results for 2002 showed pupils to be underachieving compared to similar schools and to their prior attainment by the end of Year 6 and the school was placed in a category of concern by the local education authority. However, under the direction of a recently appointed headteacher, results for 2003 show significant improvement compared to both national and similar schools' averages for typical as well as higher attaining pupils. The school has also been removed by the local education authority from the category of giving concern.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1157	N Tonge	Lead inspector	English Geography History
9146	M Brennan	Lay inspector	
22113	A King	Team inspector	Areas of learning in the Foundation Stage Special educational needs English as an additional language Music Physical education
28320	R Willey	Team inspector	Mathematics Science Information and communication technology Art and design Design and technology

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good school with many very good features. Under the excellent direction of a newly appointed headteacher, the school has changed from one in which pupils were underachieving to one where they are now attaining results above the average for their age. This has been as a consequence of establishing rigorous procedures for monitoring school performance, taking the necessary actions to improve pupils' standards of attainment and by teachers raising their expectations of what pupils can do. These systems are firmly embedded in the school's procedures and promise still further improvement. The cost of educating pupils is relatively low and bearing in mind the good performance of the school, it provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The pupils are attaining well above average standards by the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science because teaching is effective.
- There is excellent leadership by the headteacher who has developed a shared commitment amongst the staff to succeed and who has put management systems in place to achieve improved performance. There is a need however, to ensure that all coordinators have a secure knowledge of standards across the school.
- The governance of the school is good. Governors are well informed and this enables them to play a significant part in shaping the strategic direction of the school.
- Pupils' achievement is good because teachers plan appropriate work to challenge the different levels of ability in their classes.
- Relationships within school are very good and as a result pupils have very positive attitudes to their work and behave very well.
- There is effective provision to ensure that all pupils have opportunities to fulfil their potential.
- The school has made great efforts to improve the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) but this has been hampered by installation difficulties.

Since the school was inspected in 1998 the rate of improvement has been very good, although this has been achieved predominantly in the last year. Specifically, in response to the key issues; standards in the core subjects of English and mathematics and science have improved significantly. Both lower attainers and particularly higher attainers are achieving results commensurate with their abilities. Pupils have made satisfactory progress in developing ICT skills, although the rate of progress has been slow because of the lack of provision, a state of affairs beyond the control of the school. Over and above these requirements, monitoring of school performance has become particularly effective and this has ensured that pupils are attaining in line with their abilities.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

The achievement of pupils is good throughout the school. When pupils begin school their attainment is broadly typical for their age. By the end of the Foundation Stage, the children are on course to achieve the goals that they are expected to reach by the end of reception because the curriculum is well planned and taught.

At the end of Year 2, pupils attain standards in reading, writing and mathematics and science above the average and their achievement is good. This is because teachers have high expectations of

their pupils, good subject knowledge and make good use of assessment information to plan effectively to meet the needs of children of different abilities.

At the end of Year 6, standards attained by pupils are well above average in English and mathematics and have improved in science from average to well above average because the progress of pupils is carefully monitored and teachers effectively plan activities to meet the needs of all pupils.

Standards by the end of Year 6 in art and design, design and technology, geography and history are above average whereas those in information and communication technology (ICT), and music are average. It was not possible to assess standards in physical education because of the inspection schedule. These results represent a significant improvement from the underachievement evident in the two years prior to 2003.

The pupils have very positive attitudes to school because they are well looked after, their progress is monitored carefully and the school seeks their views. They want to learn because lessons are made interesting with imaginative and creative tasks and teachers motivate them to succeed.

Standards of behaviour and attitudes are very good throughout the school at all times. The attendance rate and punctuality at the school is very good. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils as well as their personal development, overall, is very good. In spiritual, moral and social it is very good, whereas in cultural development it is good. Pupils work happily together and show tolerance and respect because they are encouraged to do so both through the school's personal development programme and in day-to-day dealings. They understand the difference between right and wrong because the school has very high expectations of behaviour and the pupils respond well to these demands. Attendance and punctuality are good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good. Teaching is good. Teachers have very high expectations of their pupils and as a consequence they produce well-presented and accurate work. Children get a good start to school in the Foundation Stage because teachers plan interesting and challenging activities. As a result, children make good progress. The standard of good teaching is maintained throughout the school and accounts for the high standards pupils are now attaining by the end of Year 6. Staff have a very good relationship with their pupils and this encourages children to make their best efforts. Planning of all the subjects is good because teachers prepare work for the full range of abilities in their class and pay particular attention to providing support for pupils with special educational needs as well as to stretching the higher attainers. The planning, teaching and assessment of writing in particular, and literacy in general, as well as mathematics, is good and accounts for the good standards attained in these subjects. The quality of marking is very good. Overall, the school offers a broad and balanced curriculum, enriched with visits, visitors and imaginative lessons. Literacy and numeracy skills are well developed across the curriculum but the provision for ICT needs to be improved.

Partnership with parents is very good. They are kept well informed about their children's progress and are appreciative of the efforts made by the headteacher and other teachers to listen to their concerns. This ensures that the home supports the work of the school well and this contributes well to children's achievement. There are good links with the local community, particularly through the parish. Good links with the principal secondary school ensures a smooth continuity of learning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership by the headteacher is excellent, by key staff very good and management is very good overall. The headteacher leads well-motivated staff that work effectively as a team. All teachers have at least one coordinator role and they are effective in reviewing planning and samples of work but they need to develop systems to provide an overview of standards in all subjects, so that any shortfalls can be easily identified and remedied. Overall, governance is good. Governors are committed to the school, well informed and bring their areas of expertise to its overall management. As a consequence, they are effective in shaping the direction of the school and ask searching questions about its performance.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Pupils enjoy coming to school because they know they are cared for and valued by their teachers. Parents hold the school in high regard.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Improve the provision of ICT by ensuring the computer suite is operational.
- Ensure that coordinators, in subjects other than English, mathematics and science, have an overall view of standards in their subjects across the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Standards in the Foundation Stage are in line with the learning goals expected for children of this age and their achievement is good. At the end of Year 2, standards are above the average and achievement is good. By the end of Year 6 standards are well above the average and achievement is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' are attaining standards that are well above in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6 because of good teaching, high expectations of what their pupils can do and good leadership of these subjects.
- Standards attained in writing, which was the weaker element in national tests, have improved significantly.
- Overall, pupils' achievement is good because of the careful tracking of their performance and the effective action given to those pupils in need of extra help.
- Standards in art and design, design and technology, history and geography are above the average for those expected for their age and achievement is good because of detailed teaching guidance and good lesson planning. There is some underachievement in ICT because of the computer room being non-operational.
- Pupils with special educational needs, including the gifted and talented, make good progress.

Commentary

1. Standards are well above average expected for pupils of this age in English, mathematics and science and above in art and design, design and technology, geography and history. Pupils' good literacy and mathematical skills enable them to make good progress in many other subjects. Standards in information and communication technology are typical for their age but their progress has been hampered until now by the lack of computers. Only a few lessons were observed in physical education and music and it was predominantly on the basis of these observations that standards were judged to be typical for their age. Overall, this represents very good progress since the last inspection and has been achieved by the very good management systems put in place, particularly in the last year to track pupil progress and to take effective action to improve pupils' performance. The trend of improvement in all the core subjects is above the national trend and the school met its targets.
2. In general terms, attainment on entry fluctuates slightly from year to year but it is usually broadly average. There are exceptions however, even to this general pattern, which need to be taken into account in assessing achievement and standards; for example, there is a greater proportion of children with special educational needs in the Reception class and in the Year 4 class.
3. Pupils make a very good start in the Foundation Stage, particularly those pupils who have attended nursery. Assessment information at the end of Reception shows that these pupils reach the goals that are expected for children of this age. This is because their curriculum is well planned with interesting and challenging activities, particularly those which develop their language and literacy skills. Relationships are very good and this provides a safe and secure environment in which children can explore and develop with confidence. The recently constructed outdoor play area provides further opportunities to develop physical skills and imaginative play.

