

INSPECTION REPORT

ST THOMAS MOORSIDE C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL

Oldham

LEA area: Oldham

Unique reference number: 105695

Headteacher: Mr A Laskey

Lead inspector: Mrs L Read

Dates of inspection: 22-24 March 2004

Inspection number: 257977

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:	3-11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	144.5
School address:	Coleridge Road Sholver Oldham Greater Manchester
Postcode:	OL1 4RL
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr E Crompton
Date of previous inspection:	14/9/1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Thomas Moorside CE Primary is a smaller than average school with 145 pupils on roll. It is situated on the outskirts of Oldham and the vast majority of housing is provided by the local authority. Social and economic circumstances are well below average and children entering the reception class have a range of learning experiences and attainments that are well below average for the age group. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (33 per cent) is well above average, some of these have difficulties with learning, behaviour or speech. The school caters for children at a nearby hostel, most of whom have experienced major disruptions to family life. The incidence of pupils entering and leaving the school part way through their education for last year was 60 per cent and this is exceptionally high. This situation has stabilised somewhat since the appointment of the new headteacher. Two per cent of the school population has a statement of special educational needs and this is above the national average. Around 38 per cent of pupils claim their entitlement to free school meals which is above average. Most pupils are of white, British background and a few have European or Caribbean heritage. All but three pupils speak English as their first language. In recognition of the work done, St Thomas's holds the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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19361	K Ross	Lay inspector	
30243	A Heakin	Team inspector	Geography History Physical education Special educational needs Foundation Stage
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school provides a satisfactory and improving education for its pupils. Since the appointment of the new headteacher in the autumn term 2003, standards have risen and pupils now have very good attitudes and good behaviour. Teaching is good and, as a result, pupils achieve well in their lessons. Leadership is good and management is satisfactory. The school provides sound value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The headteacher provides a very clear vision for future developments. The staff are firmly committed to further improvements and to raising standards.
- Achievement in English, mathematics and science lessons is good. Standards are higher in science than maths and English.
- The provision in the Foundation Stage (nursery and reception classes) and for pupils who have special educational needs is very good.
- Skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) are not promoted well enough through other subject studies.
- There is very good provision for pupils' personal development. As a result, pupils have very good attitudes, they behave well and there are very good relationships.
- The school has good partnerships with other schools and agencies that support learning well.
- There is no consistent system for assessment in subjects other than English and mathematics and the system for tracking pupils' progress in Years 3, 4 and 5 does not provide enough information for managers and governors to monitor performance.
- The procedures for subject managers to monitor the new curriculum are not fully developed.

Improvements

Standards declined until very recently and improvement since the previous inspection is therefore unsatisfactory overall. Following the action taken by the new headteacher, pupils' achievement has risen sharply. Since the appointment there have also been good improvements in pupils' attitudes and behaviour and, consequently, in the quality of teaching and learning. The issues from the last inspection have been addressed fully.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*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.*

Pupils are now achieving well throughout the school. Over the past four years, standards were too low and were declining. This is shown in the results of Year 6 national tests which were in the lowest five per cent nationally and well below the average of all similar schools. There were a number of reasons for these unsatisfactory standards, including widespread misbehaviour and pupils' poor attitudes. The intervention of the local authority and the appointment of the new headteacher, with a clear agenda for improvement, have rapidly turned the school around and rising standards are now clearly evident. The inspection finds that attitudes and behaviour are good features, standards in Year 6 are now average in science and below average but rising in English and mathematics. When children enter the nursery, their prior learning is well below that usually

seen; language and personal skills are poor. They make very good progress in all areas of learning in the Foundation Stage class and, by the time they start Year 1, their attainment is very much improved but is still below average. In Year 2 standards in mathematics are average and in reading and writing they are just below average and improving. Attainment in the other subjects that were fully inspected, including ICT, is broadly average except for geography where it is below. Pupils who have special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language have very good support and their achievement is similar to that of the majority of pupils. Boys and girls achieve equally well in lessons.

Attitudes

The school promotes pupils' spiritual and cultural development well and provision for moral and social development is very good. The resulting good standards of pupils' behaviour and their very positive attitudes underpin the good learning now seen. Attendance rates are below average. Punctuality is improving with the development of the breakfast club.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is satisfactory overall and teaching is good.

Teaching: The quality of teaching is good in Years 1 to 6 and promotes good learning. In the Foundation Stage teaching and learning are very good. Teaching assistants bring a good range of talents and experience to the school; they make a major contribution to learning.

Curriculum: New planning for the curriculum has been introduced that provides a sound balance in promoting pupils' academic, creative, physical and aesthetic skills. The plans cater for the needs of pupils in the mixed-age groups successfully. There is insufficient use of English, mathematics and ICT when working on other subjects and this is an area for improvement. The accommodation and resources have been much improved and are now satisfactory.

Care and guidance are satisfactory. There are strengths and one weakness. The care for pupils who have special educational and social needs is very good. Pupils form trusting relationships with adults and feel safe. Supervision is very good and learning mentors enhance activities and facilities for pupils' leisure time very effectively. Systems to ensure pupils' safety are satisfactory. Assessment procedures are sound in English and mathematics but unsatisfactory in other subjects.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is good overall and is driving the school forward successfully. The headteacher provides very good leadership. **There are many strengths in the school's management but some areas require further development. It is satisfactory overall.** The target setting system for Years 3, 4 and 5 is not sufficiently developed to provide information for managers to check pupils' performance against expectations and there is no timetabled system for checking and evaluating the new curriculum. Governors have a sound overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses and ensure that legal requirements are met. Governance is satisfactory.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The results of the parents' questionnaires, discussions and meetings show that parents and pupils have positive views of the school. There is a good amount of information for parents about the curriculum and school life. The partnership with the resident social worker supports the good links between home and school effectively.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- develop the use of English, mathematical and ICT skills in other subjects;
- *provide systems for assessing and recording pupils' progress in subjects other than English and mathematics;

- *develop further the long term target setting system for Years 3, 4 and 5 in English and mathematics to provide better information for managers to check pupils' performance;
- *develop systems for monitoring the effectiveness of the new curriculum.

*These areas had already been identified by the school as requiring further development.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects

Standards seen during the inspection in English and mathematics are **below average** by Year 6. In science attainment is broadly **average**. Achievement in the Foundation Stage is **very good** and it is **good overall** in Years 1 to 6.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In lessons seen, achievement is good although standards are below average in English and mathematics.
- There has been a good improvement in achievement recently, especially in Years 3 to 6.
- Achievement in the Foundation Stage (nursery and reception class) is very good although standards are below average.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language achieve well in relation to their starting points.

Commentary

1. When children enter the nursery, their skills and knowledge are well below those expected for the age group and poor in language and personal development. They attend full-time for two years. By the end of the reception year, attainment has risen well but remains below the expected levels overall, especially in language development. Children make very good progress and have varied opportunities to explore, ask questions and to become independent learners.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
Reading	13.7 (14.4)	15.7 (15.8)
Writing	12.3 (14.9)	14.6 (14.4)
Mathematics	15 (16.3)	16.3 (16.5)

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

2. The test results, as shown in the table above, were well below national averages but, when compared to schools in similar circumstances, they were average for reading and writing and above average for mathematics. In lessons seen during the inspection, standards for the present Year 2 group are just below average in reading, below average in writing and around average in mathematics. The main factors behind the lower attainment in reading and writing are the poor level of skills in these areas when children begin school and the fact that around one-third of pupils have special educational needs relating to language. Taking these factors into consideration, pupils achieve well. Higher standards were seen in Year 1 and this is a promising indicator for the future. In reading and writing, some of the Year 1 pupils are making very good progress.
3. Most pupils in Year 2 read with confidence but others are still acquiring the basic skills. A small group works on early reading and writing skills in a target group taken by the teaching assistant. They are making good progress along their programme of work and developing their abilities to use a range of cues when reading new text. Around two thirds of pupils write in generally well punctuated sentences and make logical attempts at spelling. Pupils are developing neat handwriting, paying good attention to the formation and positioning of letters. In mathematics, pupils are confident in calculating mentally and have a sound understanding of

shape, measures and in producing graphs and charts. The trend in attainment for mathematics has been upwards for the last two years and is set to rise further. The trend for reading in the same period is upwards and in writing, there has been a slight improvement overall.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	20.6 (24)	26.8 (27)
Mathematics	22.8 (24.8)	26.8 (26.7)
Science	24.9 (25.4)	28.6 (28.3)

