

INSPECTION REPORT

STAPLEHURST PRIMARY SCHOOL

Staplehurst, Kent

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118313

Headteacher: Mr E. Spear

Lead inspector: Mrs J Schaffer

Dates of inspection: 2 – 4 February 2004

Inspection number: 258022

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Primary
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 – 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	407
School address:	Gybbon Rise Staplehurst Kent
Postcode:	TN12 0LZ
Telephone number:	01580 891765
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Carl Hynes
Date of previous inspection:	27 April 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is situated in the large village of Staplehurst. With 407 boys and girls on roll, it is larger than most schools of its type. However, the roll has fallen since the previous inspection. Children start in the reception class in the September of the year in which they will be five. Most pupils are of white United Kingdom, heritage. There are 2.5 per cent of pupils who come from minority ethnic groups and no one group is predominant. Currently there are five pupils who are at an early stage of English acquisition. A very small number of pupils come from the nearby traveller community. The number of pupils with special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average. The number of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is below average. The school received the Investors in People Award and has Green Flag status to recognise that it has taken steps to conserve and protect the environment. Children starting in reception have a wide range of attainment but overall, it is below average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
23698	Mrs J Schaffer	Lead inspector	English Physical education
9736	Mr J Brasier	Lay inspector	
21893	Mrs V Brittain	Team inspector	Science Information Technology
30075	Mr M Duggan	Team inspector	Foundation Stage Geography History Religious education
19055	Mrs V Derwas	Team inspector	Special educational needs English as an additional language Mathematics Art and design Design and technology Music

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Staplehurst school places pupils' well being to the forefront of its aims and it is successful in providing for pupils' personal development. As a result, pupils are happy to come to school and parents regard it well. Nevertheless, **it has serious weaknesses** in the standards achieved by the end of Year 6 and in some areas of leadership and management. Overall, it is not as effective as it should be. In the Foundation Stage, children achieve well because teaching is very good. In Years 1 and 2 pupils' achievements are satisfactory and teaching is good. However, in Years 3 to 6 pupils do not learn quickly enough and achievement is unsatisfactory. It does not provide satisfactory value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Pupils have good attitudes to their work and their behaviour is good.
- The school's results have declined in the last three years to well below the national average because the leadership of the school was too slow in making raising standards a priority.
- In Years 3 to 6, pupils do not achieve as well as they should.
- The very good leadership of the Foundation Stage ensures that children make a good start to their education.
- The school's systems for evaluating and checking the quality of its work and pupils' achievements are not good enough.
- In physical education, creative arts, drama and information and communication technology, pupils have good opportunities to develop their interests both during school and in after-school activities.
- The school's very good relationship with parents and the local community benefits pupils' personal development and learning.

The school's improvement since the previous inspection in 1998 has been **unsatisfactory**. Some of the issues that were identified at that inspection have been addressed. However, the decline in standards has been marked and there was a lack of rigour in tackling some of the important aspects for development.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

Overall pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory because pupils' skills and knowledge in Years 3 to 6 do not improve enough year-on-year. Over the past three years, the school's results have declined when compared against the national trend. In the current Year 6, while standards are higher than in 2003, the standard of pupils' work is below average in English, mathematics and science. The reasons being that pupils are not making quick enough gains in their use of accurate grammar, spelling and punctuation; they do not solve mathematical problems with enough confidence and accuracy. Pupils with special education needs in Years 3 to 6 do not make quick enough progress towards their individual targets. In 2003, the school's results in the national tests at the end of Year 2 were below average in reading and well below average in writing and mathematics. Currently, the standard of pupils' work is average which is a considerable improvement. Pupils' achievements, including those with special educational needs, in Years 1 and 2 are satisfactory. In the Foundation

Stage, children are all on track to achieve the goals set for them in all the areas of learning by the end of the reception year and their achievements are good. Pupils at an early stage of learning English make satisfactory progress in acquiring spoken English.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is very good. Pupils become more mature and responsible as they move up the school. They have good attitudes to their work. They behave well in class and particularly well in assemblies where they are taught very well to value their own and others' beliefs. Pupils like school and show it by very good attendance and excellent punctuality.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school has worked hard over the past year to improve curriculum planning and the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently, **it provides a sound quality of education** overall for its pupils, and the quality of teaching is satisfactory. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is very good and in Years 1 and 2 it is good. In Years 3 to 6 teaching is generally satisfactory. In the Foundation Stage, careful observations of children as they work and play results in the provision of activities that are well matched to their needs and as a result children learn quickly. In Years 1 and 2 good assessments guide teachers' planning and lessons are often lively and stimulating. In Years 3 to 6, teachers plan well together in their year groups and most lessons are well organised and informative. However, not all teachers have enough familiarity with the new planning to use it successfully. Work is not always well matched to pupils' needs because not enough use is made of day-to-day assessments of what they know and can do; this sometimes adversely affects the learning of pupils with special educational needs. Good experiences both in and out of school time in art and design, music, physical education and French are of interest to pupils and provide well for extra learning. Pupils become good swimmers because of the good use of the school's own pool. Parents make a good contribution to pupils' learning because they support their learning at home and at school.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Because the leadership of the school did not check the decline in standards quickly enough, overall **leadership and management are unsatisfactory.** The headteacher's aim to provide effectively for pupils' personal development is well realised but the aim to attain high academic standards is not. Some areas of the school are well managed, including the provision for children in the Foundation stage and the recruitment and retention of staff. There are, however, weaknesses in the way the school manages systems for evaluating and improving teaching and learning. Governance is satisfactory because new governors and the newly appointed chair have made good efforts to improve standards.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and pupils think highly of the school and appreciate the care the school provides and its openness to their views.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The following are the most important things the school should do to address the weaknesses in its provision:

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science;
- Improve the quality of leadership and management;
- Improve the use of assessment to match work to pupils' needs.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects.

In Years 3 to 6, standards in all the core subjects are below average and achievements are unsatisfactory. Pupils' achievements are satisfactory in Years 1 and 2 and in the Foundation Stage children's achievements are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's results in English, mathematics and science have been below or well below average in national tests at the end of Year 6 since 2000.
- Current standards are below average in Year 6.
- Pupils' achievements in Years 3 to 6 are unsatisfactory.
- Children's achievements in the Foundation Stage are good.
- In Year 2, standards have improved considerably and are now average.
- Pupils with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language do not always make the progress they should towards the targets set for them.