4. Results in 2002 show that pupils were significantly underachieving and had done so for a number of years. Indeed, the previous inspection report explicitly made reference to the underperformance of pupils in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, particularly the higher attainers. Since a new headteacher was appointed in November 2002, there has been a very significant improvement in results. Inspection evidence shows that this improvement is secure and sustainable and, on current performance, the school is set to attain results even higher than those in 2003. This has been achieved because of the implementation of rigorous procedures for monitoring pupil progress, taking effective action to raise attainment based on assessment information, and because of good teaching.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
Reading	16.9 (15.9)	15.7 (15.8)
Writing	15.8 (15.0)	14.6 (14.4)
Mathematics	18.0 (15.9)	16.3 (16.5)

There were 27 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

5. In Years 1 –2, pupils make good progress and achieve well because teaching is well structured and activities are interesting. Pupils’ progress is tracked carefully and the school is quick to provide additional help where it is needed. As writing was the weaker component of the subjects tested in 2002 the school made this the priority for improvement. A detailed analysis of performance formed the basis for formulating an action plan. Every pupil was given a specific target in writing to meet and the teachers’ provided detailed feedback to the pupils on the progress they were making toward achieving them. Furthermore, the school created many opportunities in other subjects for pupils to practise and extend their writing skills, for example in history. As a result of these specific measures, writing improved. Careful analysis of performance in reading and mathematics was also used to inform the action taken to improve these results and, as a consequence, pupils attainment improved. Good teacher planning and the effective use of assessment information also accounts for the reason why pupils do well in art and design, design and technology, geography and history.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 6 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	28.6 (16.3)	26.8 (27.0)
Mathematics	28.8 (26.8)	26.8 (26.7)
Science	28.6 (27.9)	28.6 (28.3)

There were 27 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

6. Prior to 2002 pupils at the end of Year 6 were seriously underachieving. This situation has now changed. The overall above and well above average attainment in 2003 is primarily because of good teaching and testifies to the effective measures taken to improve attainment. Above all, teachers now have high expectations of what their pupils can do and pupils rise to the occasion. Teachers provide a great deal of individual support for their pupils and their performance is carefully monitored so that help can be provided when it is needed.
7. Most pupils with special educational needs achieve well over time because their progress is monitored regularly and the appropriate help is given This is because the teachers’ expectations of all pupils are high and pupils with special educational needs respond to this as well as the rest. Most notably however, gifted and talented pupils have been a special

focus in the school management plan. The register indicates their particular expertise and the school ensures that they are sufficiently challenged. Inspection evidence shows that the learning needs of the higher attainers are well met and they are attaining in line with their abilities.

8. Attainment in art and design, design technology, geography, and history is above the average expected for pupils at the end of Year 6 because of the careful planning of interesting and challenging lessons.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils are keen to attend school and the majority have good attendance records. Punctuality is very good. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Personal development is also very good, particularly pupils' spiritual, moral and social development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have high expectations and this promotes very good attitudes and behaviour.
- The school promotes very good relationships.
- The very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development.
- The good level of attendance.
- Opportunities to experience cultures other than their own are limited.

Commentary

9. This is a school which promotes very good attitudes and behaviour in an environment in which pupils have a high regard for one another's welfare. The way in which a girl in Year 2 held a door open for one of the inspectors on the final day of the inspection, as if it were second nature, demonstrated the courtesy that is ingrained in the children. It is also a reflection of the high expectations of behaviour and well-established routines that can be seen in a number of areas including assemblies, moving along corridors and in the dining hall at lunchtime. As a consequence, the pervading atmosphere is one of calm, and in lessons this means that teachers are free to concentrate on teaching. Pupils speak highly of the school and back this up by the very good way in which they support extra-curricular activities.
10. Relationships are also very good and this too is a particular strength. There have been no exclusions from the school. Much thought has gone into the provision for Personal, Social, Health Education and Citizenship (PSHE & C) and particularly the organisation of the Friday pastoral groups. These are vertical groups comprised of pupils from every year which means that all age groups have the opportunity to discuss topics together, such as citizenship, caring for one another and relationships. A natural consequence is that pupils from across the age ranges get to know one another. More importantly, older pupils take responsibility for the younger ones and specific older pupils become 'buddies' to younger ones. This is in evidence at lunchtime when older pupils happily sit with younger ones. Relationships are also strong between staff and pupils, with staff providing very good role models.
11. This Church school takes its responsibilities for developing pupils' spirituality very seriously. Close links with the parish church mean that pupils regularly attend Mass. Assemblies within school have a strong spiritual and moral element with opportunities to sing, pray and reflect on the messages that are being imparted. A particularly good example was the parent assembly during which Years 4/5 pupils gave a wonderfully uplifting 'signed' (indicating meaning by use of hand gestures) performance. In addition, the confident way in which the Year 2 pupils performed their play for the whole school and their parents, and the roles of other pupils as school councillors, 'buddies' and prefects demonstrates how well the school ensures very good social and personal development.

12. If there is any weakness it is the pupils' lack of exposure to cultures other than their own. There are limited opportunities to meet people of a different ethnic origin than their own.

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	188	0	0
White – any other White background	1	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	2	0	0

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

Attendance

13. Attendance, at 95.3 per cent for the year ended 2003, is above national figures and unauthorised absence, at 0 per cent, is below. Parents are keen for their children to attend and as a consequence there are few, if any, pupils whose non-attendance is having a detrimental impact on their education. Furthermore, little administrative time is expended following up absences. Punctuality is very good.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.7	School data	0
National data	5.4	National data	0.4

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Pupils achieve well because of the good quality of teaching and learning; the excellent leadership by the headteacher of the school; the very good relationships, which foster positive attitudes to learning; the good care it provides for its pupils and the good relationship the school has with its parents and the community at large.

Teaching and learning

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good because teachers have good subject knowledge; high expectations of their pupils; set clear learning objectives for lessons and have very good relationships with their pupils.
- As a result of the good teaching pupils are positive about their learning, make good progress and achieve well.
- Assessment procedures are very good and this information is used very well in lesson planning to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities.
- The quality of marking is very good and consistently applied. As a result pupils have a clear idea of what they need to do to improve.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 30 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2 (6%)	6 (19%)	17 (55%)	6 (19%)	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.