There were 17 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

4. The test results are lower than at the time of the previous inspection and the 2003 results were very low for all subjects when compared to national averages. In comparison with those of similar schools, results were very low in English and well below average in mathematics and science. The results reflect a time when the school was recognised as being in major difficulties and the local authority stepped in to provide support. The records show a deterioration in the standards of behaviour over this period of declining results that led to a very serious and adverse effect on learning, particularly in Years 3 to 6.
5. Since the appointment of the new headteacher, behaviour has improved to a good standard and achievement is now good although standards for the present Year 6 group are still below average. This class is very small and 60 per cent of the pupils have special educational needs. There has been a major exit of pupils from this year group to attend other schools and just 80 per cent of the pupils in the year have received all of their education at St Thomas's. They have had the benefit of a much improved learning environment for just over one term and the class teacher is working very hard to help the pupils to catch up.
6. In Year 5, standards in English, mathematics and science are on target to be around average by the end of the school year, if the pupils continue to learn and make progress at the good rate seen during the inspection. Pupils read with sound levels of understanding and they write in various fiction and non-fiction styles. Grammar and punctuation are sound and spelling is improving as pupils make better use of their knowledge of word patterns and derivations. In mathematics, pupils compute accurately and they apply their mathematical knowledge well when solving problems.
7. Attainment in ICT across the school matches expectations. Pupils have frequent access to computers, so they learn the basic skills effectively. They do not, however, have enough opportunities to apply their skills when studying other subjects. Similarly, skills in English and mathematics are not consistently consolidated in other lessons. Attainment in music and physical education meets with expectations but in geography it is below. There was insufficient evidence to judge standards in art and design, history and design and technology.
8. Pupils who have special educational needs achieve well. This is because the school quickly identifies any difficulties that pupils experience and teachers take appropriate action in assessing their requirements, consulting with the special needs co-ordinator and adapting their teaching methods appropriately. This is especially true of those pupils who have emotional or behaviour difficulties and the vulnerable children. Through good interventions by teachers and the support team, they are enabled to access the full curriculum and are making good progress. Those pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as the majority of the pupils; they benefit from the school's good emphasis on speaking and listening and timely interventions from their teachers who routinely check understanding. Boys and girls progress equally well in class.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' behaviour is **good**, their attitudes are **very good**. Provision for personal development including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils meet the school's high expectations of conduct.
- Relationships within the school are very good.
- Pupils respect other people's feelings, values and beliefs.
- The school provides very good opportunities to help pupils to develop their confidence, to reflect and to take responsibility.
- The school works closely with parents to eliminate inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour.
- Attendance is lower than average.

Commentary

9. Children in the nursery and reception classes develop their personal and social skills very well.
10. In the intervening period since the last inspection, the standards of behaviour, mainly in Years 3 to 6, had deteriorated to a poor level and were affecting pupils' learning very seriously. This is reflected in the low test results for Year 6 pupils in 2002 and 2003. The new headteacher has made excellent improvements, these include:
 - the introduction of clear guidelines that pupils fully understand and are consistently followed by staff;
 - the provision of a good system of rewards and sanctions that pupils value;
 - good support by the learning mentors, the community social worker and a specialist teaching assistant;
 - development of a good range of activities for pupils' leisure time to keep them well occupied;The impact of this work, combined with the commitment of all of the staff, has resulted in much improved behaviour that is now good. Pupils now respond well to their teachers' high expectations and demonstrate very good attitudes to learning. This represents a good improvement since the previous inspection.
11. The appointment of a social worker and learning mentors, together with help and advice from a specialist school, have contributed considerably to the improvement. The designated staff work very closely with the teachers and are constantly present around school, encouraging those pupils who have difficulties to conform to expectations. The mentors provide a wide range of lunchtime and after-school activities, and through these sessions, pupils learn to play together sociably, accept they cannot always have their own way, and learn to value each other. Relationships are very good. The 'Friends of St Thomas' have played their part by allocating money for a very interesting range of play equipment, sufficient for all the pupils. The result is that pupils rarely get into trouble because they are happily occupied.
12. Discussion with older pupils reveals that they recognise the improvements in relationships, describing previous behaviour as 'rubbish'. One pupil explained that he has time with the mentor who helps him to develop strategies to control his feelings. He was very positive about this support, and appreciated that he was now doing much better in school. A good innovation is the 'Always' badge introduced by the new head teacher. Those pupils who consistently observe the five 'golden promises' wear it with pride. However, transgressions lead to the forfeit of the badge and, without it, pupils are unable to join in any of the extra activities or carry out jobs around school. This provides powerful motivation and works very well. All staff, including non-teaching personnel, work hard to maintain a calm atmosphere, free from anti-social behaviour. They are caring and vigilant, making sure that any potential problems whether at the breakfast club, in lessons, or around school are dealt with swiftly.

13. Pupils' spiritual development is good. Acts of worship are an integral part of school life, enabling pupils to explore religious beliefs. The inclusive ethos of the school makes it a place where all pupils are valued, and in turn they learn to value themselves and each other. Adults are good role models and teachers encourage pupils to express their own thoughts and ideas.
14. The provision for moral development is very good. The impact of the behaviour measures means that pupils respect the moral codes of the school and take responsibility for their own actions. The pupils know how seriously the teachers view any form of oppressive behaviour and they are clear about whom they should turn to for help, should the need arise.
15. Provision for social development is very good. Though the school does not have a fully functioning school council, pupils are consulted about developments; for example they decide which equipment should be bought for the playground. In lessons, teachers provide frequent opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively, which they do very well. Pupils are helped to resolve conflicts and to recognise the balance between privilege and responsibility. There are good opportunities to enrich pupils' sense of community; the choir sings for elderly people and members of the gardening club work to enhance the natural environment. Pupils appreciate the plight of those less fortunate and they collect for various charities.
16. Cultural development is good. The school takes good advantage of the local authority's nature and adventure centre. All the pupils from Year 1 to Year 6 visit annually and learn more about the diversity of the local environment. The school is fortunate to have a visiting specialist music teacher and pupils consequently enjoy very good musical provision. Older pupils have enjoyed visits to the theatre. Through religious education, pupils learn about the traditions associated with faiths other than Christianity. Pupils are taught to appreciate and respect cultural diversity through good links with another school, where pupils are mostly of an Asian, Islamic heritage.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	6.4
National data	5.4

Unauthorised absence	
School data	1.6
National data	0.4

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

17. Attendance is below the national average and is unsatisfactory. The school works closely with the pupil welfare service and the resident social worker to improve the poor attendance. The development of the breakfast club is helping to improve punctuality, which is now satisfactory.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British

No of pupils on roll
96

Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
3	1

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

18. Now that behaviour has improved, the incidence of exclusions has been reduced. Just 1 pupil has been excluded since the new headteacher took up his post. For those pupils who return from exclusion, there are very good support systems in place.

THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is **satisfactory** overall and there are strengths in teaching, the provision in the Foundation Stage and in the support for pupils with special educational needs.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is **good** overall and it is **very good** in the Foundation Stage. This promotes good achievement in lessons. There are satisfactory processes in place for checking pupils' progress in English and mathematics but for the other subjects, assessment is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have a good range of subject knowledge, including a very good understanding of the needs of children in the nursery and reception class.
- Teachers use a range of techniques and resources to challenge, motivate and encourage pupils. They have high expectations.
- Teaching assistants are knowledgeable, well briefed and deployed effectively.
- The learning mentors and special school assistant make a good contribution to learning.
- Staff ensure that pupils who have special educational needs are fully involved in all lessons and receive the support that they need.
- There is no whole-school approach for the checking of pupils' learning in subjects other than English and mathematics in Years 1 to 6.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 30 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (3%)	14 (47%)	12 (40%)	3 (10%)	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.

19. The teaching in the nursery and reception classes is very good. Children enjoy an inviting range of activities where they explore, investigate and exercise informed choice. Staff work very closely as a team and all have specific roles, either in teaching new skills or in supporting children to apply their new knowledge. There is a very strong emphasis on independent learning and communication skills. Staff work hard and have created an outside area that is rich in opportunity and that supports learning very well. Information about children's progress is collected and recorded daily. Thorough records of progress are used very well to plan the next steps in learning so that children can move on quickly.
20. In Years 1 and 2, the teacher focuses on developing a solid foundation in literacy and numeracy and promotes good progress in these areas. During the language activity sessions, a good range of strategies are promoted to help pupils tackle new texts and in mathematics lessons, pupils are encouraged to use different approaches to problem-solving. Writing is well promoted through the literacy hour and very good attention is paid to developing speaking and listening skills. In the Years 5 and 6 class, there is a very good pace to lessons which leads to accelerated learning. Teaching has a particularly good range of strategies to cope with the pupils' different learning styles. All teachers are conscious of the gap between the boys' and girls' results and work hard to find topics that will interest both. For example, the Years 5 and 6 teacher had generated a great deal of interest in a classic novel by introducing it as part of a 'Pirate' topic. As a result of the measures taken, boys and girls learn equally well in lessons.