Commentary

1. At the time of the previous inspection, standards in English and mathematics were above average while standards in science were average. The school's results in national tests at the end of Year 6 fell in 2001 and stayed low for the next two years which represents unsatisfactory improvement. The school did not keep up with the rise in standards nationally. In 2003, results in mathematics and science were well below average, while in English the numbers attaining the expected level were similar to most schools, but too few pupils gained the higher level which brought down the school's point scores as can be seen in the table below. The school's results are well below average in comparison to those schools that had similar results in Year 2. This is an indicator that pupils did not make enough progress through Years 3 to 6. In the current Year 6, standards are higher than in 2003, more pupils are on track to attain the expected level but they are unlikely to reach the above average targets set by the school unless there is a real boost to their learning because pupils whose attainment is just below the expected level are not making enough progress.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	26.1 (25.1)	26.8 (27.0)
Mathematics	25.3 (25.9)	26.8 (26.7)
Science	27.5 (27.5)	28.6 (28.3)

Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. In Years 3 to 6, pupils try hard at their work but their achievements are unsatisfactory because they have not made enough progress in previous years. The school sets its own tests at the end of each year. From these tests, it is evident that, when the pupils who are currently in Year 6 were in earlier year groups, some did not progress at a satisfactory rate, especially in writing and mathematics. Pupils currently in Year 6, tackle work at the right level for their age in English, mathematics and science. However, in their written work ideas are not always fully developed and pupils frequently do not finish because they work slowly. Pupils use a well-formed italic script which is very legible but concerns regarding neat handwriting sometimes take precedence over content and length. In mathematics, pupils' lack of confidence and agility in mental calculations hold them back from solving problems accurately. In Years 3 to 5, pupils are now learning at a good rate and some are making up

lost ground from previous years. Pupils with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language generally make satisfactory progress in lessons. However, because teachers and learning support assistants do not record their progress towards their individual targets, there are occasions when they do not move on as quickly as they should.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
Reading	15.0 (15.3)	15.7 (15.8)
Writing	13.5 (14.1)	14.6 (14.4)
Mathematics	14.9 (15.7)	16.3 (16.5)

. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. The school's results in national tests for pupils in Year 2 have been below average or well below average for two years. Current standards are better, similar to the average and pupils' achievements are satisfactory. Pupils write with enthusiasm using the letter sounds they know and a good range of words that they can spell accurately. They punctuate simple sentences correctly and choose vocabulary thoughtfully to match their purpose. Most are keen to write at some length. Their use of number and understanding of mathematical calculations are improving at a good rate. Pupils in Year 2 work on mathematical and science tasks at the level expected for their age.
4. In the Foundation Stage, children's achievements are good. They start in the school with attainment that is below average. They quickly settle to learning and make good advances in developing their spoken and written language. They start to build up a range of words they recognise by sight and they develop a good understanding of the structure of stories. They make good progress in recognizing and using number and mathematical concepts such as shape and size. They are on track to attain the goals set for children of their age by the end of the reception year and they should exceed them in their knowledge and understanding of the world.
5. Pupils' achievements in information and communication technology (ICT) are good. In 2002 and part of 2003, the school had insufficient computers because the computer suite had been flooded. Since then, the subject co-ordinator has worked hard to promote the use of ICT and develop the skills of staff and pupils alike. In consequence, pupils in Year 6 are now attaining average standards. Pupils attain above average standards in swimming because of the good use of the school's own pool.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Behaviour and attitudes are good, and personal development is very good. Attendance is very good and punctuality excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' enthusiasm and their interest in lessons provide a good foundation for learning.
- Attendance and punctuality are established as part of the ethos.
- The school has high expectations of conduct and behaviour is good.
- The school's good policies to combat racism and bullying are promoted effectively.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the cultural traditions of some other communities both in this country and the rest of the world.
- There are good opportunities for pupils to reflect on or rejoice in the spiritual aspects of life.
- Moral and social development are very good.

Commentary

6. Pupils are keen to answer questions and contribute their own ideas to lessons. They listen with respect to others' viewpoints and can show pleasure in the achievements of others. Pupils say that nearly everyone works hard. Older pupils are mature and respond well to the many opportunities offered for them to take on responsibility, such as the buddy system to help the younger ones play well or the eco team that looks after the environment. Most pupils appreciate what is expected of them and are keen to comply. Younger pupils were aware of some unsatisfactory behaviour in their classrooms, largely confined to pupils who have not yet learnt self-control. Challenging behaviour in lessons is usually, but not always, handled well. While parents have some concerns about bullying and pupils reported some problems, detailed investigation of the pupils' examples showed that the problems were rough play, friends falling out or indiscriminate unsocial behaviour. Actual bullying was a rare occurrence. When detected, bullying and unsocial behaviour are well-handled by staff. Behaviour around the school, at lunch and elsewhere is good. The school has very high expectations of pupils' conduct and their relationships with each other.
7. The school's good procedures for managing pupils' behaviour have meant that there have been no exclusions in the past two years. The headteacher takes an active part in promoting good behaviour by being fully involved with the pupil and parents concerned when behaviour is unacceptable. A very good range of clubs and activities, at lunch time and after school, play an important part in developing pupils' social skills. There is a strong feeling of community within the school which is supported by activities such as school productions, sports days and the school's participation in a range of competitive sports with other local schools.
8. Senior management confer with three local clerics to produce a scheme for assemblies throughout the school year. Those seen were used to emphasise social and moral behaviour, as well as spiritual. Pupils are encouraged to share feelings of spirituality in times of reflection and in considering the beauty of the world. The headteacher takes a strong lead in promoting the personal development of pupils and the maturity of Year 6 pupils is an example of this. Pupils show a strong understanding of our multicultural society and of the variation in living conditions and culture of peoples around the world. Appreciation of our own culture stems from their enjoyment of music and art. The school has valuable links with Tanzania and Japan and supports charities in Romania. The multicultural tradition is exemplified by the school choir learning to sing a folk song in Russian, with the headteacher enthusiastically joining in as one of the choir.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	3.8	School data	0.1
National data	5.4	National data	0.4

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

Because pupils enjoy school they attend regularly and their punctuality is exemplary. Attendance is encouraged by a cascade of awards all of which are appreciated by the pupils.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	301	0	0
White – any other White background	8	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	6	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	2	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	3	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	39	0	0

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a **sound education** for its pupils.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching, which is satisfactory overall, is very good in the Foundation Stage, good in Years 1 and 2 and satisfactory in Years 3 to 6.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In the Foundation Stage, children learn quickly because of very good teaching.
- In all classes, teachers establish good relationships to which pupils respond well.
- Newly introduced, innovative methods are being used effectively to promote learning.
- Although individual teachers often have high expectations of what pupils can do, the school has not established a climate of high expectation and this affects pupils' achievement.
- Daily planning by year group teams is beneficial in most year groups, but not all.
- In Years 1 and 2, teachers make good use of assessments, but in Years 3 to 6 there is not enough accurate assessment of what pupils know and can do to inform planning.
- Teaching assistants often provide valuable support to pupils who learn more slowly than others and those who speak English as an additional language, but some have had insufficient training or guidance on best methods and practice.
- Marking often does not help pupils understand what they need to do to improve further.

Commentary

9. Teachers, learning support staff and voluntary helpers in the Foundation Stage work very well together as a team. Teaching and learning are organised smoothly and effectively. There is a good balance between activities where children can investigate and learn through play and those where teachers set a clear objective for a task. Adults know children very well and use this knowledge to plan activities that are relevant to children's interest and challenge them at the appropriate level.

