

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **THOMAS JOHNSON LOWER SCHOOL**

Lidlington, Bedford

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109468

Headteacher: Mr K Nolan

Lead inspector: Ms M J Goodchild

Dates of inspection: 9<sup>th</sup> –10<sup>th</sup> February 2004

Inspection number: 258183

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Lower school
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 - 9
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	100
School address:	Hurst Grove Lidlington Bedfordshire
Postcode:	MK43 0SB
Telephone number:	(01525) 402 377
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Adele Moore
Date of previous inspection:	April 2002

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Thomas Johnson Lower School is located in the village of Lidlington, in mid-Bedfordshire. It is smaller than other primary schools; there are 91 pupils on roll, aged between three and nine years old, including 25 children in the Foundation Stage who attend part time. The percentage of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs is a little above the national average, although the percentage of other pupils who have special educational needs is lower than that found nationally. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The vast majority of pupils are of white British heritage; a small minority are of white Irish, white other or mixed origin. There are currently no pupils who speak English as an additional language. The attainment of most pupils on entry to Year 1 has been slightly above average in recent years but prior attainment information for pupils who joined Year 1 in 2003 suggests that they were broadly average.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

**This is a very effective school.** In their time at the school, pupils have achieved well overall. Recent improvements in the leadership of the school and in the quality of teaching mean that they are now making very good progress. Standards are well above average by the end of Year 4. Teaching and learning are very good and the school provides an imaginative curriculum. Pupils are very well cared for and the school enjoys an increasingly close relationship with its parents. The headteacher provides very good leadership and the school gives very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are that:

- Rigorous monitoring and evaluation have led to very good school improvement and are enabling the headteacher's excellent vision for the school to be put into practice.
- Pupils are now achieving very well and standards are high in mathematics, science and overall in English in Years 3 and 4; older pupils have not, however, done as well in writing as they have in reading or speaking and listening.
- Teaching is very good, with work closely matched to different learning needs, and pupils are enthusiastic learners who are willing to work hard.
- Standards are above average in information and communication technology (ICT), but ICT could be put to greater use in some subjects.

The school has made very good improvement since it was last inspected, in April 2002. There has been a distinct improvement in the quality of teaching, particularly as a result of the rigorous monitoring that has taken place over the past year. High standards have been sustained and many areas of the school's work have improved. The serious weaknesses that were found in leadership and management at the last inspection have been fully resolved; the most pronounced improvement has been in the leadership and management of the school.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*Key: A\* - very high; A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average.*

*Similar schools are those with similar percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals.*

**Pupils' achievement in their time at the school has been good overall; as a result of recent improvements in teaching, pupils are now achieving very well.** Children in the Reception class achieve well. They do very well in personal, social and emotional development, well in communication, language and literacy, in knowledge and understanding of the world, and in physical and creative development. Their achievement is satisfactory in mathematical development. They are likely to meet - and some should exceed - the goals children are expected to reach by the end of the Foundation Stage. Pupils have achieved well across Years 1 and 2 and are working currently above the national average in English, mathematics and science. In 2003, National Curriculum test results at the end of Year 2 were well above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. They were above those of similar schools in reading and mathematics and well above in writing. The trend in the school's test results has been above the national trend.

Last year, Year 4 pupils who left in 2003 outperformed other schools in the local education authority in mathematics but they did not do as well as they should have done in reading and more especially in writing. The school has taken firm action to remedy this so that pupils in Years 3 and 4 are now achieving very well and standards in Year 4 are now well above average in reading, mathematics

and science; standards in writing are above average. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are above average and pupils achieve well. Standards in religious education are average and achievement is satisfactory. Throughout the school, pupils reach high standards in art and design and samples of work in history and music showed that pupils are working above national expectations. Pupils with special educational needs and those from different ethnic groups achieve as well as their peers.

**Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good.** Pupils have highly positive attitudes and behave very well. Attendance is satisfactory and pupils are punctual in getting to school.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The school provides a very good education.** Teaching and learning are very good overall, with particularly good teaching in Years 3 and 4. Teaching has improved recently in response to some excellent monitoring and this is having a positive effect on pupils' learning. A very good curriculum is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils receive very good care and support and the school enjoys an increasingly close partnership with parents and has forged some good links with the community.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are very good.** The headteacher provides very good leadership and has made a highly effective start in transforming the school. Management is very good overall. Governance is good and governors have been closely involved in school improvement since the last inspection. They ensure that statutory requirements are met.

## **PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Parents express a good level of satisfaction with the education the school provides. Pupils are very satisfied and enthusiastic about what the school has to offer.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Extend the use of ICT into more subjects of the curriculum.
- Ensure that recently introduced initiatives aimed at improving the quality of writing are fully implemented to raise standards further.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

#### Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects

Pupils' achievement in their time at the school has been good overall. As a result of recent improvements in teaching and in the leadership of the school, pupils are now achieving very well. Standards are currently above average in Year 2 and well above average in Year 4. Pupils of all backgrounds, including those with special educational needs, higher attaining pupils and those from different ethnic groups, make equally good progress.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils in the Nursery and in Years 1 and 2 benefit a great deal from the small class sizes which go a long way to supporting their achievement.
- Children are achieving well in the Foundation Stage and very well now in Years 1 and 2.
- Standards are well above average in Year 4 and pupils in both Years 3 and 4 are making rapid progress following a dip in achievement for pupils who were in last year's Year 3 and 4 class.
- Teachers provide very good support for pupils with special educational needs and enable them to progress as well as their peers.
- Standards are well above average in art and design and above average, based on a limited amount of work sampled, in history and music.

#### Commentary

1. Three and four year olds achieve well and children in the Reception are likely to meet - and some should exceed - the goals children are expected to reach by the end of the Foundation Stage. They do very well in personal, social and emotional development, well in communication, language and literacy, in knowledge and understanding of the world and in physical and creative development. Their achievement is satisfactory in mathematical development where work is not always matched sufficiently to the prior attainment of different children in the Reception class.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
reading	17.3 (19.2)	15.7 (15.8)
writing	17.0 (17.5)	14.6 (14.4)
mathematics	17.7 (20.1)	16.3 (16.5)

*There were 20 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

2. Pupils have achieved well across Years 1 and 2 and are working currently above the national average in English, mathematics and science, because pupils are making very good progress in response to teaching that is frequently very good. In 2003, National Curriculum test results at the end of Year 2 were well above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. They were above those of similar schools in reading and mathematics and well above in writing. The trend in the school's test results has been above the national trend in recent years; there was a slight dip in results in 2003 from the results in 2002 which placed the school in the top five per cent nationally, but over time, standards in Year 2 tests have risen.
3. The analysis of non-statutory tests - which teachers use to check how pupils in Years 3 and 4 are doing compared with national expectations - showed that pupils who left at the end of Year 4 in 2003 made better progress in mathematics than pupils in other schools in the local

education authority. Their achievement in reading and writing, however, was significantly less good and results in writing were well below expectations. The school has taken firm action to remedy this, most significantly by putting its strongest teacher in the mixed age Year 3 and 4 class and identifying a clear course of action to develop pupils' writing skills. More time is needed for the new initiatives to become fully effective but pupils in Years 3 and 4 are now achieving very well. Standards are currently well above average in Year 4 in reading, mathematics and science. Standards in writing are above rather than well above average.

4. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are above average and pupils achieve well. The new ICT suite is providing much improved opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT skills and for computers to be used to support learning across the curriculum. There is scope for further use of ICT to support work in mathematics, science and humanities. Standards in religious education are average and achievement is satisfactory. Pupils have above average knowledge of religions by Year 4 but teaching and curriculum planning have not placed sufficient emphasis on learning from religion and this element of the subject is relatively undeveloped.
5. Standards are well above average in art and design, where pupils achieve very well throughout the school as a result of some very good teaching and excellent curriculum opportunities. It is not possible to make an overall judgement about standards or achievement in design and technology, geography, history, music and physical education. In the limited amount of work sampled during the inspection, standards were above average in history and music. The standard of work on display in geography and design and technology is broadly average. However, in a design and technology lesson in Years 3 and 4, pupils made good progress and revealed above average skills in designing - in response to an imaginative project that provided them with much scope for innovation and creativity; their making skills were broadly average. It was not possible to form any judgement about how well pupils are doing in physical education but the very good opportunities provided for swimming are clearly leading to high achievement in this aspect of the subject.
6. Teachers provide very good support for pupils who have been identified as having special educational needs and enable them to progress as well as their peers. They benefit especially from the small class sizes and high adult to child ratio in the Nursery and in Years 1 and 2. This ensures that they receive a good deal of support and teachers ensure that work is matched closely to their learning needs. Learning support assistants in Years 1 and 2 and Years 3 and 4 are very clear about their roles and use effective techniques when working in class and with small groups or individuals to promote the achievement of pupils with special educational needs.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good and there were no exclusions in the last year. Attendance is satisfactory and punctuality is good. Provision for pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is very good overall.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour have a positive effect on their learning.
- The school fosters pupils' personal development very well.
- Pupils are given many opportunities to use their initiative through independent learning.
- Moral and social development is very good.
- Monitoring of attendance has improved significantly and is now very good.