21. Throughout school, teachers prepare and plan their English and mathematics lessons with care to build on prior learning. This ensures that pupils have the challenge or support they need to do their best. These lessons consist of a series of short activities that keep pupils well motivated and interested. Pupils have targets so they know how to improve their work and thorough marking provides further pointers for action. The teachers provide good opportunities for collaborative working. They include 'time out' sessions where pupils discuss the answers to questions and group tasks that require good co-operation. These strategies promote pupils' personal skills well. In Years 5 and 6 the teacher plans 'science days' that consist of a carousel of different activities that successfully promote problem solving and investigative skills. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the challenges set and they live up to the trust given as they work without direct supervision, for example in the infant computer suite. This is helping them to develop good habits of independent learning.
22. Assessment strategies in subjects other than English and mathematics are not fully in place. Teachers use the plenary session at the end of lessons well to gauge learning and to help with planning but the recording of that information varies and does not, therefore, provide a useful overview of achievement.
23. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very good. Pupils who require additional help are identified as soon as possible when they begin school. The special educational needs co-ordinator, together with the class teacher, discuss and develop each pupil's individual education plan. These are known to all adults who work in classes and are implemented well. Teachers use skilful questioning to ensure that all pupils are fully included in lessons and make consistent gains in their learning. Support staff are well informed and encourage pupils effectively to persevere and overcome their problems. One teaching assistant in the Years 1 and 2 class runs a special group for pupils who have difficulties with reading and writing. Pupils learn at a good rate and enjoy especially the parts of the sessions that are delivered by a friendly puppet. The fun element captures their interest and motivates them to work hard. Teachers and their assistants know their pupils very well and cater effectively for their emotional needs. Learning mentors are on hand to support those who experience difficulty and behaviour support programmes are run by a specialist assistant. As a result of these measures, all pupils stay in lessons and cope with the conventions of the classroom.
24. Teachers use ICT in a satisfactory way to prepare lessons and to find extra sources of information. Computer skills are taught well but the use of ICT in other lessons is unsatisfactory. This is an issue of curriculum guidance rather than teaching because plans do not clearly identify these opportunities or suggest programs and websites to use. Homework is used well in Years 1 and 2. The learning of pupils in the special literacy group is consolidated and enhanced very effectively as they complete their assignments after every session. The teaching assistant finds extra time for those pupils who do not have facilities to work at home so that they can keep up with the fast pace. This is a further and good indicator of the school's commitment to ensure that all pupils can take full advantage of what it has to offer.
25. The teaching for music is very effective in promoting creative talent and performing skills. The appointment of a specialist teacher for one day each week, together with the brass instrument tuition, is an innovative way to overcome the gap in expertise in this small staff of teachers. One teaching assistant provides very good support for music as she runs the popular recorder groups out of school hours.
26. The quality of teaching is better than at the time of the previous inspection with a higher percentage of very good lessons seen. The recent difficulties identified by the local authority have been overcome and the school provides a calm, industrious learning environment. Relationships are a very strong feature of lessons. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour and expect pupils to work hard. Pupils rise to the challenge because they know that their efforts are valued and will be rewarded through praise and encouragement. This is helping them to develop good industrious habits and an intrinsic love of learning.

27. The headteacher evaluates the success of teaching, both formally as part of the management process and informally. He is often to be seen in classrooms and has a good overview of day-to-day practice.

The curriculum

The curriculum is **satisfactory** and fully meets statutory requirements. The school provides a **very good** range of opportunities for enrichment. Accommodation and resources for learning are **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage is good.
- Provision for pupils' personal development permeates all the school's activities and is very good.
- New planning has been introduced to ensure better balance across subjects and to maintain continuity of learning in the mixed-age classes.
- There are no systems in place to check the effectiveness of the new curriculum.
- There are good opportunities for pupils to take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- Curriculum plans do provide enough guidance to help teachers integrate the use of ICT, English and mathematics skills when designing their lessons.

Commentary

28. Curriculum development is a prominent feature of the school's action plan. The new headteacher and staff have worked hard to improve provision by ensuring that the curriculum is relevant to the pupils' needs and interests and is planned systematically to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. At present, however, there are no formal procedures to evaluate how well the new planning is working. Elements of the curriculum are delivered in an innovative way. For example, Year 5 and Year 6 pupils take part in a series of 'science days' which provide exciting learning opportunities that focus well on the development of scientific skills. A specialist is employed to teach and enrich provision for music throughout the school. These practices help pupils to achieve well. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 participate in, and graduate from, the 'Dinosaur Club'. This is a programme financed by Oldham's Children's Fund and has been particularly successful in developing personal, social and health education for these young pupils.
29. Teachers sometimes make connections between subjects, for example, getting pupils to make observational drawings in a scientific topic, but links between subjects are not systematically planned. As a result, the potential of ICT, English and mathematics to support learning in other subjects is not fully exploited.
30. Pupils benefit from a very good range of opportunities to enrich their learning outside the classroom. There is a very good variety of before school, lunchtime and after-school clubs that are well attended. Pupils are enthusiastic about the activities available, which include the chess club, the sewing club and the choir, as well as a range of sporting activities which include cricket and basketball. The learning mentors are instrumental in providing activities and lunchtime supervisors also organise games so that pupils are fully occupied on the playground. All classes visit the nearby outdoor educational centre and this allows them to engage in practical activities and adventurous pursuits, both of which enhance their experiences well.
31. Provision for personal, social and health education is very good. The carefully structured programme is taught well through designated sessions and other lessons such as science and religious education. This programme, combined with the high expectations of adults, enables pupils to develop well and underpins their good attitudes and behaviour. Issues such

as drugs, sex and relationships education, are taught sensitively and at the pupils' level of understanding and maturity. The gardening club makes a good contribution to the curriculum, particularly by awareness, and developing pupils' understanding of nature, their self-esteem and their concept of citizenship. Organised and run by the resident social worker, the club aims to promote care of the school grounds and gardens in the community. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about going to a local care home to plant bulbs and knew how much the residents had appreciated their efforts.

32. Accommodation is satisfactory. It is spacious but some areas are in need of refurbishment. In addition to classrooms, there are several other work areas which are well used for group activities. Resources throughout school have been improved recently and are satisfactory overall. However, not all computers are totally compatible with each other, the printers or the software in school. This sometimes creates problems and wastes time for teachers and pupils. It is a focus for action when funds are available. For children in the nursery and reception class, the shared learning space and pleasant, well-equipped outside area provide a good, well-organised environment. It allows the teacher to provide constant activities covering all six areas of learning.
33. The provision for pupils who have special educational needs is very good. The school has an inclusive ethos; all pupils, no matter what their special or individual need might be, are fully included in the class learning opportunities. Where appropriate, pupils have individual educational plans. These are well structured, regularly reviewed and reflect the particular targets that will help pupils to achieve success. The input of support staff, including the learning mentors, is fundamental to the good progress made by these pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Procedures for ensuring pupils' care, welfare, guidance, health and safety and seeking pupils' views are **satisfactory**; there are many strengths and some weaknesses.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The work of the resident social worker and the learning mentors provides very good support to meet the specific needs of some pupils.
- Induction arrangements are very good and are valued by parents.
- Each pupil has a strong and trusting relationship with one or more adults.
- Assessment information in English and mathematics is used to provide useful guidance for pupils on how to improve their work.
- There is very little guidance for improvement in the other subjects in Years 1 to 6.
- Risk assessments are not consistently recorded and filed.

Commentary

34. Staff are vigilant and there is a good level of supervision at all times during the day. Partnerships with outside agencies bring many benefits. For example, both pupils and families are well supported through the efforts of the community social worker. As a result, potential problems are identified and addressed early and barriers to pupils' learning are removed wherever possible. In addition, there are two learning mentors who provide counselling and encouragement and a specialist assistant who runs behaviour support programmes. Because of the very good support provided, pupils take full advantage of their lessons, and vulnerable children have the security that they need in order to learn. The children in the Foundation Stage flourish in the supportive environment where adults encourage independence.
35. No health or safety concerns were identified during the inspection. A governor has oversight of health and safety procedures. However, risk assessments carried out are not always recorded and filed for future reference.