10. Over the past eighteen months, the school has introduced effective and innovative methods to motivate pupils and encourage good attitudes to work. Teachers are enthusiastic about these methods and most use them consistently. For instance, at the start of each lesson, pupils are informed of what it is they are expected to learn. When done well, this helps pupils see a purpose in their efforts. Occasionally though, teachers use technical language rather than a straightforward explanation of the task ahead. A further good practice is that teachers are mindful of pupils' different learning preferences and so explanations do not rely solely on pupils sitting and listening. In a good lesson in Year 6, for instance, the explanation of the passive and active voice was brought to life through a short dramatization of a fight, thus capturing the attention of those pupils who learn through action. Teachers have established good relationships in their class through praise and recognition of pupils' efforts.
11. In the best lessons, teachers set a lively pace to lessons and remind pupils that they need to use the time well to get their work completed. However, in a few lessons there is a leisurely pace and the amount teachers expect pupils to learn is modest. The school has timetabled several short sessions during each day for such things as 'snack time' and reading time. In one snack time session in Year 2, the teacher used the time very well to promote learning through a short but fun activity that was completely compatible with the relaxed atmosphere of the session. However, in most classes in Years 3 to 6 this and reading time are not as well organised and expectations of pupils' enjoyment in learning are not high enough.
12. Throughout the school, pupils have been set a target to achieve. However, the school has chosen to set long term targets and, as a result, although they are displayed prominently in each class, few pupils remember their target or find them pertinent to the work in hand. In the older classes teachers rarely refer to targets when they mark work. Most teachers mark work regularly and give encouragement or point out mistakes. However, marking rarely gives pupils a clear understanding of how well they have done or what they need to do to improve further. Teachers and learning support assistants take account of individual education plans when deciding on work for pupils with special education needs both in lessons and when they are withdrawn. However, over a three month period few records are kept on how well pupils are progressing towards the targets in their plans and pupils themselves do not have an understanding of how well they are doing.
13. Overall, teaching is satisfactory for pupils with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language. There is a good balance between the times when pupils work within the class with extra help and those when they are withdrawn to improve on the skills that are causing particular difficulty. Learning support assistants build good relationships with pupils with special educational needs and the very few who are at an early stage of learning English. They get to know pupils well and share information about their progress with teachers each week at planning meetings. Often tasks are well-matched to pupils' needs but sometimes badly chosen methods are used, such as reading a text that is too small and much too difficult for pupils to follow or scribing page long pieces of written work for pupils to copy. The school has started to receive advice from the agency supporting pupils who speak English as an additional language but there has been little training for staff in best practice and methods to help these pupils acquire English quickly. The school acknowledges that there is a need to provide more training for learning support assistants but a significant number of well-trained staff has recently left, exacerbating the situation.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 48 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0(0%)	7 (15%)	18(37 %)	20(42 %)	3(6 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)

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

14. The school has devised a good system for staff to plan together daily. The newly introduced curriculum plans and new planning for literacy and numeracy provide the starting points for the plans for each year group. In Years 1 and 2, teachers adjust their planning in the light of pupils' learning in previous lessons. In consequence, work is set that is well-matched to pupils' needs and teaching is generally good. In Years 3 to 6 assessment of pupils' knowledge and understanding is particularly important because, in previous years, curriculum planning was not secure and pupils have gaps in their knowledge. The daily planning sessions in Years 3 to 6 are effective in the main but there has been insufficient focus on using daily assessments, particularly as marking does not help to identify misconceptions. Not all year groups work well together and, in some instances, teachers are not familiar enough with the newly introduced curriculum plans. This was a contributory factor to the unsatisfactory lessons shown in the above table. In these lessons, teachers did not provide well for pupils' different levels of attainment. Because there has been insufficient monitoring and support by subject or stage leaders, difficulties arising from using new planning have not been addressed.

The curriculum

The planning and content of the curriculum are **satisfactory** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The range and quality of learning experiences provided in the Foundation Stage are a strength.
- Good provision for personal, social and health education.
- Accommodation is good.
- There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer.
- Too much emphasis on planning for handwriting in the Years 3 to 6 age range.
- Foundation Stage outside playground needs improvement.

Commentary

15. Overall the curriculum is well-planned and relevant. There was a complete overhaul of the school's long-term and medium term planning just over a year ago. This was necessary because there was insufficient planning in place to guide teachers so that they could provide lessons that developed pupils' knowledge and understanding progressively as they moved up the school. The newly introduced planning now successfully provides for continuity and progression. The statutory requirements of the National Curriculum are met, as are those of the locally agreed syllabus for Religious Education. The inclusion policy operated by the school ensures that all pupils have equal access to all areas of the curriculum, including extra-curricular activities.
16. The Foundation Stage curriculum adds depth and quality to learning experiences with a wealth of well-planned opportunities which emphasise skills and understanding, as well as knowledge. This is linked directly to the very good overall management and teamwork in this stage of learning.
17. The provision for personal, social and health education, including the use and misuse of drugs and sex education, is good. The scheme of work and policy relating to this, recently updated, is now being implemented effectively.
18. As a result of the introduction of the school's new curriculum development framework, achievement is already beginning to rise in Years 1 and 2. In Years 3 to 6, most teachers are using the new planning well, but in these year groups some aspects of the curriculum are still in need of review and modification. For example, there is an over-emphasis on planning for handwriting and the school is unsure of what script should be taught. Teachers have begun to look for creative links between subjects and this is helping to develop pupils' interest in learning. For example, pupils in Year 6, while studying the Second World War, use ICT and

design and technology to produce attractive displays. Provision and planning for ICT has improved since the last inspection. Timetabled French lessons in the older year groups give an added dimension to curriculum development.

19. Curriculum planning is satisfactory for those pupils with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language. Their needs are identified quickly and the coordinator works closely with teachers and learning support staff to provide plans that address pupils' individual learning needs and help them participate successfully in all lessons. However, targets are occasionally too broad or long term and this adversely affects the quality of support. In addition, there is no system for checking on progress and, in consequence, pupils and adults are unclear about how well pupils are achieving.
20. The provision for extra-curricular activities is very good. In sport, clubs include football, netball, rugby, hockey and swimming with regular opportunities for pupils to take part in local and area competitions. Their efforts have been rewarded by winning area swimming and football championships regularly. Other clubs including drama and art are very well attended and contribute significantly to pupils' pleasure in the creative and performing arts. The school values educational outings and pupils have access to a wide range of visits and field-work. In addition, interesting visitors such as overseas teachers, experts from the Antiques Road Show, health professionals and local residents develop and extend pupils' experiences. These extensive programmes increase the pupils' enthusiasm for learning.
21. Good links with the receiving secondary schools, which include pupil visits and exchanges with teachers, ensure that transition between the primary and secondary stages of education is smooth.
22. Accommodation is good and includes extensive outdoor facilities and a swimming pool. These are being developed imaginatively to provide an environment which can be used for creative play, especially for Foundation Stage children or for structured learning during science, geography and physical education lessons. Some aspects of the Foundation Stage play area require improving. The school's resources are generally satisfactory.

Care, guidance and support

Pastoral care is **good**, with satisfactory support and guidance. There is an effective school council. In the Foundation Stage pastoral care is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Trusting and caring relationships with teachers and teaching assistants create a climate for good pastoral support and guidance.
- Lack of data on academic progress reduces the effectiveness of academic support and guidance.
- There are very good arrangements for the induction of pupils.
- There are good health and safety and child protection procedures.
- Circle time is used well to discuss relationship issues that arise.
- Welfare is good with a member of the senior management team taking a special interest in pupils from the travelling community.

Commentary

23. Pupils told inspectors how happy they were in the school and parents confirmed this. This was clearly a very good foundation for their work in school and demonstrates the quality of the pastoral guidance received. Welfare is well provided for, with several staff trained in handling critical medical conditions. There is a medical room and the needs of pupils with severe medical conditions are well known. Some of the teaching assistants are trained in speech therapy and others are skilled in techniques for anger management.