### **Commentary**

7. Most pupils are happy to come to school because they find lessons interesting and fun. Their eagerness to learn and to succeed is bolstered by the now greater emphasis on celebrating

success and achievement in all aspects of school life. Younger pupils benefit from the small classes in which they receive a good deal of personal attention from teachers and support staff. This results in increased maturity, so that all pupils are able to take full advantage of opportunities to work independently, even as early as Year 1. This maturity is also evident in their very good attitudes and behaviour when they come together as a whole school. For instance, pupils responded very positively to a visiting string quintet; they listened attentively to the music, answered questions eagerly and joined in the singing with gusto. Afterwards, they delighted in sharing their enjoyment of the experience.

8. Pupils behave very well because staff have high expectations supported by a new positive behaviour policy and simple class rules devised by pupils themselves. Parents confirmed that behaviour has improved significantly since the arrival of the new headteacher. They are pleased that concerns relating to behaviour are dealt with quickly and any inappropriate behaviour is managed well. Incidents are logged in the parent contact book with clear details of discussions with parents and the agreed action taken and any further action required to resolve the problem. There were no exclusions in the last year. There has been some bullying but staff are very much aware and on the look out for any early signs, so this is nipped in the bud very quickly. Staff are supported well by a clear anti-bullying policy, which gives details of strategies and any necessary monitoring.
  
9. Pupils make very good progress in becoming well rounded, sociable and tolerant because the school fosters personal development very well. Relationships between pupils are generally very good. Teachers use positive language to develop pupils' self-esteem and have high expectations of each individual's contribution to the school community. All pupils are valued equally, regardless of their background or ability and are encouraged to think of others in the wider community through charity collections each term. Pupils take on a variety of responsibilities, which increase as they progress through the school. In several subjects, they are encouraged to make choices and this helps them to accept personal responsibility for their work. Their increasing maturity is aided by the very good support for moral development, which is due to the very good role models provided by adults in the school and the opportunities taken in assemblies and personal, social and health education to emphasise what is right and wrong. Art and music make considerable contributions to cultural education, though multicultural aspects are less well established. Spiritual education is satisfactory: assemblies make a good contribution to pupils' spirituality but religious education does not put as much focus as it should on learning from religions – concentrating rather more on learning about them.
  
10. Attendance is satisfactory. It was broadly in line with the national average for the last reporting year. There has been a rising trend since the beginning of this academic year, following much more rigorous monitoring and analysis, and very good support from the educational welfare service. Pupils are punctual to school and quickly settle to work on arrival.

***Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)***

Authorised absence	
School data	4.9
National data	5.4

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.4
National data	0.4

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

**QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The school provides a very good education. Teaching and learning are very good. A very good curriculum is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

## Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are very good overall, with particularly good teaching and learning in Years 3 and 4. Assessment procedures are generally good and much of the assessment information is used well; there is now scope to refine some aspects of assessment.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are very keen to learn and those in the Nursery and in Years 1 and 2 benefit a great deal from the small class sizes.
- Lesson planning is consistently at least good and often very good.
- Work is generally closely matched to the different learning needs and ages within classes.
- Teachers have high expectations and do much to promote pupils' independent learning.
- Teachers, Nursery nurses and learning support assistants work together as a committed and coherent team.
- The school collects a great deal of assessment information about its pupils; the way data is organised could be fine-tuned to sharpen tracking procedures.

### Commentary

#### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 19 lessons*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
1	9	8	0	0	0	0

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

11. Teaching and learning were at least good in all lessons observed during the inspection. Over half the lessons were very good and at times teaching in Years 3 and 4 was excellent. Pupils' work shows that teaching has improved since the last inspection and that it is consistently strong. Intensive monitoring, including lesson observation mostly by the headteacher, has sharpened teachers' practice in a way that is clearly supporting pupils' achievement.
12. Lesson planning is consistently at least good and often very good. Work is usually closely matched to the different learning needs, prior attainment and ages within classes. In English and mathematics, planning provides different tasks for at least three different groups of pupils in each lesson. In science, open-ended tasks with an emphasis on enquiry and practical investigation, supported by some varied materials and support for pupils who need extra help, enables all pupils to achieve well. Planning in Years 3 and 4 is often highly sophisticated, with careful grouping of pupils by age and prior attainment. This enables the whole class to work on the same overall topic but each group tackles an aspect of the topic at a different level, based on their exact learning needs. Excellent planning and matching of work to the prior attainment of different groups and individuals was the key feature in an excellent lesson in mathematics in Years 3 and 4. The inspection found no grounds to support the concerns expressed by some parents that their children might lose out by being in a mixed age class; pupils are doing particularly well in this class.
13. Children in the Nursery and pupils in Years 1 and 2 benefit a great deal from the small class sizes that provide them with a high adult to pupil ratio. Teachers, Nursery nurses and learning support assistants work together as a committed and coherent team. This ensures that pupils are able to make progress and access the curriculum whatever their ability. The contribution of non-teaching staff is particularly beneficial for pupils with special educational needs, for three year olds in the Nursery and for younger pupils in the Year 3 and 4 class. The provision of well-qualified and experienced teaching assistants supports teachers in planning different work for particular groups of pupils and, thus, promotes pupils' achievement. It ensures that pupils with special educational needs are included very well in lessons, and that they receive

regular support in class and also through intensive support individually or in small groups. Good access to ICT is provided for any statemented pupil who is not always able to access the curriculum in other ways and the school meets the needs of hearing impaired pupils very well through using specialist equipment.

14. Teachers have high expectations and do much to foster pupils' independent learning by providing choices and giving pupils opportunities to express their own creative ideas. The school is increasingly providing opportunities for pupils to develop their research and enquiry skills. In response, pupils are very interested in learning. Younger pupils show natural curiosity and are very keen to contribute in lessons. Older pupils apply themselves very well and persevere with challenging tasks.
15. Assessment is very good in Years 3 and 4, good in Years 1 and 2, and satisfactory in the Foundation Stage. In Years 3 and 4, assessment information is used particularly well in lesson planning and in grouping pupils. In Years 1 and 2, there is much good practice but assessing pupils against National Curriculum levels is not entirely accurate in Year 2 and this could undermine medium-term curriculum planning. The school is aware of this and is providing additional staff training to remedy the situation. In the Foundation Stage, detailed observations are made about how well individual children are doing. Ongoing records are based, however, mainly on an assessment system that has been devised within the school rather than directly on Foundation Stage curriculum guidance. This means that records are less clear than they might be in showing how children are doing against the Foundation Stage 'stepping stones' that show how they are progressing towards what is expected of them by the end of Reception. This in-house system particularly impedes tracking of three year olds, for whom the official Foundation Stage Profile does not need to be completed. Overall, assessment is good in English and mathematics; practice is a little less consistent in science.
16. The school has largely effective methods for assessing and identifying pupils with special educational needs. At present, the identification of pupils with special educational needs is undertaken mainly by the headteacher as part of his regular tracking and monitoring. This ensures that any pupil who is not making as much progress as other pupils is picked up so that an individual education plan can be developed. The school is aware that some pupils with special educational needs may not have been identified quickly enough in the past and this is an area for some development in teachers' tracking of pupils' progress. Appropriate procedures are followed for pupils with statements of special educational needs, and pupils and parents are involved in reviews and discussions about target setting, in line with the recommendations of the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs. Good liaison with external agencies supports the school in assessing pupils' needs and planning provision.
17. The school collects a great deal of assessment information about each of its pupils in English, mathematics and science, which enables teachers to track individual pupils' progress. Most assessment is accurate but the school is aware of the need for some additional training in assessing to National Curriculum levels in Year 2. A good deal of data analysis has taken place and the headteacher uses assessment information very effectively to identify areas where further work is needed, and takes clear action based on his findings. There is now scope for organising assessment information in a way that is faster to access and visually more obvious; this would assist staff in tracking achievement over time and in seeing patterns in performance. All pupils have targets in literacy and numeracy and the good practice of making pupils' targets – in laminated form - available to them as they work means that they are able to refer to their targets for writing, for instance, not only in English lessons but also when they make notes in history or geography.