14. The proportion of good quality teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection when eight per cent of lessons were unsatisfactory and the proportion of very good and better was less. Parents and pupils agree with this positive picture of teaching. The determination of teachers to do their best for their pupils shows in the professional interest they take in how best they can help children to learn.
15. During the inspection, lessons were at least satisfactory and more frequently good or very good. This factor, coupled to good achievement of pupils in tests and work seen during the inspection, supports this overall judgement. Teachers use their knowledge about what pupils can do well to plan effective lessons to meet the different abilities in all subjects.
16. Teachers' planning of lessons is invariably good. Learning objectives for the lessons are clearly stated and understood by the pupils and work for different abilities is well constructed with imaginative activities. For example, in an excellent science lesson pupils were very well motivated to understand electric circuitry. Pupils set to work with great enthusiasm and achieved very well. Work set for pupils is always challenging, requiring them to develop higher order thinking skills. This was well illustrated in a very good history lesson, when pupils had to read primary sources in the original. As a consequence, pupils were able to explain the problems associated with understanding the past. Pupils' learning is moved along at a good pace. In an excellent mathematics lesson in Year 6 the teacher structured the activities on number sequences so well that pupils progressed to higher levels of understanding and operation at a cracking pace. The teacher skilfully ensured that all pupils understood the processes so that the higher level L5 pupils, as well as those working at the level below, were suitably challenged and experienced success.
17. Teachers' relationships with the pupils are very good and this motivates pupils to want to learn. Teachers find opportunities to raise the esteem of pupils, for example, when lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are encouraged to contribute. Teachers use constant and appropriate praise and as a consequence pupils feel their efforts are valued and they make considerable effort to do well. On the very rare occasions when behaviour falls short of expectations, it is always carefully explained why.
18. Teachers are skilled at teaching literacy and numeracy skills and are interpreting the guidance for the National Literacy Strategy and the National Numeracy Strategy to the best benefit of their pupils. Pupils develop these basic skills in other subjects of the curriculum. There were some good examples of extending pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects, for example, when pupils in Year 4 wrote a letter to Cardinal Wolsey explaining the reasons for Henry seeking a divorce.
19. Pupils respond well in lessons. This is a consequence of the good expectations that teachers have for their pupils and the praise and encouragement they give them to succeed. As a consequence, pupils produce work of a good presentational standard and they are attentive during explanations by teachers or other members of the class. The quality of written feedback pupils receive is of a very high order. Specific objectives for improvement are clearly stated and the area to which the comment refers is highlighted in the child's work. As a consequence pupils know what they need to do to improve. In literacy, pupils have writing targets on post-stickers so that they can display them on the page they are currently

working on. These targets, combined with high quality marking, have helped contribute to the rise in performance. Numeracy and science targets are to be set in the spring term.

20. Most pupils identified as having special educational needs achieve well. This is because teaching and learning, especially in literacy and numeracy, are well matched to their specific needs and they generally receive good support in lessons. The pupils make good progress and there are clear targets for what they are to learn next. Their achievements are reviewed regularly to build on what they have learned and ensure their confidence in their skills and abilities is nurtured and enhanced. Gifted and talented pupils are identified in each subject and challenging work is set for them so that they realise their potential.
21. Any improvements in teaching tend to be related to individual needs.

The curriculum

The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements well. Enrichment is provided through out of school activities as well as a good range of visits and visitors. The school was built in 2000 and offers a bright an attractive environment in which pupils can learn although storage space is limited. Resources overall, are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A good, well-balanced and broad curriculum.
- There are very good opportunities for artistic activities, which have had a positive impact on standards in art and design.
- There is an appropriate emphasis on English, mathematics and science, which has helped to raise standards in these subjects.
- There are good resources overall, especially in mathematics, and very good accommodation, although storage is not always adequate.
- The library is well-resourced and well-organised. It is centrally situated in the school, but is also a thoroughfare.
- The impact of the very well-resourced suite for information and communication technology (ICT) is yet to become operational and this is slowing the rate of progress pupils make in ICT.

Commentary

22. The school's curriculum is well thought through, meets statutory requirements and is designed to offer good breadth and balance of subjects to meet the needs of all pupils. There has been good progress since the previous inspection, as the provision for extra-curricular activities has been improved. The curriculum is well-planned using national strategies for literacy and numeracy and national guidelines for other subjects. The pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy are developed effectively both in English and mathematics and in other subjects in the curriculum, but the use of ICT within the school, especially to support other subjects, is underdeveloped. There is good continuity and progression from year to year and the curriculum builds successfully on what the pupils can already know and understand. The long, medium and short term planning ensures a high level of continuity for pupils of all abilities. The planning for different abilities is evident in the short term in literacy, with greater emphasis on developing writing during literacy sessions, numeracy and in medium term plans in all other subjects. Expectations for what the pupils can achieve have been raised very effectively by the headteacher, and this has had a very positive impact on the curriculum and the standards the pupils reach.
23. The school uses its own evaluation very well to assess what needs to be done to improve the curriculum. The recently installed ICT suite and the newly completed outdoor area for the Reception class children are both very good resources. The full impact of the new suite has not materialised as yet, because there have been difficulties in setting up the equipment. The Reception outdoor play area is not fully integrated into the Foundation Stage curriculum,

but is a very good resource to enhance the children's learning. The whole curriculum is enriched well with an imaginative approach to learning and a good range of out-of-school activities, visits, and relevant learning opportunities.

24. The provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is good. These pupils make good progress because of good planning in lessons to meet the full range of the pupils' abilities. The staff generally pay good attention to supporting the pupils and including them fully in lessons and the range of activities provided. The individual education plans to support them are clear, with specific targets that the pupils are to achieve. These are well written, with success criteria, resources to be used, and strategies and techniques to aid learning. There are good levels of support for the pupils, especially in the Reception class, where the children's specific needs are well met, with a sympathetic, and well-informed approach to their learning. Meeting the needs of gifted and talented pupils was a priority in the school management plan. These pupils' particular talents and high attainment has been identified in all subjects and teachers plan to meet their particular needs very well.
25. The co-ordinator for SEN (SENCO) has an in-depth knowledge about the pupils in each year group, with a good awareness and understanding of the range of needs within the school. Good support is offered to the pupils, especially those with profound and specific learning difficulties. The SENCO keeps well-documented evidence and records reviews and contacts made for each of the pupils on the SEN register.
26. Pupils and parents are complimentary about the good variety of clubs and out-of school activities that are provided and the good range of visits and visitors. The curriculum is monitored by all subject co-ordinators, who are given a clear brief to determine standards in their subject responsibilities and for these judgements to inform action plans. Coordinators in English, mathematics and science have a good grasp of overall standards across the school but this is not the case in other subjects.
27. The school has achieved the Activemark (an award for good practice in physical education) in PE, and has benefited from access to the local secondary school's ICT facilities. Further enrichment of the curriculum includes cross age pastoral groups, 'Fabtots' in gymnastics for Reception and Years 1 and 2, and French for Year 6. In Years 5 and 6, football coaching is organised with Sunderland FC and music tuition is offered, and there is good development of PE through the School Sport Co-ordinator programme. The school has very good accommodation. The school was built in 2000 has some very good features such as the library, ICT suite, shower facilities and the new outdoor activity area for Reception children. The school realises the need to develop work in ICT to gain the best potential of the new ICT suite; to continue to provide more challenge for pupils who learn quickly in all subjects, and to develop further cross-curricular links to consolidate and reinforce learning.

Care, guidance and support

Procedures to ensure pupils welfare and safety are very good. Staff know pupils very well and they provide very good support when required. The school is good at seeking, valuing and acting upon pupils' views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The arrangements for the care and welfare of pupils are very good.
- The provision for pupils' personal development is very good.
- The school seeks and acts upon pupils' views effectively.

Commentary

28. This is a school in which the care and welfare arrangements for pupils are very good. The new building is light, clean, well maintained and, being on one level, easily accessible by disabled pupils. There were a number of occasions when pupils were interviewed during the week of the inspection and these interviews, together with the parents' questionnaires, confirmed that the school is a secure and caring place. Parents overwhelmingly regard the care shown by children for one another as outstanding. This does not happen by chance but as a result of the high expectations that are set, the careful planning of mixed age pastoral groups and the special friend or 'buddy' system, which assigns an older pupil to take responsibility for a younger one. Pupils also confirm that they are clear on what to do if they have a concern, and that there is always an adult on hand to listen to them.
29. Pastoral groups are at the centre of the very good planned provision for pupils' personal development. These pastoral groups are used to deliver Circle Time and Citizenship during which subjects such as relationships, bullying, caring for one another and decision-making in the community are discussed. Both the pastoral groups and the topics for discussion give teachers an opportunity to monitor pupils' personal development, and because the pupils are from all year groups it allows them to get to know one another outside their normal class. Rewards for positive behaviour and achievement are made at the weekly celebration assembly and provide confirmation that teachers are monitoring these instances and that the school is valuing its pupils. The rewards are very much valued and help to raise pupils' self-esteem. In addition, the roles of school councillor, 'buddy', prefect, librarian or secretary/receptionist provide numerous routes for pupils to gain maturity.
30. The way in which the school seeks pupils' views through the School Council is good. Although only running for a year it has been particularly good at coaching children in the democratic process and has led directly to improvements in the school. These include the introduction of lockers for Year 6 to store their belongings, when the previous arrangement had been chaotic; the introduction of a system to sell fruit and water at break time, and the purchase of playground games for break and lunchtime.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has established very good links with parents. It has established very good links with the community and good links with other schools and colleges.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The successful ways in which the school fosters links with parents.
- The information about the school and about standards and progress is very good.
- Links with the local community is very good.
- The links with the local secondary school are good.

