

INSPECTION REPORT

VALLEY ROAD COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Hendon, Sunderland

LEA area: Sunderland

Unique reference number: 133559

Headteacher: Mrs Christine Young

Lead inspector: Mr P M Allen

Dates of inspection: 3rd – 6th November 2003

Inspection number: 258269

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Primary
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 – 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	365
School address:	Corporation Road Hendon Sunderland
Postcode:	SR2 8PL
Telephone number:	(0191) 553 7750
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Appropriate authority:	Local education authority
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Geoff Dodds
Date of previous inspection:	n/a

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school came into existence as a new school in September 2002 as a consequence of the closure of separate infant and junior schools, moving into its purpose built accommodation in January 2003. As such, this is its first inspection. A significant part of the very extensive 'state of the art' accommodation is designated for community use. The project was funded by the Department of Education and Science, the local education authority, the 'New Deal for Communities' initiative and, to a lesser extent, private donations and sponsorship. The school benefits from a good level of teaching and support staff; in the classes for Reception and Year 1 to 6 pupils, the pupil/teacher ratio is 18:1 and the pupil/adult ratio is 10:1. With 365 pupils on roll (plus around 40 nursery-aged children who attend on a part time basis), this is a large primary school. The vast majority of pupils live close to school which is located in an area of significant social and economic difficulty. Most live in housing association and private rented accommodation. There are a small number of 'looked after' children. Although a significant majority of pupils are of white UK heritage background, there is a significant minority of pupils from other ethnic backgrounds, mainly Bangladeshi. Other pupils are drawn from asylum seeking and refugee families from Angola, Iran and Eastern Europe. There are 20 pupils for whom English is an additional language and who are at an early stage of English language acquisition. Around 60 pupils are identified as having special educational needs, of whom five have a Statement of Special Educational Need. These proportions are slightly below the national average. There is a relatively high level of pupil mobility. In the year prior to the inspection 43 pupils joined and 27 left other than at the start and end of the year. The number of children taking free school meals is significantly above the national average. Assessments undertaken when children enter the Reception year indicate that levels of attainment are well below what could be expected, especially in social, language and communication skills.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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4350	Clive Whittington	Team inspector	English, geography, physical education, English as an additional language and special educational needs

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This new and rapidly developing school with its excellent community links is a **very good school** which is providing a very good quality of education. Although standards as yet are mainly well below average, most pupils achieve well throughout the school in relation to their abilities as a consequence of the good teaching they receive. Very good overall leadership is enabling the school to move forward in its main aim of raising standards. The school provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The school is successful because of the excellent leadership of the Principal who is putting in place clear strategies for raising standards and improving the quality of education.
- Standards need to be higher across the school, especially for the boys and most importantly in literacy.
- Because the teaching and learning are good, overall the pupils achieve well in relation to their abilities, including those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, many of whom are from asylum seeking and refugee families.
- Children are given an excellent start to their school lives because of the high quality of the work in the Nursery and the Reception Year (in the Early Years Unit).
- The excellent new building, which is facilitating excellent community links, is having a very positive impact on the quality of education.
- Attendance and punctuality need to be better.
- The arrangements for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are as yet at an early stage and need significant development.

This is the school's first inspection and, as such, judgements made are with due consideration of the fact that the school is only one year old and at a very early stage of its development. Very good progress has been made in providing a team approach involving new and established staff, who are very conscientious and committed to the school and its pupils. There is a shared vision for improvement and shared capacity to succeed.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Throughout the school most pupils achieve well as a consequence of good teaching. At the time of the inspection no data was available to make comparisons with national standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 in 2003. Children make a very positive start in the Early Years Unit but standards are low and, whilst most of them are likely to achieve the goals children are expected to reach by the end of the Reception Year, very few are likely to exceed them. Standards at the end of Year 2 are below average in reading, mathematics and science and well below in writing. Currently standards at the end of Year 6 are well below average in English, mathematics and science because of a very low attaining year group, which includes a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs. There is evidence to indicate that, in the previous schools, pupils' progress was more marked in Years 1 and 2 than it was in Years 3 to 6 and this is still having an impact on overall standards. Although across the school, boys' attainment is lower than that of girls in English, mathematics and science, the indications are that boys are now achieving better than they were when the school opened. The new school is now enabling pupils across all year groups to make good progress. Standards in information and communication technology and religious education are below those typically seen. Even though standards are low, except in art and design where they are good, most pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well in relation to their abilities. Those pupils with English as an additional language are very well supported and, as a consequence, they achieve as well as their classmates. Standards are beginning to improve and are set to continue to do so. This is the school's main priority.