## **The curriculum**

A very good curriculum caters for the interests, aptitudes and needs of the pupils, and is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The school is well staffed, and provides satisfactory

accommodation and resources. The library is inadequate to support some aspects of learning; the building of a new library is already scheduled in the near future.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has implemented the National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy Strategy very effectively.
- There are some excellent opportunities for pupils to explore their creativity.
- The school forges very good links between subjects, which makes for an innovative and imaginative curriculum.
- ICT is used well in English and art; it could be used more in other subjects.

### Commentary

18. Teachers make very good use of the National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy Strategy not only within English and mathematics lessons, but by also ensuring that literacy and numeracy are promoted effectively across the curriculum. Staff pay careful attention to extending pupils' vocabulary and provide good opportunities for pupils to practise and extend their literacy and numeracy skills in a number of subjects. Teachers use their knowledge of pupils' attainment in literacy and numeracy when grouping pupils for other subjects, and often provide different methods of recording – such as writing frames – to support those who need a clear structure within which to work. Furthermore, the interesting curriculum with its emphasis on developing pupils' creativity does much to enhance their language development.
19. The school provides a rich curriculum and subjects are frequently interlinked to provide a connected range of experiences for pupils. This makes learning intrinsically more interesting and helps to explain pupils' high level of motivation.

### Example of outstanding practice

#### **Innovative curriculum planning makes the most of potential links between subjects, and pupils are given excellent opportunities to develop their creativity.**

The curriculum provides pupils with excellent opportunities to express themselves, to develop their visual perception and to make their own decisions. Pupils in Year 1 looked at sculptures by Henri Moore and Picasso, then made their own sketches of fallen trees using line, shape, pattern and texture. This led to the creation of highly imaginative sculptures of their own where they tied and glued objects such as feathers to a series of logs, paying very careful attention to composition. Their finished work is of a very high standard for pupils of this age and reveals some really innovative visual solutions. Excellent curriculum planning is evident in the way physical education, personal, social and health education and science are linked and in the forging of links between art and science in pupils' study of the weather. Also in Year 1, a tremendous amount of learning across the curriculum has been 'squeezed out' of the story of *The Three Little Pigs*. Exploration of the materials from which the houses were made was undertaken as a scientific experiment, which looked at the properties of straw, wood and bricks, with pupils testing the strength of the materials. Each pupil designed an outfit for one of the pigs, producing delightfully lively drawings, complete with annotations. In clothing their pigs – which pupils drew onto card themselves – they selected combinations of materials from a range of options. This led on to further work where they made models of the houses. Card models of the pigs' houses included excellent decorative detail in the choice and subtle arrangement of old buttons and other resources, and gave rise to work showing a highly developed visual awareness. Clearly, these activities were accompanied by a great deal of language work and involved necessary promotion of mathematical skills in measuring and fitting the different parts of the houses together.

20. ICT is used well in English and art, so that pupils develop their ICT skills in these subjects and extend their learning in the subjects themselves. The school is aware that more work needs to be done to make full use of ICT in mathematics, science, history, geography and religious education.

## **Care, guidance and support**

The school offers its pupils very good care and guidance in a safe and supportive environment. Support, advice and guidance, based on the monitoring of pupils' personal development and achievement, are very good. The school has effective procedures for seeking pupils' views.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils are very well cared for and receive a high level of individual support and guidance regardless of their ability.
- Pupils achieve well because their personal development and achievement are very well supported.
- Pupils settle into school very well.

### **Commentary**

21. The school provides a secure and happy environment for its pupils and this is carried through all aspects of school life. Pupils know they are important and matter as individuals within the school community because emphasis is placed on caring for each individual pupil's needs. Clear guidelines through the policies ensure consistency across the school concerning matters such as child protection, discipline and first aid procedures. Teachers and non-teaching staff know the pupils and their families very well, and support for pupils is very good. In response to the questionnaire, nearly all pupils said there is an adult they could go to if they were worried; they feel teachers treat them fairly and listen to their ideas. As a result, relationships between teachers and pupils are very good.
22. The school works closely with parents from the outset. Parents' responses to the questionnaire and at the meeting confirm that they appreciate and are very confident in the school's high levels of individual care and support for their children. Seamless transition from the Nursery into Year 1 means, as in the words of a parent, "They never have a first day at school". Children have many opportunities to mix with the main school whilst in the Nursery and become very confident about life in the school at large before moving up. Likewise, transition at the end of Year 4 is made as smooth as possible through close liaison with the staff in the main receiving middle school.
23. Support for personal development is very good: staff encourage pupils to develop confidence and high self-esteem by using the positive and fair reward system effectively. Academic achievement is supported well through personal targets. Pupils know their targets well now as a result of the school's response to improving understanding following issues raised in its own pupil questionnaire.
24. Pupils know that their views are important and respected because their opinions have been canvassed. The high quality evaluation of the responses shows that the questionnaire was a positive and constructive exercise and lessons have been learnt and acted upon. The school intends to set up a school council, which should further develop pupils' involvement in school decision-making.

### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

Links with parents are very good; there is a close, well-established partnership and the school recognises the importance of parents' role in their children's education. Links with other schools and the local community are good overall.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Links with parents contribute very well to pupils' learning at home and at school.
- Parental involvement through the Parent Teacher Association and help in school is very good.

- The school's important role in the village is well supported by the community, along with recognition of its improving reputation.

## **Commentary**

25. Parents are very positive about the school, particularly the improvements that have been made since the arrival of the current headteacher. They have a high level of confidence because of the interest and concern shown about even the smallest problems and the school's rapid response to these. This confidence is translated into a genuine desire to help the school and to be part of it. Nearly every parent feels welcome in school and is comfortable about approaching the school if necessary. Several parents help in school on a regular basis and many more offer specific assistance.
26. Many parents are interested in their children's learning and the school responds to this by giving detailed information about what is to be covered in the curriculum and providing guidance for helping pupils with homework. Pupils' targets are shared with parents at consultation evenings and plans are in place to extend this to a record in pupils' reading bags. The very good quality annual reports inform parents well and include pupils' own comments. Not all parents are content with the level of information about their children's progress, according to the questionnaire responses, but these views were not supported by the inspection findings. Parents have been consulted through a questionnaire about their views. Their replies were carefully analysed, and the evaluation was sent to all parents with explanations and invitations to help.
27. Parents and ex-parents are further involved through the Parent Teacher Association. This is very well supported and directly benefits pupils' learning through the substantial donations it makes and the way pupils' experiences are broadened by organised events.
28. Community links are now strong. They continue to improve as the school's reputation is enhanced locally through word of mouth and good publicity in the local media. The school recognises the important role it plays in the village and has worked hard to encourage community involvement. A wonderful example was seen during the inspection when a local man who had been evacuated during the war visited Years 3 and 4 to give them the wealth of his experience. The pupils were clearly moved and inspired by his first-hand accounts, which brought this period of history to life. Other links, such as those with a local environmental farm, extend pupils' learning and help the school to reach a wider audience by displaying pupils' work in public venues. An important local connection is the Thomas Johnson Lidlington Charity, which has provided funding for trips and events and contributed a significant sum for the new reading scheme. All these links make important contributions to pupils' learning.
29. Links with local schools are good and there has been a lot of work on improving transition arrangements through liaison with the Bedfordshire service for children with behavioural difficulties; good practice begun through this liaison has been extended to all pupils. There are also links with other schools through subject specialists and the school has plans to build on these further with more liaison about individual pupils after they have moved to middle school in order to learn from their experiences for the benefit of present pupils.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are very good. The headteacher provides very good leadership and has made a highly effective start in transforming the school. Management is very good overall. Other staff with key responsibilities fulfil their roles well. Governance is good and governors have been closely involved in school improvement since the last inspection.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Rigorous monitoring and self-evaluation have led to rapid improvement since the last inspection.
- Subject co-ordinators now lead and manage their subjects effectively.
- The governing body has made a good contribution to the way the school has improved since the last inspection and has some good systems in place to provide continued support and challenge.