Commentary

31. Parents have very positive views of the school and the way it relates to them. The parents' questionnaire was overwhelmingly supportive and this positive picture was reinforced at the parents meeting and in interviews with parents during the week of the inspection. They felt that staff were very approachable and made particular positive comments about the headteacher's presence at the gate every morning to greet them as they arrive. Communication is considered to be very good and if there is a problem the school listens and acts. A prime example was the decision to organise a curriculum evening on numeracy, following concerns raised by parents. Once a month there is an open evening when parents are invited to meet with teachers to discuss their child's work. Within Years 1 and 2 there are an increasing number of parent helpers, a number of whom are applying to become teachers. All of this makes for very good provision.

32. The information which the school provides about itself and pupil performance is also very good. At the beginning of each term the school issues a diary list of events and this is supplemented by regular letters informing parents of other events. Annual reports on pupils' progress are very good. Not only do they give parents an indication of the National Curriculum level at which their child is working, and whether this is appropriate to their age, but they also include ways to improve. Parents can comment on the reports and get the opportunity to discuss their children's progress at the three parents evenings which are held during the year. Turnout at these events is very good.
33. Through the very good links with the church, the school is very much a part of the community. Many of the parents are members of the local congregation, which means that they get to know the other children well. Children regularly attend Mass, and pupils in Year 3 have begun their first communion programme, which they attend every Sunday. Children give concerts at local care homes, particularly at Christmas, when they sing carols.
34. There are good links with schools in the local cluster. The headteacher meets with other heads every half term and there is a termly meeting of the local Catholic heads. The majority of pupils transfer to St Robert's Secondary School, with whom the school enjoys good links. On a personal level the respective heads have a good working relationship and both acknowledge the benefits of working together closely. At a practical level this has seen staff from St Robert's providing technical support for ICT and teaching French to Year 6 pupils. Prior to going to St Robert's all Year 6 pupils attend a day at the secondary school, joining lessons, having lunch and getting the opportunity to ask questions. They also undertake a bridging activity in French. Every child is discussed before they arrive to ensure that their social and learning needs are met. St Robert's also organises an annual summer school and each year there are a number of pupils from St Michael's who attend. This is considered an excellent way of getting to know these pupils before they start their secondary education.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership of the school is very good and by the headteacher, in particular, is excellent. There are very good management systems in place to evaluate the performance of the school. The governance of the school is good. They provide both support to and challenge the performance of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The governance of the school is good because governors are well informed about the performance of the school and are actively involved in helping to shape its future.
- Leadership is very good overall but is excellent by the headteacher who has the confidence of all the staff and has inspired a shared commitment to succeed by all in the school community.
- Management is very good because there are effective systems in place to monitor the progress of the school particularly in the core subjects. However, subject coordinators in subjects other than English, mathematics and science, need to develop an overview of standards in their subjects across the school.
- Parents and pupils are very confident in the quality of education offered by the school.

Commentary

35. The governance of the school is good. Governors fulfil their statutory duties and are well informed about the strength and weaknesses of the school, providing both effective support as well as challenge. They also bring a range of valuable expertise to the management of the school and play a significant role in shaping its strategic direction. Spending accords with their priorities and with the best value and they monitor the budget carefully. While the contingency carried forward from 2002 – 03 was above the recommended five per cent, it

had been earmarked for the computer suite and an outside play area for the Foundation Stage, both badly needed facilities.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	405,118
Total expenditure	367,871
Expenditure per pupil	1,857

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	22,000
Balance carried forward to the next	37,247

36. The leadership by the headteacher is excellent, key staff very good and management very good. Drafted in by the local authority when the school was giving concern because of the underachievement of pupils, she has established effective management systems to monitor the performance of the school, taken effective action to remedy deficiencies and, at the same time, created a shared commitment from the staff to raise expectations. The consistency of approach by everyone is evident through the application of whole school policies, most successfully in marking. Most importantly, the school has put in place very effective tracking systems to monitor the progress of its pupils. The headteacher's commitment to the welfare of staff and the provision for all in the school community has resulted in substantially improved attainment of pupils in a happy and productive working environment.
37. The management leads an effective team of teachers and the structures and systems that are in place are very good. This is a view shared by parents. The school management plan is an effective document, consistent with the priorities for the school and details the actions/time/person responsible and costs. The senior managers have initiated a detailed curriculum, which covers all the requirements of the National Curriculum, the National Literacy Strategy and the National Numeracy Strategy and requirements such as Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education. Tracking procedures for pupil performance are very good and quickly identify those that need help. Above all, the quality of marking is very good because it consists of well-focused comments. This has paid dividends in improving the performance of all pupils. Co-ordinators are given time to monitor the quality of work in their subject areas but this information in the foundation subjects needs to be collated into a picture of standards across the school in order that the school can identify areas for improvement more accurately.
38. The co-ordinator for special educational needs (SENCO) has an in-depth knowledge about the pupils in each year group, with a good awareness and understanding of the range of needs within the school. Good support is offered to the pupils, especially those with profound and specific learning difficulties. The SENCO keeps well-documented evidence and records reviews and contacts made for each of the pupils on the SEN register.
39. Staff are sufficient to meet the needs of the National Curriculum and some have particular expertise that provides enrichment of the curriculum. The new school was opened in 2000 and the accommodation is very good and very well maintained. The playground is a good asset to the school and there are plans to develop the grounds further to establish a garden and quiet areas.

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and there is a well-planned curriculum.
- There is very good provision for personal, social and emotional development.
- There are very good relationships, which promote very positive attitudes and very good behaviour.
- The accommodation is very good and there are good resources.
- The use of the outdoor area is yet to be developed fully.

Commentary

40. The provision for the youngest children in the school in the Foundation Stage of learning is good and has been maintained since the previous inspection. The children come into school with attainment, which is broadly typical for their age. Their achievement is at least good in all the areas of learning, and is very good in personal, social and emotional development. By the end of the Reception Year the majority are on course to reach the Early Learning Goals and a few are likely to exceed these. This is due to the good teaching overall in the Foundation Stage and the very good approach to the children's personal, social and emotional development. The staff have a good understanding of the needs of young children, and how they learn, especially through play, and about the curriculum for this age group. Plans are good, with clear indications of what the children are to learn, based on good assessment of their skills, what they already know and can do. Activities build successfully on these to ensure good continuity and progression. The staff engage and motivate the children very well, with a good level of challenge, and teaching methods are effective. Resources are used well in lessons and sessions are well-managed with a good pace. Deployment of staff and the support they give the children are very good and all of the children are given good opportunities to be involved in the full range of activities provided. There is a well-planned and balanced curriculum offered which covers the six areas of learning. The Early Learning Goals are clearly identified within planning to ensure all the children, including those identified with special educational needs who make good progress, receive the full entitlement to the curriculum for their age group. The children have a good start in their education, as the staff plan interesting, motivating and challenging activities in which the children make good progress. The staff are very aware of the need to develop the use of the new outdoor area to enhance the children's learning still further.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The provision for personal, social and emotional development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children's very positive attitudes and very good behaviour.
- Very positive relationships and input from staff.
- Very good responses from children.