The very good provision for pupils' personal development, including the good provision for spiritual, moral, cultural, and especially their social development, helps to create a caring, community ethos where every child is valued and secure. All the available evidence indicates that the pupils' attitudes and behaviour have improved dramatically since the opening of the new school. Attitudes and behaviour are now very good and make a significant contribution to the pupils' learning and achievement. The school is very good at taking into account pupils' views. Attendance is unsatisfactory; some pupils have too much absence missing valuable learning time. In addition, levels of punctuality are in need of improvement.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. The good quality of teaching means that pupils are able to learn well throughout the school. Excellent teaching was observed in the Foundation Stage and in some English lessons. The quality of education in the Foundation Stage is very good because of the high standard of teaching and learning. A very important feature of the teaching throughout the school is the high quality of support provided by the classroom assistants. This ensures that pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Pupils with English as an additional language, including the significant number at an early stage of English language acquisition are very well supported, partly through the very good 'Language Enrichment Unit' which enables pupils to make very good progress and access all areas of the curriculum. The breadth of the curriculum is satisfactory overall. The school has appropriately concentrated on English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology, but recognises the need to now further develop the work in other subjects such as history and geography. High levels of staffing have a very good impact on the learning. A very good range of extra-curricular activities enriches the curriculum. Pupils are given good care, guidance and support. The school has a good partnership with parents and carers and has effective links with local schools. The school works closely with the local community and, under the efficient leadership of the Vice-Principal (Community), excellent links are being developed, making good use of the outstanding and innovative accommodation.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall leadership and management of the school are very good. The Principal's excellent leadership and management are major factors in the effectiveness of the school. Curriculum co-ordinators are being empowered to develop their leadership and management roles and this they are beginning to do successfully. The Principal is very well supported by a hardworking and knowledgeable governing body which ensures that governance is very good and fully meets statutory requirements. It was the vision of the governing body, ably led by its excellent chairman, that brought about the existence of this unique school.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and carers are very supportive of the school and its staff. Many of them spoke in praise of their new school, its accommodation and its impact on the lives of their children. Although there were no major concerns, a small number would appreciate more homework, especially in Year 6 as preparation for secondary education. Pupils are very enthusiastic about their new school, showing affection and respect towards the adults there.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- to continue to develop strategies to raise standards, especially for boys, most notably in literacy;
- to further develop strategies to improve attendance and punctuality; and
- to develop whole school procedures to assess attainment and progress.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects

Although standards are low, most pupils achieve well in relation to their abilities. There is no significant difference between the attainment of pupils from different backgrounds, including those with English as an additional language, but there are significant differences across the school, between the attainment of boys and girls, with boys attaining lower standards.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well overall because of the good quality of teaching.
- The very good provision for pupils with special educational needs enables them to achieve well.
- The pupils with English as an additional language are very well supported, partly through the Language Enrichment Unit, enabling them to achieve well.
- Standards need to be higher across the school in mathematics and science, but especially in English, most notably in writing.
- Boys' standards need to be higher as they are underachieving when compared with girls.