24. Pupils told inspectors how pleased they are with the way they had been introduced into the school, both in Reception and at later stages.
25. Health and safety have a high profile in the school, thanks to the enthusiasm of the chair of the premises committee and the teacher responsible. They have carried out a very thorough risk analysis of the whole school and consequently have put in arrangements to improve security. Child protection is handled by an experienced member of the senior staff, who knows the local procedures and agencies well.
26. There are two induction meetings for parents and children; the first is for parents of pre-school children of all ages. There is a discussion, accompanied by a booklet, about how parents can help their children to learn and develop to prepare for school. The second is specific for new entrants and gives both children and parents a good feel for the school. Children also visit in groups from their nursery schools.
27. The school council has elected representatives from each year group, who themselves are chosen by representatives of the classes in their year group, to whom they report back. The council has a number of achievements to its credit, including reform of the school uniform, changes to the layout of the playground, and establishing rules for a number of activities. Its meetings are somewhat free-range but the chair exerts her authority when necessary.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents and the community are very good. Links with other educational institutions are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The information provided for parents is good.
- Parents have very high opinions of the school and provide very good practical support.
- There are good transfer arrangements to the senior school.
- Links with the community make a significant impact on learning.
- Links with other educational institutions help to enhance the curriculum and better prepare children for school.

Commentary

28. Parents have very high opinions of the school, as shown by their answers to the questionnaire and their comments at the meeting. Their only concern was bullying, which was addressed by talking to children. Children are using the description bullying to refer to all sorts of conflict and true bullying is rare. When it does occur, it is dealt with properly by the school. The school provides good information to parents through home school information books that are well used by many, through newsletters, a good prospectus and a good governors' annual report to parents and good curriculum information. School reports have descriptions of what has been achieved, but targets for improvement are rare and National Curriculum levels are restricted to the older children. There are three consultation evenings. Parents are supportive in many ways, raising funds through the parent teacher association, helping in class and with swimming, coaching sports, and helping with homework and reading. Parents are welcome in school and the school is inclusive in that it provides information for single parents. Joint plans are made to tackle attendance or behaviour problems. Parents are invited to discuss individual education plans when these are being reviewed. Parents run the swimming club in term time and holidays. Parents and the school give mutual help to each other, for instance when Year 6 pupils needed calculators and the school had no funds, parents held a cake sale to buy the calculators. When asked, the school gives helpful advice and support to parents with problems unconnected to education. Parents are represented on the Eco Committee that is reviewing the school environment.

29. Local churches have very strong links with the school. The local policeman coaches the football team, the village dentist talks to children about caring for their teeth, the local grocer allows pupils to do healthy eating surveys, local businesses support sports teams and provide kit, a printer provides publicity material for use in estate agents, others provide off cuts of useful material and a food manufacturer uses the children for market research and in return provides furnishings for the computer suite. The school serenades disabled and elderly residents at Christmas and provides Harvest Festival Gifts to Romania. Many charities are supported. A puppet group performs in school on religious themes and a drama group presents material that promotes the anti-bullying policy.
30. On Thursday nights the school is used for adult education and on Saturdays it hosts the Kent Music School, attended by pupils from 50 Kentish schools.
31. The leaders of playgroups and nurseries are invited into school to hear about the school's expectations for incoming pupils. The local secondary school is a sports college and there is a fruitful relationship. There are good arrangements for transfer there. Various groups of local schools meet to discuss management, special educational needs or arrange swimming galas. There is a link with Christ Church, Canterbury for teacher training.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Because it has taken too long for the raising of achievement to become a priority, leadership and management of the school are **unsatisfactory** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher has provided pupils with a stable and caring environment in which to learn but has failed to strive for higher achievement.
- The deputy headteacher's knowledge and commitment has led to the very good organisation of the Foundation Stage and to the recent improvements in teaching.
- Effective team building between teachers and support assistants is having a positive effect on learning.
- The roles of key staff, other than the deputy, are not powerful enough to bring about school improvement.
- Systems to monitor school performance have insufficient rigour.
- The priorities of the school improvement plan are not reflected in the school budget.

Commentary

32. Governance of the school is satisfactory. The governors are enthusiastic, fully supportive of the aims of the school and keen to become more involved with shaping its direction. Until recently this was not part of their role. However, at the beginning of the Autumn term 2002, members of the governing board worked alongside staff in determining how the school should move forward and this resulted in the current school improvement plan. Useful links have been made between individual governors and subject leaders in order to gain knowledge of subject developments. Governors are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school but their role as a 'critical friend' has not been sufficiently developed to challenge the school with regard to the lower achievement of the pupils in recent years. The governing board meets all its statutory obligations.
33. Aspects of the headteacher's leadership of the school are unsatisfactory. It has been compromised to some extent by his year's secondment from 2002 to 2003 and by the failure to tackle underachievement when problems were identified in the 2001 national tests. He is rightly committed to the all-round development of pupils and, as a result, their personal and social skills are good. He has created a good basis on which standards can be raised. Pupils are well prepared for life in the wider community. However, aspirations for high academic

achievement have not been reflected in strategic planning over recent years. The priorities of the current school improvement plan have evolved from a whole school audit of provision, instigated by the acting headteacher and the present deputy headteacher during the headteacher's secondment. They focus well on relevant initiatives to raise standards, however, the number of objectives is overwhelming and restricts the school's ability to forge ahead with the most productive lines of development. The lack of close monitoring and checks on their progress also inhibits their impact. The school has begun to analyse its results and to track pupils' progress but is at an early stage of using data to improve performance. There are no analyses by aspects such as gender and ethnicity. There has been insufficient improvement in leadership and management since the previous inspection.

34. The school's management structure is not effective enough because responsibility is not devolved to middle managers, the subject leaders, to monitor and evaluate their own curriculum areas. This has affected standards, particularly in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The co-ordinator for special educational needs is knowledgeable and has developed good procedures but has had too little time to check on the quality of provision. Too much responsibility is placed on the deputy headteacher and the special needs co-ordinator, both of whom have heavy teaching commitments. As a result, curriculum initiatives are not being effectively monitored and evaluated.
35. The professional development of staff is beginning to be used well to engender a common approach to teaching and learning and to reflect the priorities in the school improvement plan. Support assistants are now included in performance management and their role is being developed effectively to maximise their impact on learning. None of this has been in place long enough to judge its success. Crucially, there is not a coherent overview of how to make the best use of the time and deployment of learning support assistants. The school effectively supports new staff and students in training. New staff appreciate the joint year group planning and quickly feel that they are welcomed into the staff team. Although staff are conscious that the standards at the end of Year 6 are not high enough, there is good morale and commitment to improvement. In an area where many schools struggle to appoint new staff, the school is successful in attracting and keeping new staff and has good relationships with a number of supply teachers to cover absences.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	984204
Total expenditure	958,508
Expenditure per pupil	2,299

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	3,591
Balance carried forward to the next	25,695

36. Efficient administrative staff control day-to-day spending effectively. However, the overall approach to financial management does not reflect the school's priorities. Governors have not focused their attention sufficiently on checking out possible options for their spending and considering all possible repercussions to their decisions. Resources are not budgeted for but can only draw on what is left after other costs have been met. Initiatives are not evaluated to judge whether they have provided value for money in terms of their success in improving pupils' achievements.

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

Overall provision in the Foundation Stage is **very good**, which is an improvement since the previous inspection. Children enter the Reception class in the September following their fourth birthday. Those born in the autumn term are admitted full-time and children born either during the spring or summer attend part-time from September to January and full-time for the remaining two terms. On entry to the Reception class, there is a wide range of attainment but overall it is below what is expected for children of this age. By the end of Reception year, indications are that the majority of children will reach the early learning goals in all six areas, and that they will exceed them in knowledge and understanding of the world.