Commentary

41. The staff have created a very welcoming atmosphere, conducive to learning, where the children feel secure, happy and settled. The children are friendly, secure in a very positive approach from the adults who care for them and from visitors to the school. They are confident enough to share their ideas, suggestions and make contributions, because they know that adults in the school, value what they have to say and respect their opinions. The

children are learning to be responsible, helpful and behave very well in school. They are encouraged to be confident in their emerging abilities, to share fairly and to take turns. The staff carefully plan what the children are to do in daily routines to encourage them to be involved in the running of the classroom. The good range of activities which the staff provide enable the children to choose from a selection, concentrate and persevere at their chosen tasks, and to become increasingly independent in their learning. By the end of reception children have achieved very well in this aspect of their curriculum.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

The provision for communication, language and literacy is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and well-structured sessions in literacy.
- Good opportunities for the children to write, make marks and symbols on paper to indicate meaning.
- Good support for the children's imaginative role-play.
- The book 'corner' is not very comfortable or inviting.

Commentary

42. The staff provide a clearly structured programme of activities in literacy and promoting language and listening skills through sharing and using books and listening to stories. They also offer the children good experiences to develop their ideas about the sounds that letters make in words. There are good opportunities for the children to practise their skills in making marks on paper and their emerging skills in writing are developing well. There is a large area set aside for role-play which the staff use very well to support the children's acquisition of language and to develop their own ideas based on previous experiences. There is a small book area, but at present this is located in 'Learning Street', and the children do not choose to look at books there very often. However, they sometimes share books together in the role-play area and this is a good dual use of the available space, which could be developed further. Nevertheless they are learning that print has meaning and through their work in writing in their planning books can convey messages about what they have learned each day at the different activities. By the end of reception children are achieving the early learning goal in this aspect of the Foundation Stage.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

The provision for mathematical development is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching to promote mathematical understanding.
- Some opportunities to reinforce mathematical ideas are missed.

Commentary

43. The children are learning to count accurately to ten and beyond, some children can count accurately to twenty and they are grasping the idea of groups of numbers and adding these together. The staff reinforce mathematical language effectively, ensuring the children understand the idea of 'more', 'less' and making comparisons. There are regular routines to talk about numbers, for example, the number of children present. However, sometimes, these opportunities are not used sufficiently to develop the children's ideas, for instance making comparisons between the numbers of children staying for school dinner and those having a packed lunch. However, planned activities are used well to reinforce the children's understanding about numbers and counting, related to the current topics. For example, the

children had great fun counting the number of 'buttons' and the shapes they used, as they decorated their gingerbread men biscuits with sweets and icing. Children are achieving the early learning goal in mathematics by the end of reception.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

The provision for knowledge and understanding of the world is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good experiences in exploring and investigating materials.
- Good work in designing and making models.

Commentary

44. Children do not always take advantage of the opportunities to use the computers, and these are not always specifically planned as directed activities to encourage the children to participate. The quality of teaching and learning in knowledge and understanding of the world is good. The children are encouraged effectively by the staff to be observant and the recent visit to Beamish museum has been used well to develop the children's ideas, for example, to think about the past and to examine different artefacts and question how things work and their purpose. The children have good experiences in using recycled materials and tools and implements to make models. This work is also reinforced well by the staff, who provide a good range of construction equipment for the children to develop their skills in building and creating models. There are two computers in the Reception classroom which the children use, but this type of work is not specifically identified within planning. When staff encourage the children to use the computers the children's learning benefits and this supports their progress in other areas of the curriculum. By the end of reception children are achieving results typical for their age.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

The provision for physical development is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and a well-planned curriculum.
- Good opportunities to move with co-ordination, control and imagination.
- A new, very imaginative and challenging piece of climbing apparatus outdoors.
- Very good outdoor space, with an appropriate safety surface.

Commentary

45. There is a well-planned programme of activities to ensure the children's physical development is progressing well. The school uses additional material resources from businesses, and this has benefited the staff's development in devising imaginative activities for the children to respond to and develop their ideas through movement. The recent addition of the outdoor area and the new apparatus are of great benefit to this area of learning. The children at present use the range of smaller pieces of apparatus in the school hall to develop their skills in climbing, balancing and jumping, which they manage well. Their hand control skills are well promoted through the use of a good range of writing implements, various tools and, for example, using musical instruments. Children are reaching standards typical for their age and their achievement is good by the end of reception.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

The provision for creative development is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good range of interesting activities to explore using the senses.
- Good variety of materials to inspire children.

Commentary

46. There are good opportunities for the children to explore a range of substances and ingredients using their senses. For example, the staff were very adept at helping the children explore flavours and aromas when mixing and baking gingerbread. The staff provide a good variety of materials and media and support the children's imaginative play. They help the children to build their own scenarios and stories based on their previous experiences, for example from the recent visit to the museum at Beamish. The children are learning to explore sound and music and had great fun during the inspection, using musical instruments to discover how sounds are made and to accompany their singing. Children attain standards typical for their age by the end of their time in reception and their achievement is good.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 and 2

ENGLISH

Provision in English is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall, pupils attain above the average in English and the current Year 6 is on course to achieve well above the average because the teaching of literacy skills is good. This represents a good improvement since the last inspection.
- The school tracks the progress of its pupils very well, identifies their needs early and puts effective programmes of support into place for them.
- Writing is the weaker element in English, which the school identified as its priority for improvement. The action taken by the school, including the setting of pupil targets has resulted in significant improvements. The school has made a good start in identifying writing opportunities in other subjects. A more complete audit of writing opportunities in other subjects may improve standards in writing still further.
- The subject is well led and managed.

Commentary

47. The 2003 National test results showed that by the end of Year 6 standards in English were well above average standards nationally and when compared to similar schools. At the end of Year 2, pupils attained above the national average in reading and writing and well above the average in reading compared to similar schools and in line with the average in writing. This represents good improvement since the last inspection.
48. Achievement is good in English overall, including writing, because pupils enter school with broadly average attainment and by the time they leave they are either above or well above the average, depending on their respective ability. Of the current Year 6 pupils, approximately one-third are confidently working at the higher level L5 now, while the rest of the class, with two to three exceptions, are already achieving the expected level L4. On this current performance, the school is likely to attain well above the average in English and to meet the ambitious targets that have been set for them. This is due to effective teaching and

very good systems for tracking pupil progress. Crucially, the setting of individual writing targets for pupils to reach, which teachers refer to in their very good quality marking and which is consistently applied by all teachers, has been instrumental in pupils' good improvement.