Commentary

1. Children are given a very positive start to school life due to the high quality of the provision in the Early Years Unit. Although there is a wide range of attainment on entry when children start at Nursery age, overall attainment is very low, especially in social, communication and language skills. Children make good progress during their time in Nursery, showing the 'value added' by the school. Nevertheless, when children start their Reception year at the beginning of the year in which they become five, standards are still well below what could be expected.
2. Even though children achieve well during their Reception year, only between two thirds and three quarters are likely to achieve the nationally recognised Early Learning Goals in most areas of learning. A relatively small number will reach the expected early reading and writing competencies. Children perform best in creative and physical development because these areas of learning have less dependence on language skills. Overall, there are strong indications that girls perform better than boys across the areas of learning.
3. As the school only came into existence in September 2002, there is very little national performance data on standards at the end of Year 2 and the end of Year 6. Judgements on standards are based on work seen in lessons, on an extensive scrutiny of pupils' work and on discussion with pupils. Judgements are also based on the school's own data which lead to predictions of future performance, most notably at the end of Year 2 and at the end of Year 6.
4. Currently standards at the end of Year 2 are below average in reading, mathematics and science and well below average in writing. Currently, because of the low attainment of the year group with its high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties, standards at the end of Year 6 are well below average in English, mathematics and science. The higher standards at the end of Year 2 were reflected in the school's first National Curriculum results in summer 2003. This pattern of attainment with higher results at the end of Year 2 compared with the end of Year 6 was the situation over a number of years at the previous separate infant and junior schools prior to amalgamation. Standards are beginning to rise and the school has high hopes of the current Year 4 pupils who will ultimately have the benefit of all their time in Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 in the new school. Data collected and analysed by the school indicate that boys' attainment is lower than girls in English, mathematics and science throughout the school, although boys are now achieving better than previously.

5. The current low standards in mathematics are mainly due to the poor numeracy skills shown by the pupils; many pupils lack real understanding of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. The school is working hard to address this and standards are beginning to improve. In literacy, a significant number of pupils have poor speaking skills, standards in reading are below average for most pupils and, in writing, many pupils lack the language skills to put their thoughts into words. Again the school is working hard on these matters and standards are improving. Currently, poor reading and writing ability has a negative impact on pupils' attainment in most areas of the curriculum and in their use of literacy across the curriculum.
6. Standards in information and communication technology and in religious education are lower than those normally seen. The school is very well resourced in information and communication technology, where pupils' attitudes are very positive and clear strategies are in place to raise standards. As standards are gradually improving, pupils' skills in information and communication technology are beginning to help them to make progress in other areas of the curriculum. Standards are below average in most other subjects, although in art and design they are good with a lot of high quality work. Pupils attain well in the swimming aspect of physical education.
7. Although there were good examples of using literacy and numeracy across the curriculum, there are firm plans to develop this further. The school is working hard and with success to meet the needs of all its pupils and is mindful of the need to continue targeting the improvement of boys' attainment. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well, having clear and relevant targets for development. They make good progress in their learning throughout the school towards meeting the targets on their individual education plans (IEPs). These targets are reviewed and revised on a regular basis. This progress owes much to the prompt identification of problems and the sensitive support given to these pupils. Pupils with English as an additional language, including those at an early stage of English language acquisition, are very well supported and, as a consequence, they achieve as well as their classmates. The school is increasingly targeting the needs of the higher attainers. The school is clear in its priority of raising standards and a very positive start has been made; challenging but realistic targets for improvement are being set. To this end, there is shared commitment and capacity amongst the staff to continue to address the school's main priority.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are very good. Pupils' personal development is good. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall with the social and moral aspects being strong. Attendance and punctuality are unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good, with a notable absence of bullying, racism and other forms of oppressive behaviour.
- Relationships are very good throughout the school and have a positive impact on learning.
- Pupils' personal development benefits from the school's very good range of activities provided outside formal lessons.
- From a relatively low starting point, pupils are gaining good levels of self-esteem, which is evident in their increasing confidence and maturity.
- Pupils readily accept the responsibilities given.
- A significant minority of pupils have poor attendance.
- Each day there are approximately 20 pupils arriving after the start of school.

Commentary

8. Relationships between the pupils and adults and between the pupils themselves are very good. Every pupil's contributions and efforts are valued. The school is fully inclusive and it

rightly prides itself on the very good provision for pupils' individual needs, including those pupils with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language. The parents speak very highly of the friendly atmosphere throughout the school.