Overall main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good induction programme.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Opportunities to learn through play are very good.
- There is very good teamwork.
- Assessment is good.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Achievement is good.

Commentary

37. Parents appreciate the good induction arrangements. Positive links are established with parents, all of whom support the school well, prior to children entering the Reception class. During the inspection many good examples were noted when teachers and other staff discussed freely and easily events of the school day with parents, grandparents or carers. The very knowledgeable and enthusiastic co-ordinator leads and manages the Foundation Stage very well. Her planning ensures that children are provided with very good opportunities to learn through play. Very good teamwork and good assessment procedures mean that the next stage of children's learning is planned for well, and this was seen to good effect in many of the plan, do and review sessions.
38. The children's learning including those with special educational needs is very good. They also achieve well due to overall very good teaching and support time invested wisely by classroom assistants.

Personal, social and emotional development

Provision for personal, social and emotional development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good balance between free choice and directed activities.
- Good opportunities to develop social skills through play.
- Adults have high expectations of children's behaviour and provide very good role models.

Commentary

39. High priority is given to the children's personal and social development. The teachers' and classroom assistants' input is effective and learning in this area is very good. Children are encouraged to be independent and make choices about activities. The teachers' good emphasis on learning through play ensures that children's language, mathematical and social skills are being developed consistently well. All adults act as very good role models, helping

children to form positive relationships and to care for others and for the resources that they use. As a result, children's confidence increases. They are respectful to adults and share resources happily with others. They feel secure and their self-esteem is enhanced. When a group of four children, for example, acted out preparations for tea-time in the kitchen area, they all collaborated without the need for adult supervision. Due to the very good provision and effective class management, children are on track to reach the goals for this area of learning by the time they leave Reception.

Communication, language and literacy

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and learning.
- Emphasis on thinking skills.
- Strong focus on language development.

Commentary

40. The children, including those with special educational needs, make very good progress in communication, language and literacy as a result of consistent, high-standard dialogue between them and adults. They are encouraged to extend their thinking and reasoning skills through play, as noted with a group pumping and siphoning water in a large trough. The majority listens attentively in an active manner, using appropriate responses and gestures, especially when teachers' questions are probing, as observed in a good lesson on sharing and writing up the 'weekend news'. The effective use of time by the classroom assistants contributes significantly to the development of the children's conversational skills, exemplified well in several creative, mathematical and physical activities, for example to explain how they had designed and made a model dog. Reading and writing are promoted well and as a result of regular, well-organised reading sessions and parental involvement improvement is constant. Although the writing of children with higher attainment is good, for many, especially younger children, it is in early developmental stages. Nevertheless, these children, as a result of the teachers' hard work and their own willingness to learn, improve rapidly. Telling examples were noted in a writing display which included 'thank you' letters and 'get well' cards to Jack and Jill. Indications are that attainment will be in line with what is expected nationally when the children leave the Reception class.

Mathematical development

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Tasks are matched well to the children's needs.
- Good attention to ordering numbers.

Commentary

41. The children enter Reception with mathematical skills below what is expected from this age group nationally. As a result of overall very good teaching and effective support from classroom assistants, they make very good progress and achieve well. At the end of the year indications are that attainment will match the early learning goals. Most of the older children count to 30 and beyond. Tasks, pitched well to meet children's different learning needs, ensure that thinking and calculating skills are being developed continually. A good example was noted in a very good lesson about recognising and recreating simple patterns

where the children were required to think deeply and count out accurately a variety of items while making their own repeating patterns. Many identify and name simple two and three-dimensional shapes and children of higher attainment carry out simple addition and subtraction to five. Good opportunities are routinely provided to develop mathematical vocabulary such as 'longer', 'shorter', 'heavier', 'lighter' and 'taller' during play and free-choice activities, which the children enjoy.

Knowledge and Understanding of the World

Provision in this area of learning is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good opportunities for designing and making.
- Good use of outside environment and resources.
- Good opportunities to explore cultures and beliefs.

Commentary

42. Throughout their Reception year children begin to understand more about the place in which they live and how they and others grow from babies to adulthood. As a result of well-organised trips, for example a tour of the local village of Staplehurst, they find out about their area and chat confidently about the different features observed. They begin to understand simple computer uses and many manipulate the mouse accurately to make pictures of streets and houses while working in a mathematics program as observed during a free-choice activity. The school outside environment is used well for scientific and nature observations. The children enjoy designing and making, and many good examples testify to this, none more so than their three-dimensional models of animals and characters from nursery rhymes, especially 'Humpty Dumpty'. All these activities become more meaningful as the teachers and classroom assistants encourage children to express their opinions, as witnessed in a very good lesson where effective use of artefacts helped them to distinguish between modern kitchens and those from the past (Polly's kitchen). In the science area they have opportunities to explore how magnets work. They learn about other cultures and beliefs, for example what Muslims do during Ramadan and Eid. By the end of the Reception year, these children will have exceeded the early learning goals.

Physical Development

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Outdoor activities are planned well.
- Good opportunities to develop physical skills in 'Write Dance', especially fine motor skills.

Commentary

43. Although children's manipulative skills are overall below those expected for this age group on entry to Reception, due to very good teaching they will have reached the early learning goals by the time they leave. Good provision through table-top games, modelling materials and use of simple tools and materials increasingly improves their hand-eye co-ordination and their control of tools such as pencils. Good examples observed included cutting and pasting, using scissors and glue sticks, and in a music and movement lesson refining and developing small gestures from larger movements. They respond well to instructions and are developing a satisfactory awareness of space and consideration for others, as noted during an outdoor activity in negotiating routes while riding tricycles. They develop satisfactory co-

ordination and confidence as they perform running, jumping and landing exercises during play-times. This is enhanced further through opportunities to pass and catch a ball and practise basket-ball shooting during games. During these sessions children learn to take turns, which contributes positively towards their personal and social development.

Creative Development

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good opportunities to explore colour, texture, shape and form.
- Music is used effectively to develop children's enjoyment and exploration of rhythm and soul.

Commentary

44. The children are offered a wide range of interesting creative activities each day and the balance between free choice and direction is good. Independence and confidence are increased as the children explore different media and materials. For example, they paint characters in nursery rhymes, themselves and their parents, and scenes depicting houses, flowers and trees. Well-planned work by the teacher ensures good opportunities for role-play, for example scenes from nursery rhymes in the 'Nursery Rhyme Theatre' stage. Children sing simple, familiar songs, for example 'Good Morning Jesus', and take great delight in tapping out repeated rhythms, using percussion instruments, as observed in a good end of day music session. Children's development in this area of learning is in line with what is expected for this age group.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 AND 2

ENGLISH

Because of recent improvements, provision in English is **satisfactory** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have been too low.
- Recent improvements in planning, teaching and resources, including the use of ICT have had a good affect on pupil's learning.
- Pupils' attainment in Year 6 is not high enough because they have not made enough progress in previous years.
- In Years 1 and 2, pupils are confident writers and readers because teachers use good methods to teach reading and writing.
- The subject leader has a clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve but has not had enough opportunity to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning.
- The short sessions, that are set aside to teach reading, are not always planned well and too much time is spent on teaching handwriting in Years 3 to 6.
- Best methods are not always used to support those with special educational needs.