36. Comprehensive induction arrangements for new pupils and other families, including home visits and open days, ensure that pupils get used to routines and enjoy coming to school. The school has very good procedures for child protection, and all staff are aware of their responsibilities and duties. Class teachers, teaching assistants and the headteacher are very effective in the care and personal support that they give to pupils. There are trusting relationships in school and pupils know that there is always ready to listen to them. The results of the pupils' questionnaire clearly confirm this. The school council is in the early stages of its development. The prefects from each class sit on the council and have already made a sound contribution to the school's development in making decisions about the play equipment to be bought to school.
37. Pupils with statements of special educational need are well cared for. Good links with external support agencies means that pupils receive their full entitlement to extra resources needed to help them benefit from the school's provision.
38. The guidance available for pupils for their academic work in Years 1 to 6 is satisfactory in English and mathematics. Pupils have learning targets that are discussed and explained and which generally help the pupils to improve. In the other subjects, assessment does not provide an overview of achievement in order to guide pupils' future learning and is unsatisfactory. The staff are aware of the need to improve this area. Guidance for the children in the Foundation Stage is very good and based on accurate assessments of what they have achieved and where they need to go next.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has **good** links with parents. Links with the community and other schools are also **good**. Parents have positive views about the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good quality information is provided for parents.
- The headteacher is building a good and improving partnership with parents.
- The Friends of St Thomas support the school well with fund raising and resources.
- The school is outward looking and has productive links with the community and other schools.
- Effective links with the secondary schools ensure pupils' smooth transition at the end of Year 6.

Commentary

39. Parents' views have been sought through questionnaires and discussions. The vast majority of parents agree that their children are happy at school. They agree that the school seeks their views; they very much appreciate the open door policy and say they feel comfortable about approaching the school. The headteacher has analysed the results of the parents' questionnaires and has made a good start in addressing the concerns of a minority of parents.
40. The information for parents is good. Regular newsletters and termly information about the taught curriculum keep parents up to date and well informed. This enables them to support their children's learning in practical ways. In addition, a well-presented parents' noticeboard provides further relevant information and reminders. Pupils' annual reports are good and provide detail about pupils' academic and personal progress. Parents of pupils who have special educational needs are supportive to the school and respond well to requests to attend meetings about their children's education. The social worker has close links with the school and works hard to promote better attendance. Some positive results have already been seen although attendance remains below average.

41. The work of the Friends of St Thomas provides good support for the school including the raising of funds to purchase resources which are beneficial to the pupils. A small number of parents and other volunteers provide help in classes and the school values this. Links with the community and other schools add another important dimension to pupils' learning as well as enhancing their social and personal development. These links provide useful information from a local playgroup, specialist advice from a nearby special school and sporting opportunities from local clubs. The school is also part of the Oldham Unity in Community Project which brings together pupils of different backgrounds, religions and cultures. Taken as a whole, this part of the school's provision helps to develop pupils' self-esteem effectively and to widen their horizons. Well developed transfer procedures between St Thomas's and the main secondary school ensure a smooth transition from one stage of education to the next.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership of the new headteacher is **very good** and is a major factor in the recent good improvements. The role of senior staff has improved considerably and they show **good** leadership. **Good** day-to-day management enables the school to run smoothly but some aspects of management require improvement; overall it is **satisfactory**. Governance is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership of the new headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher is driving the school forward at a very good pace.
- Information gathered from the recent and rigorous self-evaluation programme is being used effectively in school improvement.
- The target setting system for pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 is not directly linked to the goals in Year 6 and so does not provide enough information for senior managers to check whether enough progress is being made year on year.
- There is very good teamwork among all staff and clear vision for future developments.
- Day-to-day practice reflects the success of the school's commitment to ensuring that all pupils have full and equal access to all parts of the school's provision.
- Innovative measures are taken to tackle the identified barriers to learning and to enrich provision.
- There are no monitoring procedures timetabled for checking the effectiveness of the new curriculum.
- The governing body does not have a full complement of members.

Commentary

Leadership

42. The new headteacher has made some very good improvements, especially in terms of behaviour management which was the main priority and learning. He is highly regarded by parents and governors who value his hard work, approachability and commitment. Staff say they feel refreshed and that their morale is now good. There is now a strong sense of shared purpose, good teamwork and a clear vision for future development among the senior and subject managers. The main barriers for learning have been:
- an exceptionally high mobility of pupils in the recent past,
 - a large proportion of pupils with special educational needs in some year groups,
 - social and economic deprivation of the neighbourhood,
 - the poor behaviour prevailing at the time of appointment of the new HT.
- Important work completed in the short time since the appointment of the headteacher includes:
- establishing a clear whole-school strategy for managing behaviour that includes an easy-to-follow list of rules and appropriate rewards and sanctions;
 - creating a nurturing environment where there is no toleration of harassment or bullying;
 - establishing very effective liaison with the resident social worker to improve attendance;

- developing the role of the learning mentors so that there is very good support for those pupils who sometimes find it hard to cope with classroom and school conventions;
 - developing closer links with families so that support is extended to the home and that attendance can improve;
 - securing the services of a specialist teaching assistant and an adviser to run behaviour support programmes where needed;
 - improving the play and recreation areas and the activities available for pupils' free time; developing the breakfast club to improve attendance and punctuality.
43. The staff, including non-teaching personnel have managed the recent changes well to create a calm and pleasant learning environment where pupils say that they feel safe and happy. At the same time, the new curriculum is promoting an all-round education where creative, practical and physical skills have a good profile and are valued. Much of the development is new and there are informal, but not consistent, systems for checking and evaluating its impact. As yet, there is no timetabled programme for subject managers to monitor these aspects and this is an area for development. There is however, evidence of good subject leadership in the action plans recently developed.
44. The leadership and management of special educational needs are very good. Time is used effectively to assess pupils' progress and make sure all staff are fully informed about the individual needs of the pupils. Regular meetings are held with the support staff to discuss pupils' progress and plan future work. Good quality records are maintained and they provide appropriate information for the school to secure additional funding when necessary.

Management

45. A thorough programme of self-evaluation was completed when the headteacher took up his appointment and the school development plan reflects the priorities identified through that exercise. In just over one term, a great deal of work has been successfully completed, although managers and staff recognise that there is still some way to go to achieve the highest standards of provision that they seek. The deputy headteacher has made good improvements to the tracking system for English and mathematics. These allow classteachers to set annual targets for pupils. The system as a whole does not, however, provide enough information for managers or governors to check whether pupils are making the expected progress year on year or whether they are on track to achieve their projected level of attainment by the end of Year 6. This is recognised by the school as the next step.
46. Management routines are established and the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis, following the school's policies. The experienced school administrator has a good deal of expertise and, with the support of the clerk, covers a varied range of duties to provide good support. This means that the headteacher is able to concentrate on educational issues and to be actively involved in school life, both in and out of classrooms. As a result, he has a good overview of provision and is able to act quickly where problems occur. Standards of safety and cleanliness are kept high through the vigilant work of the site manager and the efforts of his staff. Any issues identified are quickly reported and acted upon. The accommodation and resources are used efficiently and best value in the provision of goods and services is routinely sought.
47. Some aspects of provision at the school are now good; these include pupils' attitudes (that are very good) and behaviour and the quality of teaching. These factors support the good achievement seen in lessons. Other areas are improving well and standards are rising but in the short time since the headteacher's appointment, developments have not had time to become fully embedded, or to make a significant impact on the school's results. Therefore, the effectiveness of the school at present, and the value for money that it provides, are judged as satisfactory.

Governance

48. The governors are supportive of the school and have the interests of the pupils at heart. The Chair of Governors is a frequent visitor and knows staff and pupils well. Governors have a sound overview of the school's improvement and know what needs doing next. Working with the headteacher, they ensure that all statutory requirements are met.
49. Over recent times, there have been some problems with attendance at meetings, making it difficult for governors to share the workload and to take decisions. At the time of the inspection the governing body was still short of members in spite of their efforts to attract interest. The governors show a keenness to succeed and to provide a more rigorous approach to monitoring the work of the school. They openly recognise that their role as critical friend was not satisfactory in the past. They are becoming more active in asking for relevant information and in challenging the school's professional managers. There are currently link governors in place to support literacy, numeracy, special educational needs and to oversee the partnership with outside agencies. Finances are now well monitored through the administrator's detailed monthly reports.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	492,851	Balance from previous year	53,745
Total expenditure	505,325	Balance carried forward to the next	41,271
Expenditure per pupil	3,063		

50. Much of the balance carried forward was allocated to unpaid bills and to the school's share of building costs. Currently, the budget is very tight due to the effects of falling roll numbers in 2003. The headteacher and governors work hard to keep spending within limits and there is no projected carry forward from this current year's budget allocation.