9. During the inspection no instances of serious misbehaviour or harassment were observed. Pupils and staff all confirmed that there is an absence of bullying and racism. There have been no exclusions in the 12-month period preceding the inspection. Whilst this is a new school, evidence shows that previously, the older pupils were educated in an environment where misbehaviour and exclusions were very common; parents are very clear and very positive about the significant improvements brought about in the new school.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded
Number of refugees and asylum seekers

Exclusions in the last school year

No. of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
325	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
2	0	0
3	0	0
17	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
7	0	0
2	0	0
8	0	0

10. The attitudes of the vast majority of pupils are very good which contributes to their good achievement. They want to learn, are co-operative and make valuable contributions to lessons. Many pupils come early to school, joining in the Breakfast Club, and many stay on for the wide range of after school activities. During lessons pupils listen attentively and contribute well; for example, when answering teachers' questions. Pupils are learning to work independently and good examples were observed of collaborative work, such as when pupils work together, sharing computers. Pupils with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language have positive attitudes to their learning.
11. Children in the Early Years Unit quickly begin to make good progress in the area of personal, social and emotional development, making them receptive to new learning. Across the school, pupils' personal development benefits from well planned, successful strategies to increase their self-confidence and self-esteem. Appropriate responsibilities are given; for example, a number of pupils were observed tidying the library and they were keen to explain how the books and other resources were maintained. In the playground at lunchtime, one pupil is given the whistle in order to referee the football game and this works well.
12. Pupils have a good understanding of right and wrong which is well promoted throughout the school. They benefit from the very good role models set by all the adults. They learn to work co-operatively both in class and in 'Circle Time', when they mix together harmoniously regardless of age, gender and ethnicity. Pupils' understanding of different cultures is promoted through religious education in which pupils learn about the major world faiths.

13. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, the pupils gave a strong agreement that they like being at school, that they learn new things and that the adults give very good support. All the pupils spoken to talked with affection and respect about the adults in school.

Attendance

14. Because the school is new, it is not possible to compare the school's attendance rates with those of all schools nationally. Nevertheless, it is clear that the school's level of attendance is unsatisfactory being below that normally expected for a primary school. The level of unauthorised absence is much too high, although this is, in part, due to a relatively high number of pupils who move away but remain on the register. Whilst the majority of pupils have good attendance, there is a significant minority who have frequent absences. Likewise there are too many pupils who are regularly late for school. The school is working hard, with the support of the welfare officer, to try and educate all parents so that they appreciate the critical importance of regular attendance in order to maximise the benefits of the school's educational provision.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Because of its many strong features, the quality of education provided by this 'young' school is **very good**. Good quality teaching and good levels of care and support mean that pupils are able to learn well. There is a good partnership with parents and the school's links with the local community are excellent.

Teaching and learning

Overall the quality of teaching and learning is good. The quality of teaching in English lessons and in the Foundation Stage is of a particularly high standard. Teachers provide interesting, imaginative lessons which help all pupils to learn well. The assessment of attainment and progress is an area for further development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- One third of the teaching observed was very good or excellent.
- The staff are very committed to contributing to this effective school.
- Teachers manage the pupils well. The very good relationships in class give pupils the confidence to engage in their work and achieve well.
- Teachers provide frequent opportunities for pupils to develop social skills through co-operative work.
- Teachers and classroom assistants work very well together providing a caring, consistent approach to learning.
- Teachers take care to use methods and resources which will enable all pupils to learn effectively.
- Procedures for assessing and tracking pupils' attainment and progress are not yet sufficiently well developed.
- Standards of handwriting and presentation could be higher.

Commentary

15. When the school opened, the staff faced challenging behaviour from a significant minority of pupils. Consequently their main priority was to create an environment where pupils could learn effectively. This has been successful. Through clear guidelines, high expectations and a consistent approach to positive behaviour management, teachers provide a friendly supportive environment which pupils and parents value and where the vast majority of pupils wish to give of their best.