49. The pupils make good progress because of good lesson planning, which effectively takes into account the different abilities of pupils. This was well exemplified in a very good Year 1 lesson, in which the teacher had not only ensured the objective of the lesson centred on the story of the Three Billy Goats Gruff was clearly understood, but that the activities set for the range of abilities of pupils was appropriate and challenging. For example, lower attaining pupils were given the task of consolidating their letter recognition and building simple words, other pupils used puppets to retell the story to develop their speaking and listening skills, while a third group of higher attainers wrote the story in their own words. Similarly, in a good lesson with Year 6 pupils on developing plot, character and structure in stories with a dilemma, pupils were given related tasks in line with their abilities.
50. In all lessons, questions were distributed well around the class to encourage wide participation, including lower attaining pupils. Furthermore, the questions were designed not only to draw out knowledge from the pupils but also to develop their inferential and reasoning skills. Effective summary sessions drew together the main teaching points based on feedback from the pupils.
51. Teachers have good subject expertise as a result of the National Literacy Strategy but their expectations of what pupils could do had been too low in the past. This is not the case now. Teachers encourage and insist on the best from everyone. This recent improvement is a consequence of high expectations and the early identification of where help is needed and the support given in booster classes and extending the opportunities for writing in English lessons. This strategy could be usefully extended into other subjects in the curriculum. Marking is very good and provides pupils with a clear understanding about what they need to do to improve. Pupils with special educational needs and higher attaining pupils make similar progress to their classmates. This is achieved by early identification of their needs and the effective help given by class teachers.
52. Pupils speak confidently and in detail. Confidence in speaking in public develops well through many opportunities for pupils to take part in assemblies, performances and presentations in class. In an excellent assembly, Year 2 pupils spoke at length on the theme of 'home', with great confidence and virtually no prompting. Their voices were clear and their diction good. The vast majority of pupils can hold a conversation well, responding appropriately and offering reasoned explanations. Because of the good working atmosphere and interest in lessons pupils learn a lot by listening to each other and sharing ideas.
53. Pupils understand how books are organised in the library and can find the appropriate information readily. They use literacy hours well to improve the pupils' reading skills. Nearly all pupils read their own and other pupils' writing accurately by the end of Year 6 and can use dictionaries and thesauruses effectively to improve the quality of their work. The use and development of reading in other subjects is good and contributes well to the standards the school attains in reading. In geography and history, for example, pupils use a wide range of reference books and sources to gather and select information. Teachers use the electronic whiteboard well to reference a wide range of material and pupils use computers effectively to draft their work.
54. Throughout the school, teachers use literacy lessons well to build up pupils' experience of writing in a wide range of forms. For example, they write stories, letters, brochures, drama scripts and poems. Standards of spelling are good because marking becomes a conversation between teacher and pupil, encouraging development of these areas. Handwriting and presentation are of a good standard because teachers insist that work is presented well, no matter what the level of attainment of the pupil may be.

55. The quality of teaching and learning is good, overall. All lessons were at least satisfactory and most usually good. Reading and writing are well taught. Teachers implement the literacy strategy well and flexibly but also have the skills, enthusiasm and confidence to use direct whole class teaching very effectively. This is one of the main reasons for pupils' good achievements. Other important strengths of teaching are: very good relationships which encourage pupils of all levels of attainment and backgrounds to contribute well to learning in class; very good preparation, organisation and management of learning; and good expectations of what each pupil can achieve. This powerful combination stimulates high quality, purposeful language development that pupils greatly enjoy.
56. Good leadership and management of the subject have also contributed to good standards. This is because of very good teamwork, thoughtful exploration of needs and priorities and immediate responses to them.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

57. The development of literacy skills in other subjects is good. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills in other subject areas. Teachers, for example, encourage pupils to provide feedback orally on the work they have been doing. These are cogent, well-reasoned explanations, which help pupils improve their speaking skills. Pupils are given many opportunities to give oral presentations to the whole school in assemblies, performances and to discuss their aims in 'circle time' where they learn the value of listening and building on what their peers say.
58. Pupils are required to read extensively in most subjects from a variety of formats. They too, have a wide experience of writing in a variety of styles, for example, when they write an account of an experiment in science or produce a piece of persuasive writing in geography on tourism. In history too, they are required to read and understand a range of source material and record their findings in pieces of analytical and discursive writing. These opportunities to extend literacy skills are included in other subjects and the school is using history extensively to develop pupils' abilities to write at length. This strategy could be extended by making a formal audit of potential opportunities in other subjects.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have improved since the last inspection and are above average by the end of Year 2 and well above average by the end of Year 6.
- Pupils learn and achieve well because of the very good teaching throughout the school.
- The subject is well monitored and pupil performance data analysed but pupils are currently not given targets towards which they should work, although this is planned to be introduced in the spring term.

Commentary

59. Pupils are achieving standards well above the average for their age and their achievement is good. Teachers use the National Numeracy Strategy to good effect to provide a structured approach to learning. No matter what their ability, pupils work hard and produce a high volume of work that reflects all aspects of the subject. Tasks are adapted to suit each ability level and pupils with special educational needs are supported well during lessons, enabling them to take a full and active part. As a result, pupils with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well. Pupils' interest is caught and maintained good. Teachers use the National Numeracy Strategy to good effect to by imaginative approaches to lessons, as in Year 2 when the teacher set work on halves and quarters in the context of a factory.

As a machine produced half the number of cubes, pupils were asked to predict what the whole number would be. Later they were challenged to build a dinosaur from unfixed cubes so that the colours reflected either halves or quarters of the whole. The combination of structured planning, effective use of good resources and imaginative delivery has raised standards throughout the school so that they are above average by the end of Year 2 and well above average by the end of Year 6. A recently introduced mathematics club for pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 has further enriched the numeracy curriculum.

60. Teaching and pupils' learning in lessons seen were very good. Lessons start with a brisk mental arithmetic session which pupils enjoy. Good use was made of individual whiteboards in Years 5 and 6, which ensured that all pupils were actively involved and the teacher could assess how well pupils were understanding the work. Teachers' own subject knowledge is very good and they use investigational approaches to the subject well to challenge and develop pupils' thinking skills. Interactive computer screens in Years 4 to 6 are very well used in lessons to illustrate concepts and demonstrate calculations. The quality of teachers' questions and their focus on mathematical vocabulary also help to develop pupils' learning. They give pupils time to explain the strategies they have used to reach their answers and this both develops speaking and listening skills and provides alternate models of working. Their high expectations of pupil performance, behaviour and work rate ensure learning is purposeful and levels of achievement are high.
61. The subject leader and the headteacher work closely together to analyse pupils' performance in national tests. She also monitors lessons and the work in pupils' books. As a result she gives very good leadership to the subject, as she is very aware of strengths and weaknesses throughout the school. When she discovers a whole school weakness she addresses it with a whole school initiative such as the recent focus on marking. This has raised the standard of marking so that it now includes both affirming remarks, and questions that challenge pupils' thinking further. She recognises that if pupils were set short-term achievable targets, towards which they should work, they could take more responsibility for their own learning, but this is not planned to happen until the spring term.

Mathematics across the curriculum

62. Mathematical skills are used in science when data is presented in the form of bar charts and graphs. Pupils use their measuring skills in design and technology, and in geography they carry out surveys, analyse data and use co-ordinates in map work.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards, which have risen since the last inspection, are above average at the end of Year 2 and well above the average in Year 6 and pupils achieve well.
- The strong focus on scientific enquiry – investigation and practical experiments – enthuses pupils, giving good support to their understanding whilst enhancing their thinking skills.
- The careful analysis of test results has enabled the school to determine weak areas in teaching and to focus on improving them, which has raised the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school.
- The school does not set individual targets for pupils in science so that they can take full responsibility for their own learning.

Commentary

63. Inspection evidence shows that pupils in Year 6 are continuing the improvement in science attainment shown over the last three years. They have a good knowledge and understanding of all the main strands of the subject and have mastered such skills as planning a fair test, using scientific equipment and recording findings in a variety of ways. This is the culmination of good teaching throughout the school. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils, deliver lessons at a good pace and develop scientific vocabulary well. They match pupils appropriately with tasks and have extension work available for those of higher ability so their interest is maintained and developed. Teachers have a good rapport with their pupils and target very good quality questions to encourage pupils of different abilities to respond. They create an atmosphere in which pupils may make mistakes without embarrassment. As a result, pupils are learning to think scientifically and can apply their knowledge and skills to new ideas and concepts. Teachers present well-planned lessons imaginatively, usually through investigations, allowing pupils to develop their subject knowledge from concrete evidence.