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Provision is **very good** in the Foundation Stage.

Provision for nursery and reception aged children is a strength of the school. Children start in the nursery with levels of prior learning that are well below average and a significant number have poorly developed communication and social skills. All children, including those who have special educational needs, achieve very well. Overall, the levels of attainment are below average with approximately half the children on target to achieve the expected levels by the end of the reception year. The very good progress is due to:

- The caring, nurturing environment.
- The very good teaching and very good teamwork.
- Very good planning and classroom organisation.
- Good links with parents.

The teacher and the nursery nurses share the teaching; they work very well together to provide a consistent and challenging curriculum. The support assistants make a very good contribution to the success of the provision. The very good planning means that all adults are very well prepared for the activities of the day, so no time is lost and full attention is given to the children's learning. There is a good combination of adult-led sessions and independent free choice activities and, as a result, children learn through investigation. They make informed choices and become confident. Throughout the day, adults observe and record children's progress and the information gained is used effectively to plan future activities. Good links with parents include home visits and a gradual introduction to school life. Parents are openly welcomed to the classroom and, during the inspection, a high proportion of parents spent the initial part of the day encouraging their children's efforts in writing, drawing or exploring the wide range of toys available. This interest from parents helps the children feel secure and motivated to learn. Improvement since the last inspection is good and this phase of children's education is well led and managed. The accommodation is good, there is a large teaching area with space for a wide range of activities and a newly developed out door play area. The quality and quantity of books and equipment are satisfactory.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good relationships between children and adults create an atmosphere where children can grow in confidence.
- Planning is very good.

Commentary

51. This area of learning receives a high profile in the nursery and children achieve very well although their attainment is below what is expected by the time they enter Year 1. Many children arrive lacking in confidence, unsure how to behave and unable to make relationships. The adults are very good role models; they listen closely to what children have to say and show that their contributions are valued. Discussion activities are used effectively so children learn to talk about feelings. Adults relate very well to the children, expecting them to behave well, work hard and collaborate as part of a group. Consequently, the children learn to take turns and to share fairly. Development of personal independence is good, for example, when

children select their own activities, dress independently and manage their own personal hygiene. Staff plan a very good range of activities which support children's sustained concentration and encourage a desire to learn.

Communication, language and literacy

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Every opportunity is seized to enhance children's communication skills.
- Staff constantly assess what children have learned and use the information to plan the next steps.
- Imaginative language is developed well through creative play.

Commentary

52. Language and communication skills are poor when children start school. They achieve very well, but attainment is likely to be below the expected level by the time the children move into Year 1. Adults listen carefully to children and encourage their conversation effectively, reinforcing it in many activities. They make good use of puppets to present stories and to encourage an interest in books. The success is evident in the children's enjoyment of the book of the week, 'Come on Daisy'. They enjoyed re-enacting the parts of the various characters and, in free choice time, several children chose to look again at the book and talk about the story. The children develop imaginative and communication skills effectively through role-play. The doctor's surgery set up in the classroom provides a good focus for this work. Throughout the day, adults lead group activities and games to develop early reading and writing skills. The majority of reception children can hear and write initial sounds within words correctly but only a few can read simple sentences or familiar words at this stage. The book corner is attractively arranged with cuddly toys and cushions and is used well.

Mathematical development

The provision for mathematical development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is of high standard with a strong emphasis on learning through practical activities.
- Children are developing a good grasp of mathematical language.
- A good system of observations is used to assess and record children's progress.

Commentary

53. Children make very good progress from a low starting point with around half of them on target to achieve the expected learning outcomes by Year 1. The practical approach is successful and learning is fun. Nursery children enjoy singing number songs such as 'Five Speckled Frogs'. They use their fingers to show they understand one more or one less and joining in the actions to decrease the number of 'Currant Buns'. The outdoor area is used well for the 'egg hunt', where children explore the play area to find the hidden eggs and place them in numerical order. The majority of reception children recognise and count numbers up to ten. The higher attaining ones are learning to calculate by combining objects from two groups and understand the meaning of the word 'total'. Registration time is used well to reinforce number concepts; the children predict how many are present and then check their answer by counting with the teacher. Children recognise simple shapes, they use squares, rectangles and triangles to make pictures and patterns. A particular strength in the teaching is the very good questioning that encourages the children to think through problems and check their answers. The very

good planning includes specific guidance on mathematical vocabulary so that all the adults know which words to reinforce for the week.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are very good opportunities for investigation.
- Children are encouraged to ask questions and to follow their own lines of enquiry.
- There are very good opportunities to learn about, and to use, ICT.

Commentary

54. The teacher plans a wide range of interesting activities to encourage children's curiosity and as a result, they achieve well. For example, they investigate how magnets work, and examine objects in detail with magnifying lenses. Children have good opportunities to explore; for example, they investigate the growth of seeds asking questions such as, 'Will the upside-down seed grow differently from the others?' Their understanding of change and growth is promoted effectively when, for example, they observe developing frogspawn. The two computers are used constantly. Children play games that extend their literacy and numeracy skills and manipulate the mouse effectively when they draw pictures on-screen. In one very good activity, children learned to assemble and join materials to make a moving Easter chick. Children were totally absorbed during this activity and made very good progress with their technical skills. By the time they move into Year 1 children have made good progress but attainment is below the expected mark.

Physical development

Provision for physical development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The outdoor play area is well designed and provides a good range of toys and equipment to promote physical skills.
- Children have varied opportunities to use a wide range of tools, equipment and materials.

Commentary

55. The newly developed outdoor play area is used very effectively and children have good opportunities for exercise. Achievement is good but a significant number of children will not achieve what is expected by the end of the reception year, especially in the use and manipulation of small tools. They pedal around the road markings and gain an increasing understanding of space and direction. Staff regularly change the equipment to keep children motivated throughout the day. Good adult supervision and intervention means that children play safely together, improving their social as well as physical skills. The majority of children handle malleable materials and construction toys with increasing control. Reception children change their clothes independently and know the benefits of warming up before rigorous exercise. They learn to move with more confidence and thoroughly enjoy jumping like rabbits and pretending to be chicks hatching from their eggs. Children improve their ball control, learning to bounce, throw and roll accurately.

Creative development

Provision for creative development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children are inspired by the sessions with a specialist music teacher and there are frequent opportunities to sing.
- Planned activities allow children to communicate their feelings and use their imaginations.
- They experiment with adult language and actions as they work in the role-play area.

Commentary

56. Pupils achieve very well in this area of learning although attainment by the end of the reception class is below what is expected. Staff encourage children to explore colour, pattern and shape through drawings and paintings and plan an exciting range of activities. These include designing book covers, printing, drawing story illustrations and making a collage. The children thoroughly enjoy the wide range of opportunities to make music. They sing nursery and counting rhymes tunefully and join in with older pupils at school assemblies. In their lesson with the visiting music teacher, children explored the range of sounds from different instruments, improved their sense of rhythm and learned to maintain a beat. Children are given very good opportunities to play imaginatively and adults are always on hand with ideas to help them experiment with language.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 and 2

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement in lessons is good throughout school.
- Teaching is good.
- Pupils have targets that help them to improve.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language are well supported and achieve well, relative to their starting points.
- The use of writing is unsatisfactory when studying and recording work in other subjects.

Commentary

57. Standards seen in lessons and completed work in Year 6 are below average but there are only 10 pupils in the group and over half of them have special educational needs. In lessons, achievement is good. Those in Year 5 are now making very good progress and, if they continue to learn at the present rate, they are on track to achieve average standards. The teachers' assessment of skills in reading and writing is sound and the information is used well to plan the next steps and to provide sound guidance for the pupils who each have clear targets that show them how to improve their work. Some good recent improvements to teaching and learning have arrested the decline in standards seen over past years. The very low results of 2003 were due to poor behaviour in school that affected achievement badly. The new headteacher and his staff made this a priority for action and the calm atmosphere is supporting the successful drive for higher standards.

58. Standards seen in Years 2 and 6 are average in speaking and listening. Pupils have achieved well in these two areas from the low starting point on entry to the nursery and the below average attainment on entry to Year 1. Teachers pay good attention to developing listening and oral skills, both in literacy lessons and when teaching other subjects. They explain new

terminology very well and check that complex phrases are fully understood. There is a good emphasis on distinguishing between formal and informal language and pupils recognise traditional language, for example, in old tales and classical writing.