Commentary

45. Improvement since the previous inspection in 1998 has been unsatisfactory. At that time, the school's results in national tests at the end of Year 6 and Year 2 were average. However, in 2001 they slid to below average in the tests for Year 6 and, in 2002, the same happened in Year 2. The same below average results were seen in 2003. Prompt action to investigate the

reasons for the deterioration in pupils' achievements was not taken. This was because there was insufficient monitoring of pupils' achievements and the quality of teaching.

46. The school's results in 2003 in national tests at the end of Year 6 were well below average when compared to schools that had had similar results at the end of Year 2, indicating that some pupils did not make enough progress. In the current Year 6, pupils have gaps in their use and understanding of grammar and punctuation and this holds them back when they are tackling the work expected of them in Year 6. Pupils read books at the expected level of difficulty for pupils in Year 6, but they do not have some of the reading skills that they should have, such as identifying implied meanings or summarizing quickly what they have just read.
47. When the present co-ordinator took up the role some 18 months ago the acting headteacher had set in motion an urgent programme to raise standards. The co-ordinator identified weaknesses in planning, resources and the quality of teaching. The local education authority helped to provide training in using new planning available from national sources. This was successful, especially with regard to the use of best methods to teach grammar and punctuation. Grammar is now taught in a lively way and linked to good opportunities for pupils to practise their new skills. This greatly increases their confidence as could be seen when pupils in Year 2 wrote about the characters in the fairy tale they had just read. Their enjoyment in the story was harnessed effectively to encourage them to write using colourful descriptive language. Teaching in Years 1 and 2 is good. Teachers are knowledgeable about the best methods to teach spelling and they effectively encourage pupils to use a range of different strategies to work out unknown words when they read. In Years 3 to 6, teaching is satisfactory overall. There was one lesson that was unsatisfactory; but contributing to this was the fact that the new planning was not fully understood because of a teachers' lengthy absence.
48. Assessing pupils' achievements accurately and setting work at different levels were identified as priorities for development. To address this, pupils have been given group targets using the National Literacy Strategy objectives. These are displayed prominently in each class and act as a good guideline for teachers in their planning. Most teachers provide well for those of higher attainment. However, fewer are successful in meeting the needs of those who learn more slowly than others. This is because there is not an ample fund of knowledge regarding the best methods to use. The co-ordinator provides a good model for others by customising resources, having high expectations and providing the right amount of encouragement and support. When work for those of lower attainment is not so well planned, pupils spend too long copying out what has been written for them by adults and often become dependent on adults' help.
49. On most days, short sessions are timetabled for reading. The use of this valuable time is not maximised because there is no central management to help teachers make it as effective as possible. In the younger classes, for instance, teachers focus their attention well on one group but have no classroom support to help plan more effective tasks in the other groups. In the older classes, some good activities are devised to help pupils develop interest and enthusiasm for reading. For example, in Year 3, an enthusiastic group were researching facts for a history lesson. However, in some classes the session is used for silent reading with few identified objectives. There is no evaluation of the way in which this time is used and because most teachers use the same time slot for the session, there is no opportunity to target support from teaching assistants. The school teaches the italic script and most pupils' writing is very well-formed and fluent. However, too much time is spent teaching handwriting, even in Year 6, when nearly all pupils write with a joined hand as expected by their age.
50. Leadership of the subject is satisfactory but the subject is not managed well. There are two co-ordinators and they both have good knowledge and understanding of current best practice and provide good role models in their own teaching. There have been opportunities to provide training and guidance for staff and help from the local education authority advisor has been enlisted. However, there are no clear procedures for monitoring and evaluating

teaching and pupils' achievements. In addition, the co-ordinators' roles do not fully encompass providing support when needed.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

51. Those pupils with average or higher attainment have enough skills in language and literacy to use them effectively in their work in other subjects. However, those of lower attainment find this difficult and the school has not looked at ways of improving this. Because of this the achievements of pupils with lower attainment in history, geography and science are limited. For instance, when recording work in science, teachers do not have good strategies to develop pupils' skills in recording. Support for them generally results in an adult or more able pupil carrying out the recording task. Literacy skills are not developed well enough across the curriculum.

MATHEMATICS

Provision for mathematics is **unsatisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement in Years 3 to 6 is unsatisfactory.
- Achievement in Years 1 and 2 has improved because teachers use information from assessments to plan work.
- Leadership lacks drive to push up standards and management fails adequately to monitor the quality of teaching and learning.
- The National Numeracy Strategy is securely in place but not all teachers plan effectively for different groups of pupils, particularly in Years 3 to 6.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work is not always helpful in pointing out where pupils can make improvements.
- Pupils' positive attitudes to learning ensure that they work hard at tasks.

Commentary

52. In the 2003 national tests at the end of Year 6, pupils' attainment was well below the national average. Standards in Year 6 are still lower than those expected for pupils of this age. Despite being satisfactory in Years 1 and 2, achievement in mathematics overall is unsatisfactory because pupils have not made enough progress compared with their attainment at age seven. Taken as a whole, improvements since the last inspection have been unsatisfactory.
53. The quality of teaching is satisfactory because of the recent improvements in planning and in the use of the methods recommended in the National Numeracy Strategy. There was, however, one unsatisfactory lesson. Pupils are placed in banded groups across each year group from Years 3 to 6 for four lessons out of five, with the intention of providing better learning opportunities for different abilities. Thorough planning typified the good lessons observed because teachers take into account all pupils' needs and rates of progress. As a result, pupils' skills and understanding are extended and developed with appropriate levels of challenge. In a few lessons, teachers have low expectations and the tasks set do not always reflect the differing abilities because they are not using the available assessment information well enough to meet the learning needs of all pupils.
54. The overall progress and achievement of pupils with special educational needs is unsatisfactory in Years 3 to 6. In an effective lesson in Year 6, all pupils including those with special educational needs were engaged by the teacher's careful planning that helped visualise fractions. The teaching assistant worked well with a group of pupils with special educational needs so that they could understand division of money with remainders. However, in many lessons, especially in the upper part of the school, these pupils do not

achieve as well they could because teachers do not take sufficient account of their differing needs.

55. The recent focus on teaching and learning is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' achievement in Years 1 and 2. Teachers are now using information about pupils' attainment and recording progress each term in order to plan work for all ability levels in their class. Lessons are lively and relevant to the pupils' interest and needs. For example, at the start of a Year 1 lesson, pupils' knowledge of two-dimensional shapes was reinforced using songs. Pupils thoroughly enjoyed the session. They confidently named and described the properties of most regular two-dimensional shapes, and were then able to apply that knowledge to three-dimensional shapes.
56. There are inconsistencies in the way teachers mark books. A few teachers give pupils a very good indication of how well they are doing and what they can do to improve their work. However, not all teachers use marking effectively and so pupils are not being guided towards improving their understanding. The rather out-dated commercial scheme of work used for homework tasks in Years 3 to 6 does not extend and reinforce knowledge gained in lessons. The older pupils use several different workbooks and this makes it difficult for teachers accurately to assess progress.
57. Although there are two co-ordinators for the subject, the amount of work needed in recent months to secure improvements has been daunting. Both co-ordinators have worked at some good improvements, although some have been unfinished. The initiative to record pupils' achievements termly in Years 1 and 2, in order to target pupils who need extra help and those who could be moved on more quickly has been particularly fruitful. However, too few opportunities to monitor teaching and learning has hampered co-ordinators' efforts to raise standards. There have been too few opportunities for teachers to share good practice and their own evaluations with the whole staff. In Years 3 to 6, the school uses end of year tests to track pupils' progress year-on-year but it is not yet using this information to investigate when progress is insufficient. Consequently, teachers are unaware of pupils who have slipped behind their earlier indications of potential achievement.