## Commentary

30. The headteacher has excellent clarity of vision, sense of purpose and high aspirations for the school, together with the capacity to put his vision into action. Rigorous monitoring of teaching, curriculum planning, assessment and other aspects of the school's work has led to rapid improvement since his appointment. Thorough self-evaluation is ensuring that the right priorities are identified and the headteacher provides teachers with excellent feedback. This good practice is having a very direct and positive effect on teaching and curriculum planning. The school is now very well placed to improve further and the morale of all the staff is high, including that of non-teaching staff, who make a very good contribution to the day-to-day efficiency of the school.
31. Subject co-ordinators lead and manage their subjects effectively. English is led and managed well, with very good monitoring of planning, assessment and pupils' work. Mathematics is led and managed very effectively by the headteacher. The co-ordination of science is good; the co-ordinator has undertaken some monitoring and shared her findings with staff. The art co-ordinator is an excellent role model for other teachers of the subject and provides inspirational displays of pupils' artwork around the school. Co-ordination of special educational needs is good overall: a new co-ordinator has made a good start in overseeing provision. The school recognises that the new special educational needs co-ordinator would benefit from some training in order to develop her role further.
32. The governing body has made a good contribution to the way the school has improved since the last inspection and has some good systems in place to provide continued support and challenge. Governors operate through a range of subject-committees that meet regularly and there are link governors with designated responsibilities in a number of areas. The governing body undertakes some direct monitoring of the school's work through visits and formal observations, and governors have received training in data analysis. The governing body could monitor the impact of decisions a little more closely but governors are kept up to date with developments by detailed reports from the headteacher. Governors readily provide practical support and have a strong involvement in the life of the school. The chair of the governing body works closely with the headteacher and has a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
33. It may be necessary for the school to set a deficit budget but the headteacher and governors, working closely with the local education authority, have clear strategies for managing this. The present situation is largely the result of a loss of funding, caused by a reduction in projected numbers after the school was found to have 'serious weaknesses' at the last inspection. The fact that the school is now rebuilding its reputation should put it in a better financial position through attracting greater numbers of new pupils. In the meantime, funding is being carefully allocated to key priority areas and to undertaking necessary maintenance work to the building.
34. Pupils are now achieving very well, teaching and learning are very good, the curriculum is interesting and meets the needs of different pupils very well. Standards are well above average by the time pupils leave and the school is very well led and managed. It is achieving a very good level of success with minimal expenditure and so provides very good value for money.

**Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003**

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	276,898
Total expenditure	284,674
Expenditure per pupil	2,476.58

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	37,016
Balance carried forward to the next year	29,240

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

### **AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE**

35. The Nursery makes good provision for three and four year olds and enables them to achieve well. The leadership and management of the Foundation Stage is good overall. Planning relates appropriately to the Foundation Stage curriculum, through a topic-based approach organised in a two-year cycle. Children are provided with a good combination of structured adult-led activities, often with a literacy or numeracy focus, and a range of learning opportunities from which they may choose. Teaching is very good in personal, social and emotional development, good in communication, language and literacy, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development, and satisfactory in mathematical development.
36. Assessment procedures are satisfactory. Staff complete the Foundation Stage Profile, which provides vital information about how well children are doing by the end of the Reception year. Other assessment is broadly satisfactory but is made more complicated than it needs to be through the use of a system that is not entirely aligned with the Foundation Stage curriculum. This makes it unnecessarily difficult for staff to gain a complete overview about how children are doing compared with what is expected nationally; it is particularly an issue for the three year olds, where completing the Foundation Stage Profile does not apply. Staff do, however, keep detailed observations of individual children which are potentially valuable in planning. Children with special educational needs are supported well and staff make sure that they understand as fully as possible when working alongside their peers. There are effective arrangements for the support of children with statements of special educational needs, and individual education plan targets are appropriate and specific. Frequently, special educational needs children work in small groups with the Nursery nurse, where they receive very good support and encouragement.
37. The Nursery is well staffed with an experienced teacher and Nursery nurses. The accommodation is satisfactory; it places some restrictions on possible activities but staff make good use of the facilities available. Resources are at least satisfactory and have been supplemented by funding from the parent teacher association. Partnership with parents is good; they are appropriately included in their children's learning and have good opportunities to meet with staff and talk about how their children are doing. The school has particularly good links with parents of children with special educational needs to align practice at home with that at school so that parents and staff work to the same agenda.

### **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children are settled and enjoy their time in the Nursery.
- They respond very well to the activities provided and learn to relate well with others.
- Their very good behaviour supports their learning and personal development.

#### **Commentary**

38. The children in the Nursery are clearly happy and secure. They trust the staff who work with them and relate well with one another. Staff enjoy very good relationships with the children and do a great deal to promote their self-esteem and build up their confidence. Children benefit greatly from the high staff to child ratio. This means that all children, including those with special educational needs, receive a good deal of adult attention and care. Mostly,

children play nicely together and even the youngest ones are beginning to be able to negotiate with one another in a harmonious way.

39. Children in Reception are particularly keen to learn and focus very well on organised activities such as literacy and numeracy sessions. Generally, the older children take turns well and put up their hands during more formal sessions when they know the answer. At times, they get excited and call out rather than listening to what others have to say, which shows that they are still developing the necessary self-discipline for working in a group but it also reflects their eagerness to answer the teacher's questions and to participate. Higher attaining children readily help others to work things out and lower attaining children are included well in activities.
40. Staff manage children's behaviour skilfully and the children are very responsive to adult guidance. As a result, they learn in an atmosphere that is at once relaxed and fun but also calm and orderly. Behaviour is consistently very good and supports the learning of three and four year olds. Even the youngest children concentrate very well for extended periods of time, working independently and collaboratively. Adults encourage children to try hard and to be as independent as possible, for instance, by helping to clear away when they have finished playing with something. Children show an increasing ability to work together on such occasions and are learning about teamwork by discovery.

## **COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good in this area of learning and children are achieving well.
- There are good opportunities for children to develop their language skills and to express their ideas.
- Progress is good in reading and satisfactory in writing; higher attaining children could be challenged a little more in extending their writing skills.

### **Commentary**

41. Children achieve well in communication, language and literacy and by the end of the Foundation Stage, most are likely at least to meet the Early Learning Goals; some should exceed expectations in communication, language and reading.
42. All children make good progress in speaking and listening because of the high adult to child ratio and the careful attention adults give to promoting children's language skills. A lot of meaningful talk takes place, where children are encouraged to develop their vocabulary and discuss what they are doing. As a result, many children are verbally confident and articulate. Most are good listeners too, not only listening for detail but also asking questions. Visual reference materials are used well to support the development of language and to ensure that all children understand new concepts. Staff ask children questions that are carefully matched to their prior attainment, including challenging questions aimed directly at higher attaining children. Even the youngest children are able to talk about their experiences and tell the staff about things that have happened at home.
43. Children make good progress in reading, where a small 'book' room contributes significantly to the development of their skills. Reception children know that pictures provide valuable clues of what a book is about. During the inspection, many of the children were able to read a number of high frequency words from the 'big book' with the teacher and they made good progress in learning new words. They are developing good phonic skills, which enable them to work out some unfamiliar words, using picture clues also to help them. Three year olds listen very well to stories that are read and clearly enjoy them, and the Nursery nurses ask good questions to

encourage children to talk about what is happening in the story. Taking books home each week further supports the development of their literacy skills.

44. Children make satisfactory progress in their writing. Higher attaining children write short sentences and make some use of full-stops and capital letters. Average attaining children are beginning to write a simple sentence as a caption to their drawings and use growing awareness of letter sounds in attempting to spell single syllable words. Lower attaining children have limited pencil control and so make slow progress in overwriting; they know that print carries meaning and are able to tell an adult what their drawings are about. Some children in the Reception are ready for a bit more writing than they currently undertake and could be moving forward a little faster in this aspect of communication, language and literacy.

## **MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Provision in mathematical development is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children are grouped well according to their learning needs but work in mathematical development in Reception is not matched sufficiently to the needs of individual children.