59. There is a good emphasis in Years 1 and 2 on teaching pupils to blend and segment letter sounds within words; this promotes good progress in reading. Standards in reading for the Year 2 pupils are below average but are rising. Those in Year 1 are on track to achieve the expected level of attainment. Pupils benefit from a half hour slot each day when they have guided reading sessions with their teacher or an assortment of activities and games to promote reading and writing skills. These sessions use 15 minutes of the lunch-time break and are a good, efficient way of extending provision and enhancing learning. Throughout Years 3 to 6 pupils investigate different types of book, including non-fiction material, poetry and playscripts and become confident readers. By Years 5 and 6 pupils show a good interest in works by significant authors such as Robert Louis Stephenson and they find information from text books efficiently. In one session, pupils scanned and skimmed the page for key words to speed up their research and were able to explain their findings clearly to others in the group.
60. The development of writing skills is a current focus of school improvement and this is leading to better standards of work. When writing their reports, Year 2 pupils use the present tense and know that facts need not be in a chronological order. They rehearse their sentences out loud to make sure that they make sense before committing them to paper. Spelling is logical and pupils make good use of the knowledge of letter sounds to attempt harder words. Higher attaining pupils use a range of punctuation, descriptive language and longer sentences in their writing. Capital letters and full stops are evident in most pupils' writing by Year 2 but some pupils do not use them consistently. Overall, the percentage of pupils who are on track to attain the average level is below average but they all make good progress taking into consideration their low starting point. Some good standards were seen in Year 1 where several pupils are already working around the average level. For the Year 2 pupils standards remain below average but are improving well.
61. Throughout school, there are good links between reading and writing and teachers often use texts as a model for pupils' work. This was effective in a Year 3 lesson, for example, where pupils wrote an alternative ending to the story of 'Rumpelstiltskin', whilst maintaining the traditional style. In Year 4, pupils wrote some good poems with the aid of a 'writing frame' that helped them to develop their ideas and use of vocabulary. Teachers make concerted efforts to interest boys in reading and writing. For example, the theme in Years 5 and 6 was 'Pirates' which created good motivation for the work on Treasure Island. The teacher also had versions of the book as a graphic novel for the less confident readers. Inspired by the author's technique, pupils wrote interesting descriptions of pirates, using imaginative language and including complex sentences. Spelling in the older age groups is generally accurate and most pupils use their knowledge of spelling patterns and understanding of prefixes and suffixes when attempting longer words.
62. Pupils who have special educational needs are supported well in lessons and make equal progress to that of their peers. Those who speak English as an additional language benefit from the school's emphasis on oral skills and are able to take full advantage of lessons through the support they receive. Provision in the Years 1 and 2 intervention group is good and is successful in promoting confidence as well as oral, reading and writing skills. During the inspection, pupils in this group split simple words into letter sounds to spell accurately. They worked hard on their handwriting and knew how to spell several irregular words such as 'what'. The teaching assistant delivers these sessions at a fast pace and presents the pupils with good challenge. Consequently, learning is good and pupils enjoy their successes.
63. The quality of teaching in this subject is good. It is very good for pupils in Years 1 and 2 and the older juniors. The best features of lessons include:
 - the teacher's demonstration of writing to provide pupils with a good model for their own work;

- the use of time-out sessions where pupils can share and discuss ideas;
 - the use of wipe-off boards that encourage pupils to have a go at spellings or sentences before committing them to paper;
 - good use of praise to encourage and reward effort.
64. Classrooms provide a stimulating environment with good access to books and reference material. There are many prompts around the rooms that remind pupils about punctuation, grammar and spelling and encourage them to experiment with interesting adjectives or connecting words. Targets are written in the front of books or on bright card and most pupils are well aware of these when working. Teaching assistants, throughout the school, make a good contribution to learning, especially when guiding and supporting group activities. Homework is soundly used to extend the learning in class and is usually completed on time. Those tasks set for the Years 1 and 2 intervention group are especially good in consolidating the new learning and pupils say that they enjoy doing this work at home.
65. Leadership is firmly focused on improvement and is good; management is satisfactory. Some monitoring is completed in this subject through checking of plans and pupils' work and classroom observations. The subject manager is knowledgeable and has introduced new planning that caters better for the needs of the mixed-age classes. Several areas for development have been identified and action planning is detailed. The good improvements to teaching and learning made recently have not had sufficient time to make a significant impact on standards but there are promising indicators for the future. Assessment is satisfactory in English and teachers use the information gathered to set individual targets for pupils. However, the checking of pupils' performance in Years 3, 4 and 5 requires improvement and is unsatisfactory at present.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

66. Reading skills are well applied across the curriculum and teachers gather a satisfactory selection of non-fiction books to serve the topics being studied. Speaking and listening skills are constantly extended during whole-class introductions or discussions. As a result, pupils are confident in expressing their views and in providing evidence to justify their opinions. Writing skills are not exploited fully in work in other subjects. This area remains a focus for improvement but, at present, the manager does not have an input into other subject plans to ensure that writing assignments are included in the topic work.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teaching is good, and as a result, pupils achieve well in lessons.
- Pupils enjoy lessons and have very good attitudes to the subject.
- Leadership of the subject is good.
- Systems for managers to check pupils' performance across the junior years need to be revised.
- The use of mathematics across the curriculum is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

67. Standards are average for pupils in Year 2. The attainment of the pupils currently in Year 6 is below average and lower than at the previous inspection. Serious problems with behaviour in past years have led to a drop in standards but achievement in lessons is now good since the appointment of the new headteacher. There are good signs of improvement in the performance of pupils in the current Year 5 who are close to attaining national expectations. The school is now in a strong position to improve the results achieved in the national tests for

future years. They have declined steadily in past years and have been well below average for some time.

68. Pupils, throughout school are competent in mental arithmetic and explain their thinking clearly. This shows that they have a good range of strategies such as doubling or halving numbers, using learned number facts or rounding up and down. Older pupils use techniques such as reversing calculations. In a quick-fire session, some middle juniors worked out that 30 divided by 6 is 5 because $6 \times 5 = 30$.
69. Pupils enjoy their lessons and have very positive attitudes to the subject. Teaching follows the guidance of the National Numeracy Strategy and is characterised by good planning. There are clear learning objectives, which are communicated well to pupils and constantly referred to during lessons and in the concluding plenary session. As a result, learning is good. Teachers use a good range of questioning strategies and, throughout the school, there is a good emphasis placed on problem-solving work, mathematical vocabulary and the practical application of skills. In a Year 4 lesson, pupils used their knowledge of the multiplication tables to sort numbers into groups. This was an enjoyable and practical way of consolidating and practising their skills. Pupils in the Years 1 and 2 class used their understanding of multiples as they worked out the coins needed for shopping and to give change. In one very good Year 5 lesson the teacher showed high expectations as she drove the learning on at a very fast pace. Pupils learned to choose the best tools and units when measuring and to apply their knowledge of decimals effectively when calculating measures.
70. The subject is well led and managed. The recently appointed subject leader has a clear view of the aims and priorities for mathematics in the school. Test results are now being carefully analysed to identify any weaknesses in pupils' learning, and subsequent planning will take account of this. However, there is a need to improve tracking procedures so that individual pupils who are not making the expected progress are identified at an early stage. There is some use of computers, especially in data handling but, overall ICT is used infrequently in this subject.

Mathematics across the curriculum

71. Mathematical skills are sometimes used in other subjects, such as science, for example, when pupils record their pulse rate on line graphs. However, opportunities to apply mathematics across other subjects of the curriculum are not part of a systematic plan and are unsatisfactory.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school makes very good provision for practical work in science.
- The supportive relationships within lessons encourage pupils' enthusiasm for the subject.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Pupils enjoy their work and achieve well.
- Assessment systems are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

72. Inspection evidence indicates that standards in science are average for pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 and are similar to those reported in the previous inspection. This represents good achievement when taking into account the low starting point of many pupils on entry to the nursery and is the result of good quality teaching, pupils' positive attitudes and the school's focus on raising attainment. There is a pleasing upturn from the low results seen over previous years. Varied opportunities for investigations and practical tasks make learning enjoyable. This

results in the high level of enthusiasm seen in all the lessons observed. Relationships are invariably strong and pupils are encouraged to do their best.