Mathematics across the curriculum

58. In some subjects, teachers are beginning to plan opportunities so that pupils can use their mathematical skills, notably in science collecting and analysing data, and in geography in the study of maps. In Year 6, well-planned work in design and technology stretched pupils' skills in measurement and estimation. However, whole-school planning is not sufficiently systematic to enable pupils to use their mathematical knowledge and practise their skills in each year group.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving but are still below average in Year 6.
- There is a good emphasis on learning through investigation and pupils enjoy their work.
- Correct scientific terminology is being taught and used by pupils.
- Science skills are not being systematically developed.
- There is no formal system for assessing pupils' learning and this affects standards.
- The monitoring of standards, and of teaching and learning, is not yet in place.

Commentary

59. Since the last inspection there has been insufficient improvement in provision. As a result, standards have declined over recent years. This year a new, investigative based science curriculum has been put in place and there is some evidence of a positive impact on standards, particularly for younger pupils. By the end of the year, almost all pupils in Year 2 should achieve the expected level with more pupils reaching the higher level than in 2003. They achieve well. National tests results for Year 6 pupils in 2003 showed standards to be well below average when compared nationally and were below those of similar schools. Inspection evidence indicates that more pupils will achieve the expected level although it is unlikely that the number achieving the higher level will rise significantly. The achievement of these pupils is unsatisfactory over time. Generally, in junior classes, higher attaining pupils are insufficiently challenged. Higher and average attaining pupils in Year 6 can talk confidently about the areas of science they have studied recently and they have acquired sound and sometimes good knowledge and understanding. They use correct scientific vocabulary when explaining their ideas. Pupils' science skills are below average because they have been given insufficient opportunities over time to plan and carry out their own investigations. No significant differences were noted between the achievement of boys and girls, those with special educational needs or pupils from minority ethnic groups.
60. In the lessons seen during the inspection teaching varied between satisfactory and very good. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. Only one lesson was seen in Years 1 and 2. Most teachers provide interesting activities so that pupils want to learn. They are encouraging the use of correct scientific terminology and older pupils show a good understanding of words such as 'insulator' and 'rigidity'. Where teaching is good or better, skilful questioning challenges pupils' thinking and extends their understanding. For example, in a very good Year 1 lesson, the teacher used this method to enable pupils to understand why the nature of sounds changed when different materials were used in shakers; for example, pasta and rice. Higher attaining pupils were able to understand why the amounts used should be the same. When teaching was satisfactory lessons were often too teacher dominated with insufficient opportunities for pupils to express their ideas. Insecure subject knowledge in some lessons meant that teachers did not pick up on pupils' misconceptions and challenge them. An analysis of pupils' work in junior classes shows that the new planning format, to enable pupils to set up and carry out investigations, is helpful in developing science skills when used well. However, there is inconsistency between classes in expectations. For example, ensuring that pupils attempt to give reasons for their predictions or explaining their conclusions is not evident in about half of the work. This is affecting the development of skills as pupils move through school. Lower attaining pupils are rarely offered resources that are matched to their level of attainment to record their findings and some of their work is incomplete. The quality of the marking of pupils' work is variable. Where it is used well it helps pupils to rethink their ideas and develop their skills.
61. The role of the subject leader has not developed since the last inspection so she cannot identify areas of weakness and influence provision sufficiently in order to raise standards across the school. The following are areas for development for the management of the subject:
- Monitoring of teaching and learning would enable the subject leader to identify weaknesses.
 - Staff need more support and guidance to plan for the systematic development of science skills.
 - Formal assessment procedures need to be put in place so that teachers know what their pupils understand and can do, so that this can be built on year-on-year.
62. Year 6 teachers have developed their own assessment system, using previous national test papers, which is successfully identifying areas of weakness which they can then tackle.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Strong leadership has had a positive impact on improving the quality of provision.
- Teaching is very good in Year 6 and standards for these pupils are now at expected levels.
- Information and communication technology is being used well in other subjects.
- Teachers' confidence and subject knowledge have improved since the last inspection.
- The ICT suite, an expensive resource, is underused.

Commentary

63. There has been a good improvement in provision for ICT since the last inspection, particularly for older pupils. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 have good access to the new, networked computer system, particularly in the resource area outside classrooms. This gives them regular opportunities to practise their skills. This, alongside the appointment of a Year 6 teacher with ICT expertise, has enabled Year 6 pupils to catch up quickly on the eight months lost when the computer suite was out of action due to flooding last year. Their achievement is good. They handle spreadsheets confidently and have created their own PowerPoint presentations, often using animation and sound. There were no ICT lessons for pupils in Year 2 so standards could not be judged. However, assessment records indicate that pupils are generally at expected levels. Many Year 1 pupils show confidence in logging on, opening and closing program and files. They use the mouse accurately to create sentences with words from a database.
64. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Most teachers have received recent training and this has been enhanced by sessions with the subject leader to ensure they are confident in the aspects of the curriculum to be taught each term. As a result, skills are taught competently but, generally, without extra challenge for higher attaining pupils. Teachers achieve a good balance between formal instruction and the time allowed for pupils to practise skills. Teaching in Year 6 is very good because strong subject knowledge and effective questioning allow the teacher to assess what pupils understand and to build on this in clear manageable steps. Mistakes are quickly picked up and rectified by demonstration. Expectations are high and pupils welcome the challenge. Two boys were thrilled to discover that altering their profit and loss graphs updated their spreadsheets. Good attention is paid to the application of spreadsheets in everyday life.
65. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The improvements since the appointment of the subject leader have ensured that pupils across the school are generally working at the expected levels. Last term he was given time to work with all teachers in the computer suite and he still provides regular, informal support. Training for staff is ongoing. The development plan identifies relevant priorities, for example, interactive whiteboards to enhance the teaching of skills. Broadband access to the Internet is imminent.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

66. Information and communication technology is being used well to enhance work in other subjects. For example, in English there are good opportunities for pupils to use their word processing skills to enhance presentation, often with imported pictures. Simulations have enhanced work in science. Search engines on the Internet are used regularly for research and there is evidence of good quality work in history and geography.

HUMANITIES

It was only possible to observe one lesson in history and two in geography, all of which were in Years 3 to 6. Comments are based on these lessons, on an analysis of pupils' work and discussions with them and their subject co-ordinators. From these it is evident that attainment in both subjects is in line with national expectations by the end of Years 2 and 6, which is broadly similar to the last inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good use of primary and secondary sources and role-play in history.
- Visits and visitors have a positive impact on pupils' learning.
- Limited recording of geography in some classes.
- Pupils are not given enough opportunities to develop their skills in writing and reading in their work in geography and history.
- Information and communication technology used well.