### **Commentary**

45. Reception children can count in unison from one to ten and recognise these numbers. A higher attaining minority know about much higher numbers. Most can look at a number of dots, like those found on a large die, and estimate how many there might be. Many are accurate for much of the time. They nearly all know whether a number is more than or less than another. Higher attaining children know some simple mathematical information by heart, for example, that four and four makes eight and that a square has four corners. Other children are beginning to understand that a given number added to another number, or group of objects, adds up to a bigger number. They know which is first and last and most can recite the ordinal numbers at least to 'fifth'. They can sort objects into categories, compare by size and recognise simple geometric shapes. During the inspection, the teacher asked some good questions and made effective use of resources to extend children's knowledge of ordinal numbers but missed the opportunity to get them to count beyond ten. Children in Reception are making satisfactory progress overall; some children are progressing well but higher attaining children could be moving ahead faster and are not always challenged enough.
46. Three year olds and lower attaining Reception children are making good progress in counting from one to five, learning one-to-one correspondence and using objects to assist them in counting. They are beginning to be able to write numbers one to three and have opportunities to play with plastic numbers to help in their knowledge of number structure and orientation. In a shape recognition game that children played with the Nursery nurse, they made very good progress in recognising shapes and matching them and in learning the names for them. Even the youngest children can successfully complete simple jigsaws.
47. The work that Reception children have recorded shows that children with different abilities are doing basically the same tasks, with varying degrees of success. There is significant variation in what individual children know but planning does not take this into account sufficiently. Opportunities to write numbers are fairly limited and many children would benefit from more practice in this to prepare them for more formal written mathematical work in Year 1.

## **KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD**

48. This area of learning was not inspected in detail, but planning shows that provision in this area is at least good. A topic-based approach is used strongly, so that children learn, for instance, about 'winter' from many different perspectives. They find out about how machines work, their

bodies, the past in relation to the present, about nature, and begin to take part in simple scientific experiments. They go on visits, such as those to the park or the post office, and have a trip to a nearby zoo or farm. Free choice activities include good opportunities to play with construction toys and resources such as the garage layout support imaginative play with a knowledge and understanding of the world focus. Opportunities to use ICT are satisfactory but this could be promoted more. Teaching is good when children engage in designing and making activities, and this leads to some interesting and thoughtful designs where children think carefully about how they might use the materials available to them.

## **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

49. This area of learning was not inspected in detail, but the evidence available suggests that provision in this area of learning is good. The outdoor area has been developed, with the purchase of a range of commercial play equipment. This supports a satisfactory range of physical skills but does not provide any real opportunities for symbolic play, for instance, through the provision of neutral objects that can be used in a range of imaginative ways. In an organised dance session during the inspection, a group of children made good progress and really enjoyed themselves as a result of some inspired teaching by the Nursery nurse. They moved well in space, showing good developing control. They followed instructions well and were able to move in a variety of ways at the same time as avoiding obstacles. Children are developing a good range of physical skills, such as those required for cutting out, using a paintbrush, working with play dough and building. The higher attaining children manage to build quite complex structures and have little difficulty interlocking a variety of brick shapes.

## **CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT**

50. This area of learning was not inspected in detail, but it is clear from the evidence available that provision in this area of learning is at least good. Children have good opportunities to engage in role-play through dressing up. At the time of the inspection, the home corner was decorated imaginatively on the theme of 'weddings'. A notice revealed which children were 'getting married today' and three girls busied themselves in arranging their clothes, which gave rise to excited chatter. Standards in art are well above average. Children have produced some beautiful paintings of robins and jungle animals, which show careful observation and some accurate recording of detail, as well as above average control of paint. Their work is lively and sometimes strikingly representational, as in the furry collages of bears and careful observational paintings of a cuckoo clock.

## **SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 AND 2**

### **ENGLISH**

Provision in English is **very good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are above average in Year 2 and well above average in Year 4.
- Pupils' standards in speaking and listening and in reading are above average in most years.
- The slowdown in achievement when pupils enter the larger class in Years 3 and 4 has been halted.
- Very good teaching now enables pupils in all classes to achieve well.
- Lower standards in pupils' writing have been correctly identified as needing improvement.
- The library does not support pupils' learning well enough.

#### **Commentary**

51. National test results at the end of Year 2 in 2003 showed pupils' reading to be above average. Standards in writing were well above the national average. Both showed a slight decline from

2002 levels. Attainment was above that in similar schools in reading and well above in writing. Higher attaining pupils reached very high standards, particularly in writing. The cohort was relatively small, particularly in the numbers of girls, and the school met its targets for the subject in 2003.

52. Pupils' standards on entry to Year 1 are currently average. They benefit significantly in Years 1 and 2 from being in very small classes where they have many opportunities to interact with teachers and other adults. Although standards in the current Year 2 vary widely, attainment is above average overall.
53. A key strength of pupils' performance in English is their ability in speaking and listening. Teachers take every opportunity to provide a range of activities in English and in other subjects, which enable pupils to contribute actively to class discussions. By Year 2, they can talk confidently in structured sessions, for example in circle time, about events and feelings. Most enter willingly, often assertively, into question and answer sessions with staff and with their peers. Higher attaining pupils listen very actively, quickly picking up main points from teachers' expositions, eager to contribute their own ideas and to seek clarification if they do not understand. Their pronunciation and grammatical accuracy are well developed through active speaking and listening experience because staff integrate the teaching of phonics and grammar seamlessly into most of their lessons. Lower attaining pupils are very well supported and pupils with special educational needs, for example with a hearing impairment, take part as actively as their peers in all activities. Pupils make good progress and achieve well in speaking and listening, so standards are well above average by Year 2.
54. The fact that pupils move into a much larger class in Years 3 and 4 naturally reduces the opportunity for such high levels of oral/aural interaction with staff. The recently improved quality of teaching here means that lessons are so well managed that the improvement in pupils' speaking and listening skills no longer slows down significantly. The current Year 3 took some time to gain confidence amongst a larger group, but now contribute well in lessons. By Year 4, oral skills are well above average and the slowing in progress these pupils experienced in Year 3 has been reversed. They have made very good progress in Year 4.
55. Pupils' reading also develops well, though again, standards are varied and year groups small. Standards for a number of pupils with special educational needs in Year 2 are below average, but overall attainment in reading in this class is above average. Pupils apply their reading skills well across other subjects, for example to use an index to access information from atlases in a geography lesson seen, and to understand what they then read about other countries. They read suitably widely and with confidence, using the limited library to borrow books which they often take home. Pupils concentrate well on reading books, for instance in their early morning registration sessions when they read quietly to themselves or aloud to adults. Higher attaining pupils read expressively, with good pronunciation.
56. Pupils in Year 4 have now reversed the slowdown that the school identified had taken place last year in the Year 3 and 4 class in pupils' reading. The reading challenges offered to pupils in Years 3 and 4 now match their prior attainment very effectively, so many have reading ages above, or well above their chronological ages. Standards in reading by Year 4 are well above average and pupils have made very good progress this year.
57. The school recognises that standards in writing are not so strong as standards in reading and speaking and listening. Analysis of non-statutory test results for pupils who left the school at the end of Year 4 in 2003 showed that they had not made enough progress in writing. Staff are now putting a strong focus on improving this aspect of pupils' work, and initiatives that have been introduced are beginning to raise standards. For the majority of pupils in Year 2, standards are above average. Good teaching methods, such as that seen in a Year 1 lesson to reinforce understanding of letter structures by 'writing in the air', help pupils to understand how 'joined-up' writing links together. By Year 2, most pupils are joining script. In Year 4, standards are high. These pupils' writing shows a good range of ideas using a variety of styles, both in English and in other subjects. Their writing about World War II in history, for

instance, shows good understanding of structuring content, and most handwriting is legible and neat after redrafting. As with other aspects of their English, Year 4 pupils have resumed their good progress in writing this year and standards are now above average overall.