Example of outstanding practice

In this excellent lesson, pupils learned how to increase the luminosity of a bulb.

Mr. Grindling was desperate! The lighthouse light was failing. What could he do? Could Year 2 help? His letter was read with earnest concern and pupils responded to the challenge. In an excellent link with their work in literacy on "The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch", their teacher had created a real life dilemma for pupils to resolve. Her excellent questioning, very careful planning and use of resources motivated pupils and created an excellent learning opportunity for them to explore and apply their knowledge about electricity. Pupils experimented confidently and deduced that connecting batteries in series brightened the bulb. "It lit a little bit. Then we put two battery holders in and one battery in each. It lit up more with two." The quality of the lesson illustrates well why standards in science in the school are rising.

64. As well as analysing test results, the subject leader monitors pupils' books and teachers' lesson plans. During the year, she sees all staff teaching science so has a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the subject. As a result, she arranges training for staff when she feels it necessary – last year it was to encourage them to teach through investigations. She manages the curriculum well and alerts other staff to areas she believes to be weak. As a result, the school is currently addressing the delivery of 'Materials and their properties'. Although pupils' are assessed at the end of each unit of work, no system has yet been devised to build on the results by giving pupils individual targets to work towards.
65. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Results and achievement, particularly for higher attaining pupils, and investigative science are now strong.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quantity and quality of resources, both hardware and software, have been significantly improved since the last inspection.
- Good use is made of classroom computers to support pupils' learning in other subjects.
- Good leadership and good resource management have improved provision and afford good support for teachers and pupils.
- Limited computer access and "hands on" opportunities are inhibiting pupils' achievement in the subject.

Commentary

66. Since the time of the last inspection, the school has invested heavily to improve provision within the subject. Obsolete computers have been replaced, inter-active whiteboards have been installed and the school is about to open an excellently equipped computer suite. This will provide a computer: pupil ratio of 1:7 so that the school will have better computer provision than most. However, the majority of these computers are located in the suite, the opening of which has been delayed by technical problems. Despite this, a secure base for future improvement has been established. Pupils in Year 6 demonstrated their multi-media work on a series of slides that used text, graphics, animation, sound and images imported from photographs or the scanner. They demonstrated a range of skills and understanding of procedures and options that indicated a competency in the subject at least commensurate with most pupils of their age. Pupils in Year 2 demonstrated a similar expertise in their work with computers and talked enthusiastically and confidently about the word processing work they had done. They had particularly enjoyed creating pictures with “draw” tools and using shapes to generate art. They commanded a good vocabulary, knowing and explaining terms such as “highlighting” and “logging on” and an understanding of their purpose and use. Both groups would welcome more opportunities to work with computers but fully appreciated the need to ration time on classroom machines.
67. No lessons were observed during the inspection. It is, therefore, not possible to give secure judgements on the quality of teaching and learning. Judgements on standards at the end of Years 2 and 6 are typical for their age and are made on the basis of work done by pupils and conversations with them, supported by examination of planning and discussion with teachers. Teachers’ subject expertise has been greatly enhanced by good quality training and the support of the local high school which has also allowed pupils to use their suite whilst waiting for the completion of their own. This was negotiated between the schools and reflects the good, pro-active role of the subject leader.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

68. Classroom computers are well and actively used for at least half of the school day. A good, and improving, range of software and access to the Internet is used to support learning in other subjects, particularly in English, mathematics, geography, history and art and design. Work in science is enhanced by the use of a digital microscope, and pupils in Year 3 were seen using this to view particles in different kinds of soil. Pupils use a digital camera to record their work in subjects such as design and technology and physical education as well as for visits. Programmable toys are used to experience directional instruction and support work on co-ordinates in geography and mathematics.

HUMANITIES

The provision for geography and history is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in geography and history are above the average expected by the end of Year 6 and achievement is good.
- There is an appropriate emphasis on teaching investigative and enquiry skills in these subjects as well as knowledge.

Geography

Commentary

69. Overall, standards are above what is expected of pupils in Years 1 and 2 and achievement is good. This represents an improvement since the last inspection when standards were typical for their age. Two good geography lessons were seen during the inspection week and

judgements are based upon these observations and on work seen and conversations with pupils. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to others in the class. Very good attention is paid to developing pupils' geographical skills as well as increasing their knowledge about places.

70. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 develop the skills of mapping the immediate area through guided walks. Average attaining pupils can identify some principal features and explain their function. Higher attaining pupils can produce accurate pictures of the main features on their way to school and to distinguish between natural and built features. All pupils understand the function of how these features are represented on a map and how symbols are used.
71. By the end of Year 6, pupils have extended their geographical knowledge and skills and have attained standards above the average for pupils of this age. Their achievement is good. Year 3 pupils could identify different weather patterns from information about temperature and rainfall but they were not able to explain this pattern of weather as 'climate'. They can explain the distinguishing features of contrasting localities, for example, a major city and an area in which a national park is situated. They appreciate the impact that negative and positive features of tourism can have on areas of natural beauty. They can describe and explain the similarities and differences of mountain environments in different parts of the world. Their investigation of the topic 'rivers' is enhanced as part of Year 6's residential visit. This is also used to good effect in their study of a contrasting locality. Information and communication technology is used well to find information from the Internet.
72. Coordination of the subject is good. There is a good scheme of work in place and the coordinator monitors standards through sampling pieces of work and reviewing planning, but there is no overall view of standards in geography across the school.

History

Commentary

73. By the end of Years 2 and 6 standards are above those expected for their age, and pupils make good progress, including pupils with special educational needs. These standards have been maintained since the last inspection. Achievement is good. Evidence for this judgement is based on the observation of three lessons, pupils' work, displays of pupils' work and conversations with pupils. Good literacy skills contribute significantly to this attainment; the enthusiasm teachers have for history and the teachers' very good understanding of the requirements of history in the National Curriculum. Teaching and learning is enhanced through visits.
74. In Years 1 and 2 pupils develop a good understanding of 'now' and 'then' through topics such as 'Seaside holidays long ago' and through examining the differences between Victorian photographs and those of today. In a good Year 2 lesson, pupils successfully tackled the reasons for Great Fire of London spreading rapidly by sorting 'causes' and 'effects' cards into relevant and irrelevant. Pupils used very good reasoning skills and identified most of them accurately, even when some of the vocabulary used was difficult.
75. Pupils continue to develop their research skills as they progress through the school. In a very good Year 4 lesson, pupils were set the task of understanding the reasons for Henry VIII seeking a divorce. In order to understand the family relationships in the Tudor dynasty, pupils performed in a tableau so that they could understand who was related to who and what became of them. Pupils were then presented with two primary sources in the original, one of which represented Henry's public statement of his reasons for divorce, while the other represented his private reasons written in a letter. From these contrasting sources, pupils appreciated the difficulties of interpreting what really happened in the past. Pupils then collated this information into a letter to Cardinal Wolsey well, although guidance on structuring the piece of writing would have been helpful to the pupils.

76. Teaching and learning are good because activities are well planned, challenging and interesting. Very good relationships also contribute to successful learning.
77. The coordinator enjoys history, as do many of the teachers and pupils, and this is demonstrated through effective teaching and learning of history throughout the school. Opportunities are provided for the coordinator to monitor planning and samples of work. This would be further enhanced if there were means to identify standards of history across the school as areas for improvement could be more easily identified.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

Provision in art and design is good.

- Standards attained by pupils have improved since the last inspection and are now above average by the end of Years 2 and 6.
- Resources in the subject are good and afford opportunities for pupils to explore different media.
- Computers are used well to support learning in the subject.
- There are limited opportunities for three-dimensional work.