Commentary

67. In the lessons seen, pupils' learning, including those with special educational needs and for whom English is an additional language, was satisfactory. An examination of past and present work indicates that many pupils are not using their skills in writing and reading well enough when they do work in these subjects. Teaching is satisfactory overall, among its strengths being the use of primary and secondary source material, the internet and role-play to stimulate pupils' interest. A prime example was observed in a Year 6 geography lesson where pupils working on computers used different search engines to research facts about their locality and a village in India.
68. In history, pupils begin to build their sense of chronology from an early age. Starting in Year 1 they compare modern and past toys. By the end of Year 2 their knowledge and understanding of chronology is enhanced through time-lines related to specific events displayed in picture or diagrammatic form. By the end of Year 6 pupils of higher attainment have mastered the skills of historical interpretation and enquiry. This was evident in an evaluation of some Year 6 pupils' work on explaining how rationing affected both rural and city dwellers during the Second World War. Their study of history is enhanced by visits to local museums and stately homes in conjunction with studying the Tudors and Victorians. As a result of these activities history becomes alive and events of the past more meaningful, exemplified well in a Year 3 lesson where pupils acted out the reasons for the revolt, led by Boudicca, against the Romans. A notable feature relating to the subject is the frequent visits of a member of the Antiques Road Show team to conduct workshops emphasising the importance of archaeology in historical enquiry.
69. In geography, pupils in Years 1 and 2 carry out simple mapping exercises and describe their route to and from school. Many know the difference between physical and human features. In Year 2, for example, they compare the different features and way of life in their own locality with those in an African village. By the time pupils leave Year 6, their knowledge about the British Isles is developed satisfactorily. Further, they understand how people both improve and damage the environment, recognised by the awarding of the Green Flag to the school for its work on the Eco-School Project. Their knowledge and understanding of how people in other parts of the world live is enhanced when they compare Chembakoli, a village in India, with Staplehurst. In discussion with pupils it is clear that their knowledge of topics covered is satisfactory, for example why families had to build Anderson shelters during the Second World War.
70. Both co-ordinators are relatively new to their posts. They are conscientious and plan to raise the profile of the subjects further. They monitor teachers' plans. Assessment is carried out

in an informal manner at the end of topics. It is an area for development, of which the school is aware. Overall the subjects are led and managed satisfactorily.

Religious education

Provision in this subject is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Religious education makes a good contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development.
- Pupils acquire a good factual basis about the subject.
 - There is no formal assessment system.
- Written work is limited.

Commentary

71. Pupils' attainment by the end of Years 2 and 6 is in line with what is expected by the locally agreed syllabus, which is similar to the last inspection. Pupils' learning, including those with special educational needs and for whom English is an additional language, is satisfactory. Overall these pupils achieve satisfactorily, due to appropriate challenge, choice of interesting topics, satisfactory teaching and their willingness to learn.
72. The pupils develop a sound factual basis from the topics which they study and respect for their own religion and that of others. For example, pupils displayed great respect as they produced mini Torah scrolls during a Year 3 lesson. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 enjoy retelling the story of Christmas and recall other stories from the Bible, such as the Prodigal Son. When learning about the significance of light during religious celebrations, they compared the festivals of Hanukkah and Diwali in the Jewish and Hindu religions respectively. This helped them to see similarities in different faiths. In Years 3 to 6 their study of several aspects of major religions such as Sikhism, Hinduism and Islam provides them with a good understanding of the importance of faith to different communities. Pupils explain some of the meanings or reasons behind religious beliefs and customs such as, the five pillars of Islam, why Muslims face Mecca when they pray, and why living things are not represented in Islamic art. Through their study of these religions pupils' moral, cultural and spiritual development is enhanced.
73. Overall the subject is led and managed satisfactorily. This is a decline from the last inspection when it was good because there has been too little monitoring and evaluation of provision. The co-ordinator is aware of the areas for development, which include assessment.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

Two lessons were seen in music, art and design and physical education. Other evidence was gathered, such as, observations of displays, pupils' work, singing by the choir and in assembly, and discussion with pupils and the co-ordinators. No lessons were seen in design and technology and only a small amount of pupils' work; the subject co-ordinator was absent from school.

Art and design

Displays of art work in the central areas of the school as well as in classrooms are of good quality and indicate that pupils in all year groups attain at least average standards, and often better. There is a planned progression of skills across the school with pupils developing their ideas independently. Teaching in both lessons observed in Years 2 and 5 was good. Pupils were confident in using a range of materials for collage and their choices of colour, shape and texture were well considered. Pupils worked cooperatively and were able to make decisions independently about the direction of

their work. In Year 5, pupils demonstrated a clear understanding of the use of perspective in art. There is a well-attended art club. The school arts' week contributes effectively to pupils' awareness of art in their own heritage and in the many cultures of the wider world. The co-ordinator is a good role model and provides guidance for other staff from a sound base of subject knowledge.

Design and technology

Very little work was seen but that of pupils' in Year 6, designs and models of war-time air raid shelters, is at a level expected for pupils of their age. Pupils clearly have a good understanding of the process of design and evaluation.

Music

There is a well-planned programme of work in music and pupils' enthusiasm for the subject is very evident. However, in a lesson in Year 6 teaching was unsatisfactory; the teacher missed opportunities to develop skills and musical vocabulary and pupils' participation was very limited. In the Year 2 lesson, pupils worked cooperatively and the good pace and challenge maintained by the teacher enabled pupils to develop their understanding. Children sang well during collective worship, and the school choir sang very well and enthusiastically in rehearsal. Provision for extra-curricular music across the school is very good, with lessons from peripatetic teachers in guitar, violin, keyboard, and piano. Very good opportunities for performance are provided through participation in school productions, local recorder and choral festivals and regular performances in the local community. The co-ordinator has relevant skills and provides a good role model for other teachers. Most teachers use the school's new planning effectively but there has not been an opportunity for the co-ordinator to give guidance to all staff.

Physical education

Teaching is good. The co-ordinator has devised her own system of providing training for staff and this has paid off. By taking exemplar lessons over the period of a week at the start of each term, teachers' skills and confidence in all the aspects of the programme for physical education are improved. The co-ordinators' enthusiasm for the subject is outstanding, and is communicated effectively to staff and pupils alike. Lessons proceed at a good pace and pupils try hard to improve their skills in all aspects of the subject including dance and gymnastics. There is good long-term planning to ensure that pupils' experience all aspects of the National Curriculum. Pupils are keen to participate in one or other of the many after-school clubs such as rugby, football and cross country running, some of which are held on Saturday mornings. Help to run these clubs is enlisted from parents and the local community, including the police. There are good practices in place to ensure that there is equality of opportunity. The school's own pool is used in the summer and all teachers take their own class for swimming lessons. There are proper health and safety systems in place. As a result of the school's good use of its pool, pupils enjoy success in local swimming galas and records show that they reach standards well beyond national expectations.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Provision in **personal, social and health education is good.**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A clear policy statement, linked to the school aims guides staff well in planning lessons.
- Pupils' personal development is threaded into the organisation of the school day and teaching in a number of subjects.

Commentary

74. The school's commitment to developing the pupils' personal, social and health education is clearly guided by an effective policy. Pupils receive appropriate teaching in respect of sex education, drugs awareness and interpersonal skills. Discussion times have a clear learning focus and there is a good balance achieved between the different strands within the subject. Good links are made with religious education and social and moral development. The short 'snack time' which allows pupils to settle back to lessons after play is also used to promote pupils' social skills and awareness of health and safety. On the occasions when class discussion times are used for school council business pupils are given a good understanding of aspects of citizenship. This is also promoted through the school's links with other countries and its participation in the Green Flag initiative that develops pupils' awareness of conservation.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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