73. The quality of teaching is good overall and work is made relevant to pupils' interest. In a very good lesson in the Years 1 and 2 class, pupils knew that 'finding out' about seeds involved planned investigation. They talked about the experiments that they might use, showing a sound awareness of fair testing. Activities for science are well planned according to pupils' prior learning and supported by well-informed and lively teaching. In the mixed-age Years 5 and 6 class, where teaching was excellent, pupils were involved in a series of tasks demonstrating their ability to predict the outcomes of experiments and to eliminate variable factors that might make their results unreliable. Pupils used an appropriate scientific vocabulary and utilised a variety of recording strategies. Below is a brief commentary on the lesson.

Example of outstanding practice

In one outstanding lesson, a class of Year 5 and Year 6 pupils engaged in a series of scientific activities.

Pupils explored a set of topics in rotation. The lesson observed was excellent in planning, delivery and in the resulting progress made by pupils. It was imaginatively and meticulously prepared both in terms of the learning aims and in the resources made available. The teacher explained exactly the activities in which the pupils were to engage, including investigations and research. She made very clear the expected outcomes. In an atmosphere of genuine interest and excitement the pupils set to work, recording their learning on 'sticker notes' that were posted together on the learning outcomes board. The teacher and teaching assistant supervised the activities tactfully, providing good encouragement and questioning and intervening only when essential. This meant that pupils had to organise themselves effectively and work out solutions to the problems encountered. In the plenary session the pupils reviewed their notes and records while the teacher skilfully and probingly elicited relevant comments and helped them to draw conclusions. Relationships were excellent and throughout the lesson, the whole room was 'buzzing' as pupils shared ideas.

74. Computer programmes are used in some aspects of science, such as investigating the function of muscles in the body, but there is scope to extend the use of the Internet for research. Pupils have little experience of using electronic aids in their work such as the computer generated microscope or thermometer. The application of mathematics is sound in this subject, especially when pupils are measuring, calculating or presenting data. Marking in the Years 1 and 2 class is very good and provides pupils with a good understanding of what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve further. The teacher's pertinent questioning and insightful comments ensured that Years 5 and 6 pupils were consistently aware of the progress they were making throughout the lesson. However, methods of assessing and recording pupils' progress are unsatisfactory because they do not provide sufficient information about learning over time or to evaluate the effectiveness of the planning. The recently appointed subject manager has prepared a commendable action plan, aimed at improving standards further. Leadership is good and management is satisfactory.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject leadership is good.
- The new scheme of work provides good guidance for teachers and ensures that pupils cover all elements of the programme of study.
- Achievement in the lessons seen was good.
- The use of ICT when working in other subjects is unsatisfactory.
- Assessment is in the early stages of development and is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

75. The pupils in Years 2 and 6 have a satisfactory range of ICT skills and experiences and attainment matches national expectations. This is similar to the findings at the last inspection. In Years 1 and 2 pupils use word-processing facilities to write and present their work and produce computer-generated pictures using a graphics program. They are familiar with the layout of the keyboard and are confident in using icons and on-screen prompts.
76. Pupils' skills cover all elements of the programmes of study. In Years 3 to 6 pupils use graphics well, for example, to design and draw a tee shirt pattern in the style of a modern artist, making good use of colour and shades. During the inspection, pupils were developing a data base linked to their science work and demonstrated a sound understanding of handling, collating and presenting data using the computer facilities. In one good project, they had produced their own eye-test chart to accurate standards. They then put the results of the sight tests onto a spreadsheet and made a graph to present their findings. Pupils talk confidently about programming a floor robot and about using a computer simulation to learn about growing plants. There is a good amount of collaborative work in the subject and those who have difficulties in reading and writing receive good support from their friends who willingly help.
77. Teaching and learning seen during the inspection was good and pupils' attitudes were very good. Lessons have good pace and pupils work hard. Teachers make efficient use of the computer facilities so that pupils have good 'hands-on' experiences. This means that some older pupils have to work some way from the classroom on the infant computer bank. In the session seen, their behaviour was exemplary and they demonstrated mature attitudes as they worked independently, shared ideas and helped each other without direct supervision.
78. There are computers in every classroom as well as two small computer suites. The machines are relatively old and not all have the full range of facilities or programmes. This can disrupt learning at times. There are plans to resource with new computers as and when funds are available. The technician visits weekly and his trouble-shooting skills contribute well to the running of the hardware and software. The subject manager provides good leadership. There have been some good improvements through the purchase of new programs to cover all elements of the subject and the introduction of a new scheme of work that guides teachers effectively through their weekly planning. Skill-based activities are being planned as part of the new assessment strategy but these are not in place as yet.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

79. During the inspection computers were occasionally seen to be used to support learning in other subjects but ICT is not exploited fully in this respect. Planning for other subjects does not consistently contain references to the use of computer programs or facilities and so it is very much at the teachers' discretion. Some good use was seen in the science day activities for Years 5 and 6 when pupils engaged in problem-solving work. Pupils sometimes use websites or CD ROMS for research; this was seen in the Years 1 and 2 topic about the Tudors. However, across the school, the use of computers to find information is not exploited fully.

HUMANITIES

One geography lesson, for the oldest pupils, was seen during the inspection. Judgements are also based on a scrutiny of pupils' work, discussions with teachers and pupils and an examination of planning. There was insufficient evidence in history to make a secure judgement about standards and provision.

History

80. Not enough history was seen to judge the quality of provision or gauge standards. The school has now introduced a planning cycle that fulfils curriculum requirements and provides a sound balance of time for the subject. This has not always been the case in the past although there is evidence that the subject has been covered to some extent. Leadership and management are now satisfactory. Evidence came from classroom display, pupils' books and discussions with them and their teachers.
81. Years 5 and 6 pupils recalled enthusiastically the 'Victorian Day' that they had enjoyed when they explored food, jobs and costumes of the era. Younger juniors were working on the Viking topic. They used picture evidence to draw conclusions about housing, travel and village life in the settlements. Display in the corridor and classroom reflects the work of pupils in Year 1 and 2 about famous people of the past such as Florence Nightingale. Pupils, in their conversations, demonstrate a sound understanding of how such people have influenced our lives today. In their topic based on the Great Fire of London, some Year 2 pupils have used the Internet for research and are knowledgeable about the events and how people's lives were subsequently affected. They also know the importance of evidence in historical study and recognise that much information came from Samuel Pepys diaries.

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment is below expectations.
- Teaching is good.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about the subject.
- There is no whole-school assessment strategy in place.

Commentary

82. Pupils' standards in geography are below those expected by Years 2 and 6. This is largely because there has been little time given to the subject in the past. Since the appointment of the new headteacher a long-term topic cycle has been introduced and this has redressed the balance. Leadership and management have improved recently and are satisfactory. Pupils are enthusiastic for the subject and keen to learn. Based on the evidence from pupils' work and from the one lesson seen, achievement is now good and standards are set to rise.
83. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 have followed a project based on the Isle of Struay. They can identify the physical and human features of places well. They have made passports and written postcards describing the island and using a good range of geographical terms. Pupils have gained some basic knowledge of the local area around school and started to make simple route maps.
84. As pupils progress through the school, their skills in mapping improve. They progress from drawing a birds-eye view of a table to mapping their classroom, and then to plotting a village map complete with compass points. Year 5 pupils enthusiastically demonstrated how they had plotted various features of the school in relation to where they had been standing. Pupils gain a deeper understanding of settlements and in particular their own locality, becoming aware of the difference between villages, towns and cities. The annual visit to the local authority resource centre is successful in developing pupils' fieldwork skills.
85. The quality of teaching and learning seen was good. Years 5 and 6 pupils concentrated well as their teacher demonstrated the three-dimensional image of contours and transferred the information to a two-dimensional drawing. Pupils were absorbed as they made their own

images and chose steep or gradual gradients for their own mountain. A particular strength of this lesson was the teacher's very good questioning that made pupils think very carefully about their new knowledge and consider how to apply it to their work. At the moment there are no adequate arrangements for assessing what pupils have learned, so teachers are without the essential information to develop geography in line with pupils' abilities and aptitudes.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

No lessons were seen for design and technology and therefore no judgements were made about provision and attainment. There was insufficient work across all the programmes of study in art and design to make secure judgements about attainment at Year 6 and teaching. Music work was observed across all age groups and there were lessons in physical education for Years 3 to 6. Additional evidence was taken from planning, completed work and discussions with teachers and pupils. This is a voluntary aided Church of England school and therefore the inspection of religious education was carried out by the diocese.