16. Teachers work very hard and are very committed to the school and its pupils. All staff have a calm and supportive approach in dealing with the pupils. The very strong community ethos, together with the determination to raise standards has led to very good provision for inclusion.
17. Pupils with special educational needs are supported very well and teachers plan effectively to meet the needs of these pupils. Good effort is made to include all pupils in oral sessions by appropriate questioning. Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are suitably managed. Effective liaison between the special educational needs co-ordinator, class teachers and support staff ensures that there is appropriate support and challenge for these pupils and, as a result, they make good progress. The quality of teaching for these pupils is generally good. The school is in the early stages of identifying pupils who are gifted and talented. However, suitable work is set in all classes to ensure that these higher attaining pupils achieve well. Pupils with English as an additional language achieve well. They are given very good quality support, which promotes their development, both socially and linguistically. All pupils are encouraged to develop their particular talents and all are equally valued.
18. The good quality of curriculum leadership and management is helping to ensure that teachers have a consistent approach to teaching and learning. The main current priority is appropriately to improve speaking and listening and writing skills. Teachers make a great effort to provide opportunities for pupils to develop these skills across the curriculum. They show great patience in discussions, gently steering those pupils who find difficulty in focusing on questions and making the appropriate response. Through carefully focused questions, a very sympathetic attitude and good use of praise, pupils' achievements are gradually being improved. Teachers provide well-organised opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively and this is proving very beneficial in developing both oral and social skills. Teachers are successful in helping the pupils to understand their own progress and how they can improve.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 56 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
4 (7%)	16 (29%)	24 (43%)	11 (19%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

19. Where teaching is very good, pupils are engrossed in their work and are making considerably better progress than might be expected and achievement is high. In one particularly effective literacy lesson, relationships between the teacher and pupils were excellent and this situation promoted the pupils' self-esteem. The teacher's enthusiasm was infectious and resulted in a very high level of involvement from the pupils and very good learning. Very good teaching is having an increasingly strong impact on the school's main agenda of raising standards. In the minority of lessons where teaching was less than good, the teachers did not enable pupils to make the good progress typical of other lessons.
20. In the Early Years Unit, a vibrant, attractive environment, together with very effective planning and well established routines, is providing high quality learning experiences for the youngest children. The staff there are particularly effective in creating a warm, friendly environment, where parents and children feel welcome and valued. This strong, positive start for the children, is laying the foundations for the main focus of raising standards.
21. Classrooms are well resourced and usually well organised with attractive displays of pupils' work and other artefacts. Teachers make very good use of interactive whiteboards in their classrooms to make presentations which capture the pupils' interest. Pupils take delight in talking to visitors about the various stimulating displays. Pupils show interest and concentration in their work and they are usually keen to do their best. Increasingly they are

enabled to develop the skills to work both independently and also co-operatively with their classmates.

22. Planning for English and mathematics is thorough and consistent across the school. In other subjects, there is some variation. Planning for the use of information and communication technology across the curriculum needs further development and teachers are beginning to take appropriate steps to improve the standards of handwriting and presentation. Teachers make regular assessments of pupils' work, mainly in literacy and numeracy, showing good understanding of the next steps pupils need to take in their learning. However, as yet, there is no formal whole school format. This is a priority in future development plans to ensure consistency in assessing pupils' attainment and progress across all areas of the curriculum. Teachers give homework on a regular basis and parents are aware of the arrangements. Where there is appropriate support from home, which is not always the case, this is making a good contribution to pupils' learning.

The curriculum

The overall quality of the curriculum throughout the school, including the Foundation Stage, is good. The range of extra-curricular activities enriching the curriculum is very good. Overall the range and quality of resources and accommodation are very good, and the accommodation itself is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is of particularly high quality in the Nursery and in the Reception year.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs and for those who speak English as an additional language is very good, enabling them to achieve well.
- Personal, social, health education and citizenship is good.
- The quality of the accommodation is excellent, contributing positively to the quality of education provided.
- The contribution to pupils' learning by support staff is very good.
- There is a very good match of teachers and other staff to the demands of the curriculum.
- Participation in sport and out of school activities is very good.