58. Teaching is very good overall. All lessons seen were good or very good. Teachers have very secure knowledge and understanding of the National Literacy Strategy and good levels of confidence to employ flexibility in its implementation. Good marking of pupils' written work shows where pupils can improve, without undermining their confidence. Teachers are particularly adept at planning opportunities for pupils to speak in 'public', so even the most diffident gain confidence to contribute ideas. The high levels of encouragement and praise which staff give to pupils reinforces their self-assurance well. Teachers also provide good opportunities to develop pupils' skills and their enjoyment in reading, because work is pitched very well to the different levels of pupils' prior attainment. Different tasks provided in lessons in most subjects support the less able and challenge higher attaining pupils well. Lessons are lively and well structured, and offer interesting introductions, for example, in a very good lesson with excellent features in Years 3 and 4, the teacher assembled a traditional story setting, piece by piece, with props and artefacts, so pupils had to deduce who the characters were – Cinderella in this case. This led to excitement and interest as the stage-set was constructed and pupils realised what the story was. The mix of activity in this and other lessons seen, often including the very good use of poetry, leads to pupils enjoying English and developing good levels of confidence in using the language.
59. English is well led and managed. The subject leader is a very good role model for teaching English. Monitoring is good. The priority for improvement in pupils' writing is appropriate and being tackled well. Not all assessment is accurate against the expectations for National Curriculum levels, but this is recognised and is being addressed through staff training. The decline in pupils' achievement in Years 3 and 4 has clearly been reversed through staff redeployment to different year groups. The improved provision of ICT in the school is used to good effect in a range of English-related activities. Overall, there has been good improvement since the last report.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

60. Teachers make very good use of the opportunity to reinforce pupils' literacy skills through other subjects. Many examples of the use of listening enable pupils to experience a range of language uses. Pupils listen very effectively and ask sensible, pertinent questions to elicit answers related to set projects. Personal, social and health education, often in the form of circle time, enables all pupils, confident or diffident, to speak about personal experiences. Reading is promoted well, although the library is currently unsatisfactory because of its location in a corridor. Nonetheless, systematic use of the books enables pupils to learn how to use such resources. Plans to relocate and enhance the library are timely. Classes have their own selection of books appropriate for pupils' ages and pupils add to these well by writing their own class-books about many different topics and subjects. Poetry features well in this range. Writing tasks are very well matched to the needs of pupils in all subjects. Pupils have many opportunities for writing but it remains an area for development and improvement in standards.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are above average in Year 2 and well above average in Year 4.
- Pupils have achieved well in their time at the school; they are currently doing very well in response to very good teaching, especially in Years 3 and 4.
- Pupils show a lively interest in the subject and apply themselves very well.

- The subject is co-ordinated very effectively and staff are working hard to raise standards.

## Commentary

61. National Curriculum test results at the end of Year 2 in 2003 were well above the national average and above those of similar schools. Analysis of non-statutory test results at the end of Year 4 in 2003 showed that pupils made better progress in mathematics than in reading and writing, and that their achievement was higher than that of other schools in the local education authority. Standards are currently above average in Year 2 and well above average in Year 4. In their time in the school, pupils' overall achievement has been good. Throughout the school, they are now achieving very well as a result of improvements in teaching in recent months. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 achieve particularly well as a result not only of high quality teaching but also of their own enthusiasm for learning. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers, in response to very good support.
62. By Year 2, the majority of pupils are gaining good number skills. They write numbers to a 100, multiply numbers under ten and divide and multiply in tens. They recognise patterns in numbers when they are adding and are able to use mental strategies to solve simple problems using counting, addition, subtraction, doubling and halving. They can tell which are the larger and smaller numbers from a series of numbers in the hundreds and can write three-figure numbers in words; lower attaining pupils write numbers in words to ten. Pupils know how to organise data in tally charts and bar graphs. In work on measurement, they are able to apply their knowledge to a real-life situation, for instance, to find out who is the heaviest. They know how to measure in centimetres and can estimate. Pupils recognise a number of basic three-dimensional shapes and know their properties. During the inspection, they learned about lines of symmetry and made very good progress, higher attaining pupils recognising that a circle has many lines of symmetry. Their written work shows that higher attaining pupils are beginning to be able to solve problems expressed in words.
63. By Year 4, pupils have a very good facility with number; they can do long addition in thousands, round up to the nearest thousand, know which is the smaller or greater number in thousands, and calculate place value with six-figure numbers. Increasingly, they recognise patterns in numbers and solve applied mathematical problems. They have a very good knowledge of the properties of quadrilaterals, polygons and heptagons and know the characteristics of equilateral and isosceles triangles. They know how to express proportions in fractions and understand equivalent fractions. They convert kilometres into metres and kilograms into grams, and know how to find the perimeter of a given area. In a lesson during the inspection, they revealed a thorough understanding of co-ordinates.
64. All teachers make very good use of the National Numeracy Strategy and plan lessons so that learning objectives are clear and work is matched to the needs of different pupils, including higher attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. Learning support assistants are used very effectively and provide high quality support, which ensures that all pupils access the curriculum equally well. Questioning pushes pupils to think deeply, thus encouraging an enquiring approach to the subject, and teachers pay careful attention to getting pupils to understand and use mathematical vocabulary. Teachers consistently share learning objectives with pupils at the beginning of lessons and make clear at the end how well they have done. They use resources very well, including overhead projectors and practical equipment, to ensure that everyone understands. Pupils are given very good opportunities to engage in active learning, to find answers by investigation, and so they acquire confidence from a young age. Activities are often fun and pupils are clearly motivated by the subject and show a natural curiosity. They organise themselves very well and collaborate effectively when working in groups. Whether in the whole class or during group work, pupils feel safe to make suggestions and are able to explain their views.
65. Whilst all teaching seen during the inspection was at least very good, that in Years 3 and 4 was excellent. The planning was extremely thorough and work was matched precisely to the

needs of different ages and abilities within the class. This was achieved by a sophisticated grouping system, with as many as six different groups of pupils working on specific tasks. Expectations were high for all pupils, the lesson proceeded at a rapid pace and the teacher used her very good subject knowledge to ensure all pupils made optimum progress. Questioning was exceptionally challenging and explanations ensured that all pupils understood. Homework extended pupils' learning and linked well with what they had done in class. Pupils were keen to learn, contributed their ideas readily and used every moment productively. In many ways, pupils in Year 3 benefited from being in a joint class with Year 4; they looked on in awe when the older pupils showed the work they had been doing and gained in their own understanding from the explanations that were provided for and by Year 4 pupils.

66. The headteacher provides very good leadership and management for the subject. Rigorous monitoring has led to a clear improvement in teaching. There is much very good assessment practice but not all teachers are entirely accurate in assessing pupils against National Curriculum levels; the school is aware of this and providing necessary training. Performance data is used well overall and staff are working well together to raise standards. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

67. Mathematical skills are developed well in a number of subjects and pupils' skills support their learning across the curriculum. For example, timelines are used regularly in history, science work includes accurate measurement and ICT provides opportunities for pupils to understand more about shape and angles through the use of the 'floor turtle'. In art and design and technology, pupils apply their knowledge of space and measurement to good effect.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- In Years 1 and 2, standards are above average and well above the national average in Years 3 and 4.
- Pupils achieve well in response to good teaching, and their own very good attitudes to learning support their achievement.
- The consistent focus on scientific enquiry skills has contributed to high standards.
- Matching work closely to the needs of different pupils enables all to access the curriculum at an appropriate level.
- Information and communication technology is not used to enhance teaching and learning in science.

### **Commentary**

68. At the time of the last inspection, standards in science were above the national average in Years 1 and 2 and average in Years 3 and 4. In teacher assessments in 2003, the proportion of pupils gaining Level 2 was below average, whereas the proportion gaining Level 3 was above average. Standards are now above average in Years 1 and 2 and pupils make good progress. Pupils make very good progress in Years 3 and 4 and evidence shows that, by the end of Year 4, standards for this year group should be well above the national average. This indicates good improvement since the last inspection.
69. Pupils use a wide variety of methods to record their findings and open-ended tasks ensure that they work at their own level of understanding. There is a considerable amount of evidence of investigations and enquiry; a significant improvement since the last inspection, when this was considered to be a weakness. In Year 1 books, the inclusion of a contents page with all the modules of work for the term is very informative for pupils, and parents especially, and

serves as a useful assessment tool for the teacher. Teachers use writing frames well to help pupils structure their writing and challenge them to use higher order thinking skills, for example, prediction, fair testing and evaluation. There are some good examples of teachers' marking providing prompts and targets to encourage thinking, but marking is not used consistently in this way across the school.