Commentary

Art and design

86. A scrutiny of teachers' planning indicates that the subject is covered to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. Teaching in the one lesson observed was very good. The teacher effectively motivated the pupils by taking them to visit her favourite place in the school. They subsequently thought about, and described, their favourite places prior to sketching a favoured object. These sketches were the first stage in a project leading to the making of a sculpture. Pupils who have special educational needs enjoy this creative subject.
87. This lesson, together with other work done by Years 1 and 2 pupils indicates that standards are as expected for the age group and this is a similar picture to that seen at the previous inspection. Years 5 and 6 pupils had produced sketches depicting moving figures that showed a sound appreciation of shape, form and space. The designs for a chair seen in Year 4 provided evidence that pupils are able to explore and combine ideas. Pupils learn about different artists and some used pastels to draw figures in the style of Lowry which were of an expected standard for the age group. However, there was little evidence of three dimensional work to judge standards overall. This is timetabled for later in the year. The new curriculum provides a better balance of time allocations to aspects of art and a wider range of opportunities for pupils to use various materials and this is a good, recent improvement. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Some application of ICT skills was in evidence, for example some pupils had created landscapes using a graphics program and contrasted these with painted versions. However, there is scope to extend the use of computers further, for example in developing ideas and in the use of the digital camera.

Design and technology

88. Design and technology was not a focus of the inspection and insufficient work was seen to make a judgement on standards or teaching. The completed work in Years 1 and 2 showed that pupils had investigated commercial products and used the ideas in their own designs. The resulting moving figures showed a sound understanding of basic mechanisms such as levers. When asked, pupils talked about their experiences in food technology. They have experiences of a range of tools and are aware of safety. The new long-term curriculum plan provides for design and technology to be taught in four blocks of units spread throughout the year and covering all of the programmes of study. Leadership and management are satisfactory.

MUSIC

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well, especially in singing.
- Pupils have opportunities to appreciate a good range of music.
- They enjoy performing and creating music.
- Teaching is very good.
- Out-of-school clubs, instrument tuition and performances provide enhancement for learning.
- Assessment is not consistently recorded.

Commentary

89. Pupils' attainment matches expectations and there are strengths in singing. There was a period when the quality of teaching and learning dropped in the subject but attainment is rising once more due to the high quality of teaching and pupils' very positive attitudes. They perform tunefully and with good expression. Their performances during collective worship add a spiritual element to the proceedings. In Years 1 and 2, pupils learn to recognise a good range of instruments and know how to create different effects when playing them. They rehearse songs and improve pitch and duration to a good standard. In Years 3 to 6, pupils' performing skills develop further and they sing in three parts to create an interesting structure to the music. Pupils' diction is good and they adopt a good singing posture. The choir rehearses at lunchtimes. During the inspection, they were rehearsing for the Easter service, alongside the brass and recorder players. Their rendition of a popular song was of a very good standard in terms of quality of singing and playing, and in creating mood.
90. By Year 6, pupils play percussion instruments creatively and follow the directions of the conductor and to lead the playing themselves. They know how to 'warm up' their singing voices and show good dynamics when performing songs such as 'Food, Glorious Food'. They appraise a range of music and especially enjoyed an unusual piece played on the didgeridoo. Pupils are enthusiastic about music and show great enjoyment in lessons. Those with special educational needs are fully involved in all activities and many relish the chance to shine in this creative area. Those who speak English as an additional language benefit from the teaching of diction and the extension of vocabulary that is included in the wide range of songs that they learn. Those who have special talents are recognised and challenged appropriately.
91. A specialist teacher is employed by the school. Teaching is of a very good quality and leads to good and often, very good learning. There is a very good degree of subject knowledge and good opportunities for pupils to experiment with sound and music and to use their imagination. Planning is good and linked to themes studied in the classroom. It covers all elements of the programme of study for music over the year. Lessons consist of different short activities that promote a good pace of learning and much enjoyment. One teaching assistant teaches the recorder group out of school hours and acts as a good role model for pupils by playing with them. She makes a very good contribution to the overall provision. Music is often heard in school and is played in lessons and at worship time. There is additional, good brass tuition available for those who are interested and this enhances provision further.
92. Leadership and management are good and ensure that the subject has a high profile throughout school. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual and cultural education. They listen to a good range of music from around the world and create some moving moments through their performances. Speaking and listening skills are effectively promoted through lessons. There is, however, little use of ICT in the subject, especially in composition work, and this is an area for development. Resources are satisfactory and the school plans to introduce more ethnic instruments in the near future. Pupils' work is assessed as lessons proceed and they have good, informative feedback. This assessment is not formally recorded and this is an area identified by the school for future development.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are good links with external agencies that enrich provision well.
- The subject has a high profile in school.
- There is good enrichment for the subject.
- There is a good range of extra-curricular activities.
- There are no formal assessment procedures to check pupils' progress.

Commentary

93. No judgement can be made about teaching and standards in Years 1 and 2 as no lessons were seen. Attainment by Year 6 matches expectations. Provision is satisfactory and similar to the findings at the time of the last inspection. Leadership and management are satisfactory.
94. Discussion with the co-ordinator and teachers' planning confirms that pupils throughout the school enjoy a sound balance of gymnastics, dance and games. The school has good links with local cricket and athletics clubs and there is hockey and rugby coaching. The school participates in inter-school sports, the next events being tennis and Kwik Cricket tournaments. All pupils have the opportunity to learn to swim when they are in Year 4. Teachers have enhanced their own skills and are trained in a nationally recognised sports scheme. The school has plenty of space, the hall is adequate for gymnastics and dance, playgrounds are extensive. There are spacious grassed areas but the drainage problem means they can only be used for part of the year.
95. In the one lesson seen, teaching was of good quality. Pupils from Years 5 and 6 achieved well. One of the pupils competently led the warm up session and the rest of the class responded well to his instructions. By the end of the lesson all pupils had worked through a range of well-organised activities. They had improved their awareness of space and developed their control and precision in striking and fielding skills. Boys and girls and pupils and pupils who have special educational needs have equal access to all activities. The boys' attitudes to music and movement have become very positive since the rugby coaches explained that players' warming up activities were the same as dance routines. Games are very well used at lunch times to keep pupils active. The learning mentor organises cricket sessions and lunchtime supervisors play small-sided games with pupils. The provision contributes well to developing an awareness of healthy lifestyle through exercise.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

The school makes **very good** provision for the teaching of personal and social and health education and citizenship.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have a sound understanding of environmental issues.
- Circle time provides a good opportunity for pupils to express their feelings and explore issues that interest them.
- Pupils learn about a healthy lifestyle through science and physical education lessons.
- Pupils know that they can take their problems or worries to the headteacher, class teachers and learning mentors who readily provide a listening ear, good support and helpful advice.

Commentary

96. There are timetabled lessons for the subject and themes are well integrated into other subject areas, such as science and religious education. Lessons cover aspects such as healthy eating and conservation issues. From Year 1 pupils learn about medicines and the dangers of drug abuse and in their topic about Florence Nightingale they gain an understanding of hygiene and the importance of clean hands. The science work is extended to include a study of the dangers of electricity. As part of their religious education lessons, pupils study different religions and cultures. They meet pupils of different backgrounds, religions and cultures through the links with another primary school; this helps to prepare them for life in a multi-cultural society. The vicar of St Thomas's takes the junior classes in turn for regular lessons in personal and social education and makes a sound contribution to learning.
97. Personal education has a high priority at St Thomas's and begins early on with the 'Dinosaur school' where pupils learn about respecting each other and of the need for classroom rules. Pupils thoroughly enjoy these lessons that are led by a teaching assistant and a very popular 'Dina' puppet. The Golden Rules are a major feature of school life and pupils know well the consequences of breaking them. The reward system that accompanies the rules is very effective in teaching pupils to make sensible choices when confronted by a problem. It also allows them to make good their mistakes through careful thought and actions. Leadership of this area is good and innovative.
98. There are satisfactory opportunities for pupils to take responsibility, to act as monitors or prefects and look after younger children. The gardening club enhances pupils' awareness of nature and encourages them to take care of living things. The most recent project is to improve the garden area for an elderly local resident and is a good way of developing citizenship. There are planned occasions, such as circle time, where pupils discuss social and moral issues, talk about feelings and consider dilemmas. Learning mentors are specially trained in helping pupils to think through their feelings and in making sense of their experiences.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	4
How inclusive the school is	2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	5
Value for money provided by the school	4
Overall standards achieved	4
Pupils' achievement	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	5
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	4
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	5
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	4
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	4
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	4
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	4
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
The leadership and management of the school	4
The governance of the school	4
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	4

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