Commentary

78. Pupils' work in art and design has a high profile within the school. The quality of display is good and artistic elements contribute to work in all subjects throughout the school. A particularly strong feature is the painting that pupils have done as a result of studying the work of numerous artists, including Turner, MacIntosh, Warhol, Monet, Lowry and Bridget Riley. Year 2 pupils talking about their wall on "Blue", referred to the work of "Kirsty" – Kirsty Wither – as one of the starting points for the topic.
79. Paint as a medium is used well to explore many different styles and techniques. Two satisfactory lessons were seen and both were devoted to exploring colour mixing. Pupils in Year 3 were exploring mixes of "primary", "secondary" and "tertiary" colours and were able to explain the terms and had a clear understanding of the relationship between them. The care with which they considered and executed their work demonstrated their enjoyment of the subject.
80. No lessons of a more creative nature were observed but it was clear from displays around the school that this is a strong feature of the subject. Pupils experience a range of different opportunities including printing, collage and generating computer images and pictures. All pupils have sketchbooks that are used well for observational drawings of buildings, portraits and objects. Older pupils demonstrate good line and tonal qualities in their sketchbook work, indicating a systematic development in skill acquisition. There was evidence of wire sculptures and clay work, but three-dimensional work is generally more limited and the school relies heavily on the use of the kiln at a local high school.
81. The subject leader manages the subject well and has successfully encouraged the inclusion of art in many subjects throughout the school. Resources for art and design are good. This is one of the improvements since the last inspection. Others are the standards pupils attain, their achievement and the quality of teaching and learning.

Design and technology

Provision in design and technology is good.

Strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average by the end of Year 6.
- There are good resources for the subject.

Commentary

82. Only one lesson was seen in design and technology, which was very good, but pupils' work was studied and pupils were interviewed about it in order to come to a judgement about standards. The subject was discussed with the subject leader and teacher guidance for the subject was examined. Standards are above average throughout the school and the quality of pupils' work is good. Although the school follows the latest national guidance for the subject, teachers adapt this well to local opportunities to enrich the subject. Following work on designing a torch, pupils in Year 4 had been commissioned by the local council to make lanterns for the Houghton Feast. They have since followed this up with a visit to the Mines Rescue Centre where they saw and investigated Davy lamps. Achievement is good throughout the school as pupils understand the need for clearly annotated design briefs, carefully executed products and honest evaluations that will help them to improve their work and enhance their skills. They are frequently given the opportunity to make reasoned choices for the materials and tools they will use. Samples of pupils' work from across the school have been collected but not assessed and annotated to provide a useful resource portfolio for all staff to judge overall standards in the subject. Design and technology alternates with art and design in half termly blocks and pupils' work is assessed before each change. Good improvement has been made since the last inspection, when resources were barely adequate and pupils were not allowed to think for themselves.

Music

The provision in music is satisfactory.

Strengths and weaknesses

- There are good resources for the subject.

Commentary

83. In addition to observing lessons, inspectors had discussions with pupils, listened to pupils singing and discussed work with subject co-ordinators.
84. The standards and the pupils' achievement in music are average across the school. The lessons were observed in Years 2 and 4 were satisfactory and the pupils were also heard singing in assemblies. The standards in the Year 2 lesson were at the expected level for this age group; indications are from other evidence that pupils in Year 6 also achieve at an appropriate level. In the Year 4 lesson the standards were good, as the pupils could create their own melody to illustrate a poem, using the pentatonic scale. There is good evidence in each classroom of the appropriate work the pupils cover in music. Resources are good, musical instruments are of very good quality and are used properly in lessons. The accommodation is used effectively to ensure the pupils can practise their music making and not disturb others. The school uses national guidelines and a commercial scheme to teach music, this ensures all the required elements of the music curriculum are followed and offers good guidance to staff who are non-specialists.
85. In lessons observed the pupils were being given appropriate guidance overall to use the correct musical terms, such as 'pitch', 'drone' and 'beat'. In Year 2 they were learning how to develop their ideas about pitch, to create an accompaniment to a song they had learned. Their singing of 'Listen to the Chorus of the Brontosaurus' was good, with good emphasis on appropriate words and a tuneful delivery. In Year 4, the pupils' efforts to make their own melodies were successful and they produced good effects to accompany the poem they had written. The staff prepare music lessons well, and make sure they are well informed, using the scheme of work effectively to deliver the subject. The use of the new scheme has helped to develop the staff's confidence in how to teach music. Pupils sing well overall, they enjoy their singing and are aware of themselves and others as performers.

86. The headteacher is acting as co-ordinator at present and has monitored the pupils' work through assemblies, checked planning for coverage, observed lessons and interviewed pupils on how they feel about music in the school. There is a good scheme provided from Year 5 onwards, whereby pupils can opt to learn to play a musical instrument for which there is a nominal charge. They are able to continue this through Year 6 if they wish and an instrument is provided for their use. Progress in music since the previous inspection is satisfactory but there is a need to determine overall standards in music in the school so that areas for improvement can be easily identified.

Physical education

The provision for physical education is satisfactory.

Strengths and weaknesses

None.

Commentary

87. Lessons in physical education (PE) were observed in Years 1, 2 and 5. Standards and achievement in Year 2 are at the expected level for these age groups, but it is not possible to come to a firm judgement on standards in Year 6. However, the pupils in Year 5 already have good skills in dance and can use their bodies to create well-co-ordinated movements with a good degree of control. In lessons, the teaching and learning observed was satisfactory overall, with an example of very good teaching in Year 5. This very good teaching resulted from very good management of the pupils, with very firm control and a good awareness of safety and the necessity for everyone involved, including staff, to be appropriately dressed, with correct footwear or bare feet. Satisfactory lessons sometimes did not offer enough appropriate pace and challenge, especially for the younger pupils in Year 1.
88. From evidence in planning, and discussions with pupils and the headteacher, who acts as co-ordinator, there is a good, well-rounded curriculum of activities in PE. The programme of activities includes for example, gymnastics, dance, games and swimming. The subject has been maintained since the previous inspection, with evidence of good progress in dance for the older pupils. Pupils in Year 6 are swimming at the appropriate level by the time they leave.
89. Further evidence of the school's success in promoting PE is the award of an 'Activemark', which the headteacher intends to develop by applying for the next stage in the scheme. Resources are adequate overall, with some good, lightweight equipment for games, but there is no large climbing apparatus in the hall at present, although this is on order. Leadership and management of PE are good overall, with good, effective and systematic monitoring and evaluation but there is no overall view about standards in the subject. There is a good range of clubs and other sporting activities to promote PE in the school and there is a highly successful sports day, which is held each year. The pupils also participate in local events such as Houghton Feast. All these activities are beneficial to encourage them to be active and develop their skills.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

It was not possible to make a judgement about provision.

Commentary

90. The school's work in Personal, Social, and Health Education and Citizenship (PSHE&C) is good. There is a strong ethos within the school, which promotes this aspect of the pupil's learning successfully. There is a clear programme for health education covering in Year 6 sex and relationships education, and puberty and which also raises pupils' awareness of the dangers of drugs. This work is also linked to science throughout the school. The cross age pastoral groups are also beneficial in supporting the pupils' social and personal skills, and enabling them to maintain the very good relationships between older and younger pupils that exist within the school. The school council and friendship systems are used effectively to promote the pupils' sense of being part of a community, being responsible and making friends, especially with the younger children in the school.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	2
How inclusive the school is	2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2
Value for money provided by the school	2
Overall standards achieved	2
Pupils' achievement	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	2
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	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	2
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	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	1
The leadership of other key staff	2
The effectiveness of management	2

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