70. The quality of teaching and learning was consistently good in all lessons seen with evidence of some very good teaching. Teachers and learning support assistants work well together to plan and support learning through effective questioning, and make use of good resources. Pupils' achievement is further promoted by work that is appropriately matched to their different learning needs, including open-ended tasks, enquiry and investigations, resources matched to their prior attainment and individual support. This ensures that all pupils, including those with special educational needs, have access to the curriculum and learn at a good pace. Pupils in all years have a clear understanding of the scientific enquiry process, and their predictions and planning are valued and explored. Teachers' expectations are high and pupils are challenged to express their ideas using correct scientific language. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 are very articulate and can explain their thinking and learning well. In all year groups, however, insufficient use is made of ICT to enhance teaching and learning.
71. Pupils have very good attitudes to learning. They listen well and are keen to participate in practical activities and work well together in small groups. In a lesson during the inspection, pupils in Year 2 worked collaboratively on their models with an electrical circuit, discussing in depth their ideas and supporting each other. In Years 3 and 4, pupils had a prolonged discussion on how to develop a fair test. There was an excited buzz around the room during this session, which clearly indicated their involvement and commitment. The development of a wildlife area in the school grounds is making a good contribution to pupils' learning and motivation in science.
72. The science co-ordinator provides good leadership and management. She has been able to influence the work of other teachers through the monitoring process and by providing effective feedback. She has also had an opportunity to upgrade and audit the resources to ensure effective coverage of the curriculum. She recognises that assessment is an area for development, because although there are a number of procedures in place to monitor pupils' progress, these are not used consistently across the school.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are above average overall and by the time pupils leave the school.
- The new ICT suite is providing pupils with much better access to computers.
- Staff confidence in teaching ICT is developing well.
- The lack of fast access to the Internet means that pupils are not able to do as much research using ICT as is common.

### **Commentary**

73. Standards in ICT are above average and achievement is good in all years. The recent provision of an ICT suite gives pupils much better access to computers than was the case at the last inspection, resulting in good improvement in provision.
74. Pupils learn about the functions and uses of computers both in the suite and in classrooms. The Year 2 class, for example, was learning how to program the school 'floor-turtle' so that it would move in a square and arrive back where it started. Standards here in this lesson were above average for Year 2. Pupils used their mathematics well to understand the numbers of

units the machine would need to move forwards across the carpet. They mostly understood whether it would need to turn clockwise or anticlockwise to create the square pattern they wanted to achieve. Good cross-curricular links such as these with mathematics strengthen pupils' understanding well. Several pupils were being challenged well to recognise, and be able to annotate, the sequence of repeating instructional patterns they would need to make the machine complete the whole square. Clear, planned progression to the next lesson where this idea will be developed, ensures that pupils' knowledge is consolidated and expanded well. Higher attaining pupils in this class remembered prior learning clearly and could remind the teacher that the memory of the 'turtle' had first to be cleared before they could start a new operation.

75. Displays in the ICT suite and in pupils' portfolios of work show that all year groups have a good understanding of an appropriate range of programs. Year 1, for example, can show many types of comparative information visually, using various types of software. They can make fantasy pictures, using the mouse control, for instance to combine heads, tails, legs and bodies of different animals to invent imaginary creatures. In Year 2, pupils deepen their understanding of the functions of computers and can explain the different things they can do with controls and icons. Pupils of all abilities can log on, type and select text, change the colour and size of text, save their work and so on, and can explain this to adults or to each other if their friends forget things. They work together very happily sharing machines if necessary, but there are enough computers in the suite for younger pupils to have one to themselves. Pupils of different, or similar, abilities are often encouraged to work together on the machines for different curricular or social reasons and always co-operate very well. This type of work was observed in an English lesson in Year 2, where the ICT resources were put to very good use in exercises very effectively matched to the needs and abilities of different pupils, including those with special educational needs.
76. Good progress continues into Years 3 and 4, where ICT is used very well to support other subjects particularly English, art and mathematics. Pupils' understanding of space and shape, for example the nature of repeat-patterns, is reinforced well. The development of pupils' ICT knowledge is also good, with increasingly sophisticated, often integrated operations such as the merged use of text and graphics in Year 3. By Year 4, when pupils word-process and illustrate storybooks for younger children, skills are above average. Pupils often work together on joint productions. They then take their books to read to children in the Nursery, providing good reinforcement for their work in English in writing for different audiences. Several pupils in the current Year 4 are likely to reach well above average standards in ICT by the time they leave the school.
77. Teaching is good. Teachers are becoming increasingly confident about using computers and the associated equipment and technology. Pupils have very good attitudes towards the use of ICT and enjoy using the machines in their classrooms and going into the suite. The school's lack of broadband Internet access affords pupils less access than usual to extending their use of ICT for fast research, or for e-mail connections.
78. The headteacher is the subject co-ordinator and is leading and managing the development of ICT well. He makes the assessment of pupils' levels of competence against National Curriculum requirements, an area of expertise in which more staff need training, so that they can track pupils' standards against secure criteria.

### **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

79. The new ICT suite and computers located in classrooms are used well and now provide much better resources for pupils than were available at the time of the last inspection. The ICT suite can accommodate the whole class in Years 1 and 2, so all pupils can use an individual machine for lessons. The room is not big enough for the large Year 3 and 4 class to share machines realistically, so pupils have to use the suite in groups, either with the class teacher or with a learning support assistant. Even so, the use of the computers in some subjects across the school is good. English in particular makes good use of a variety of ICT programs

to extend and support pupils' work. Word-processing of draft texts in subjects such as history reinforces pupils' ICT skills well. Art makes a good contribution to pupils' experience of computers. The need to extend the use of ICT to other subjects, including mathematics and science, is well understood by the coordinator and is a priority for development in the school.

## HUMANITIES

80. Insufficient evidence was seen during the inspection to make an overall judgement about provision, standards or teaching in geography or history. One lesson was seen in **geography** in Year 2 and one in **history** in Years 3 and 4.
81. The **geography** lesson in Year 2 showed that pupils had sound grounding in understanding their own and their parents' connections with other countries. Several have friends and family abroad and could identify artefacts from these places. Pupils understand how they can find out information about these locations and were able to offer good suggestions about how people make contact with each other from far away. Pupils' development of a sense of their own 'place' and that of other locations is developing as expected. Teaching in this lesson was good and pupils were encouraged to make cross-curricular links very effectively. English skills were well promoted in a task about finding information from atlases. Pupils were encouraged to think about e-mail connections with people abroad. Good incidental references such as the link to religious education when mentioning Rome, all served to promote pupils' understanding of the integrated nature of the subjects they study in school. Pupils' independent learning skills were also well promoted here, for instance in the good degree of choice the teacher left for pupils to select which country they would find out about.
82. In a **history** lesson in Years 3 and 4, pupils had a very interesting opportunity to hear a first-hand account from a visiting speaker about what it was like to be an evacuee during the World War II. Pupils interacted very well with the speaker and were clearly very interested in the talk about his experiences. The question and answer session, which followed, showed pupils' good understanding of the main aspects of this historical period. In writing about the plight of evacuees, pupils showed that they could empathise well. They wrote letters from their imagined new temporary homes and Year 4 pupils' descriptions of what it felt like to wait to be 'picked' to stay in strangers' homes were above average. Furthermore, Year 3 and 4 pupils' knowledge - revealed in displayed writing about other aspects of the effects of the World War II - shows above average awareness. Work on display also contributed to judgements.

## Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils in Years 3 and 4 make good progress in learning about religions but insufficient progress in learning from religion.
- There has been limited development in religious education since the last inspection.

## Commentary

83. In Years 1 and 2, pupils cover an appropriate range of topics, which enables them to achieve satisfactorily and reach standards that are in line with the expectations of the Local Agreed Syllabus. They learn about important ceremonies that take place when a baby is born or when someone gets married. They find out about some special occasions and have written about how Christmas is important for Christians. They have begun to learn about Jesus and about the creation, and considered how the environment needs to be cared for. Religious education is closely linked to personal, social and health education for the younger pupils; this includes work on feelings, bullying, identity and the family.

84. In Years 3 and 4, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Standards are above average in the knowledge of religion but below average in learning from religion<sup>1</sup>. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 are able to retell Bible stories and write about the lives of key figures from world religions, such as the Buddha and St Francis of Assisi. They have an above average knowledge of the facts of the religions they have studied, with the main emphasis currently on Christianity. There is evidence of pupils engaging in independent research, including using the Internet, and their extended writing is accompanied by imaginative and attractive illustrations. Religious education provides good opportunities for pupils to express their creativity and to develop their literacy skills. Pupils' above average writing skills support their achievement and they set their work out in an orderly, logical way. Pieces of work are often beautifully presented, showing an obvious sense of pride in a job well done. However, pupils make little attempt to relate religion or religious stories to everyday life because teaching does not focus enough on this aspect of the subject.
85. In the one lesson observed, which took place in Years 3 and 4, teaching was good. The teacher challenged pupils to find words to describe Jesus and had planned the lesson very carefully so that work was matched to the different learning needs within the class. The learning objective was shared with pupils and highly relevant to the syllabus. Pupils came up with a number of suitable adjectives, some showing a greater spiritual awareness than others, for instance, selecting words like 'magical', 'special' and 'powerful'. Teaching was lively and pushed pupils to recall their knowledge of Bible stories. The teacher made good use of a painting of Christ that was unusual in its mood as a means of extending their thinking. There were, however, some missed opportunities to get pupils to relate their analysis of the emotions and personal qualities of Jesus with their own experiences of life or to extend their spiritual understanding.
86. The co-ordinator provides satisfactory leadership and management. Detailed marking communicates to pupils what they need to do to improve. Pupils' work has been assessed against both strands of the religious education curriculum, although learning from religion is not systematically taught. The school follows the Local Agreed Syllabus in planning its curriculum but makes insufficient use of national guidance about what should be covered in the subject. Pupils have been on visits to the church and the local vicar visits the school, but these experiences have not been extended to pupils visiting any places of religion for other world faiths. Since the last inspection, religious education has been a low priority as the school has worked to get out of 'serious weaknesses'. There are few artefacts to support teaching and learning in the subject.

## **CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS**

### **Art and design**

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

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The art co-ordinator has excellent subject knowledge and uses this to very good effect.
- The subject makes an outstanding contribution to the development of pupils' creativity.
- Standards are well above average and very good links are forged between art and other subjects.

#### **Commentary**

87. High quality artwork on display contributes a good deal to the school's ethos and celebrates pupils' success. Standards in art are well above average throughout the school and even the

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<sup>1</sup> These are the two strands of the subject that schools are required to teach in accordance with national guidelines for religious education.

youngest pupils are quickly developing an acute visual awareness. Particularly striking work is evident in Year 1 where, as already indicated in this report, pupils undertake meaningful work that spans a number of subjects including art. Their artwork reveals a strong sense of colour and composition. From Year 1 onwards pupils gain key skills in how to observe and record accurately from observation. When working in three dimensions, as when they made highly expressive elephants in clay, pupils have a well above average control over the medium and pay careful attention to detail. Models of butterflies and wasps reveal a very imaginative combination of fabrics, painting and embroidery. Wonderful mixed media pictures after Van Gogh's 'Starry Night' are extremely powerful and expressive.

88. In a lesson in Year 1, very good teaching ensured that pupils gained the important skill of recognising shapes within objects and becoming aware of the relationship between the different elements when recording from observation. The teacher made excellent use of work that she had produced herself to show them the sort of effects that could be achieved, at the same time presenting pupils with highly challenging tasks and a good range of materials to select from.
89. The work of older pupils, such as that inspired by Japanese silk pictures, uses colour and brush strokes experimentally to very good effect. Observational work on 'the environmental garden' is based on an excellent variety of techniques and approaches. Well above average tonal drawings reveal careful and accurate observation and pupils arranged their studies in a way that revealed strong compositional skill. Pupils' own illustrative drawings in their books across the curriculum show that they transfer the skills gained in art and have the confidence to express their ideas graphically. This is supported by good opportunities to use ICT in art.
90. The art co-ordinator provides highly skilled leadership and management, and combines excellent specialist knowledge with experience in training other teachers in the subject. As a result, pupils have excellent opportunities to develop and express their creativity and to develop much stronger skills, knowledge and understanding than is usually found in children of their age.

### **Design and technology**

91. During the inspection, it was possible to observe only one lesson which included a **design and technology** focus. Evidence of pupils' work on display shows that standards are in line with national expectations across the school and by the time pupils leave at the end of Year 4. A lesson in Years 3 and 4 – where pupils were constructing chairs – incorporated elements of art and design and design and technology, and confirmed that standards are average.
92. Pupils are keen on the design aspect of the curriculum and their drawing is above average. They create complex designs, for instance for the chairs which have been created for selected famous characters. When they make these and other artefacts such as their money containers seen on display in the school entrance, pupils pay appropriate attention to selecting the materials they will use. Textiles and other materials used in the construction of these purses are suitable for the purpose and pupils can explain their choices. The money containers have been embellished well, for example with stitches of different types and sizes. Pupils understand the health and safety issues about using tools such as saws and drills. When using resistant materials such as wood and balsa, for example in their model lorries, pupils are able to achieve the smooth movement of wheels through axles. Earlier in the school, pupils learn an appropriate range of methods of fixing things together, for instance to allow movement of arm and leg joints in the paper monkeys pupils have made in Year 1. These form part of a project to celebrate the Chinese New Year – the year of the monkey. Younger pupils are also able to work out how to make pop-up books, for instance, to illustrate an adventure story about pirates. These artefacts are generally robust and sturdy. Pupils make the progress expected across the school overall, but there is little written evidence of evaluations of their final artefacts. Whilst they talk effectively about these, and about the modifications they have made as they develop their constructions, to chair designs, for

example, it would be of value to older pupils in their transition to middle school if more evaluations were written down.

93. Very little **music** was seen during the inspection and no overall judgement can be made about provision, achievement or teaching. Judgements are based on evidence from singing in assembly, a session led by the Bedfordshire Strings Quintet, two short lesson observations and discussion with staff.
94. Pupils sing tunefully with enthusiasm and enjoyment. They have a good knowledge of several songs and successfully learn new songs by listening to the words without visual distractions; this has developed their good listening skills. During the inspection, pupils' musical understanding was greatly enhanced by a special performance in the school by the Bedfordshire Strings Quintet. This provided pupils with a lively rendition of classical music and helped to develop their knowledge and understanding of the instruments and pieces of music. Pupils responded with enthusiasm and spontaneous applause and were held spellbound by some of the musical effects. When the quintet played a rondo, pupils kept perfect time by following the viola player in clapping the main beat and then proceeded to do so without help. They were able to answer a wide range of questions about the different instruments and sounds, and revealed knowledge of the correct musical terms. Standards were at least above average and at times well above average as revealed by pupils' response to the string quintet and their singing in assembly.
95. In a lesson in Year 1, good questioning by the teacher encouraged pupils to develop discernment in their listening, which led to increased skills in producing long and short sounds with a range of instruments. The school provides very good opportunities for pupils to learn to play instruments through the peripatetic music service; at present they have opportunities to play the violin, piano and recorder.
96. No lessons were seen in **physical education** so it is not possible to make an overall judgement about provision, achievement or teaching. Information was gained from discussions with staff.
97. The physical education curriculum is linked usefully with personal, social and health education and science to ensure pupils understand the importance of exercise and how it affects the body. Pupils have an hour of dedicated physical education a week and opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities, including football and swimming. In summer, pupils are encouraged to swim every day and this has resulted in high achievement. Talented pupils in all elements of physical education have been identified by the school and their development is promoted well. The subject is appropriately resourced but the multi-purpose hall and lack of storage space causes difficulties at times. The co-ordinator provides a very good role model for other staff as he has a clear vision for the development of physical education and he is enthusiastic and committed to the subject.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

98. It is not possible to make an overall judgement about provision, achievement or teaching in personal, social and health education. The school ethos and assemblies contribute very positively to pupils' development as effective citizens as well as to their personal and social education.
99. Pupils have some very good opportunities to develop their independence and are encouraged to learn to think for themselves about moral issues. For instance, in an assembly during the inspection pupils were involved actively in identifying what would be the most hurtful types of behaviour and so gained in their understanding of how to treat others. In Years 3 and 4, teachers take a daily newspaper, which is used as a stimulus for class discussion in moral and ethical issues.

100. Personal, social and health education, often in the form of circle time, enables all pupils to speak about their personal experiences in an atmosphere where they feel safe and know that they will be listened to.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

### *Inspection judgement*

### **Grade**

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

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