Commentary

23. The school's curriculum is broad and balanced, preparing pupils well for the next stages of their education. Most of the planning is based on nationally developed schemes of work. The curriculum meets statutory requirements, including those for the provision for religious education and collective worship. The quality and range of learning opportunities provided are good, with some very good elements. The school enhances its curricular provision by offering a very good range of opportunities for learning out of school. The choice of activities includes computer, first aid and embroidery clubs. There is a good range of sporting activities, including gymnastics and swimming which are popular with pupils. In addition, a homework club provides pupils with a quiet place to complete homework with the support of an adult. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies are used effectively to teach the skills of literacy and numeracy and enable pupils to achieve well. The school is developing good opportunities to work in a cross-curricular way.
24. Provision for personal, social and health education and citizenship, including sex and relationships education and attention to alcohol and drugs misuse, is good. The curriculum is inclusive by ensuring equality of access and opportunity for all pupils. School planning includes 'Circle Time' where pupils are free to express personal feelings and concerns. Teachers have positive strategies that develop children's initiative and responsibilities.
25. There is very good provision for pupils with special educational needs. The special educational needs co-ordinator works closely with staff and parents to support the effective learning and progress of these pupils. Individual education plans are detailed with appropriate

targets identified to help the pupils and strategies suggested to achieve these. Pupils with special educational needs have good support in class and when withdrawn in small groups to follow their specific learning programmes.

26. The Language Enrichment Unit provides very effective support, most notably in language development for those pupils with English as an additional language, including those at an early stage of English language acquisition. The support equips these pupils well to take part in lessons and enables them to achieve well across the curriculum.
27. The standard of accommodation is excellent. The space is used very well and is greatly appreciated by the pupils. The overall quality and quantity of resources are very good and these are used appropriately, although in some areas, such as the library, further developments are planned. Overall the accommodation and resources are having a very positive impact on standards and achievement.
28. The role of the curriculum co-ordinators is being well developed and is having a positive impact on the provision. The teachers and learning support staff in all parts of the school are experienced and work very efficiently together to support the pupils' learning and contribute to their good achievement over time.

Care, guidance and support

There are good procedures for the care, guidance and support of pupils. The school has developed a very good, caring, community ethos, within which the health, safety and welfare of pupils is given a high priority. The school is effective in consulting pupils about school life.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are very good policies and procedures for pastoral care, including child protection.
- All staff know the pupils very well and have very caring attitudes.
- Relationships are very good.
- First aid provision is excellent.
- Very effective induction arrangements ensure that new pupils settle well.
- Health and safety procedures are very good.
- The school is fully inclusive for all its differing groups of pupils; individual pupil needs are well met.
- Pupils' own views are sought and valued by the school.
- There are not, as yet, systematic assessment procedures.

Commentary

29. The leadership of the school has brought about a successful commitment by all staff in providing a caring, family atmosphere that is highly valued by the pupils, the parents and the surrounding community. The pupils feel secure within the school's warm and friendly environment; this is particularly evident at the start of the day when over a third of pupils arrive early to join in the Breakfast Club.
30. The school benefits from a relatively large number of staff, parent helpers and other adults such as student teachers. All staff give good support and supervision. The high quality of staff training and commitment is exemplified by the numerous well organised activities led by the midday supervisors. The conscientious site supervisors ensure that the site is safe, secure and clean. Appropriate risk assessments are undertaken by staff. Medical care and child protection issues are suitably covered and meticulously logged. The school's hard working administrator organises the school's excellent first aid provision.

31. The Early Years Unit staff provide very good induction for the new starters into the nursery and the Reception year group. The young children settle quickly. The parents of all children are unanimous in their praise for the school's care, support and help. Very good care and support is provided for those pupils, often new to school, who speak English as an additional language. This is the main reason they flourish and make such good progress. The Language Enrichment Unit, with well organised provision by the two staff, provides a very high level of care.
32. Early identification of pupils with special educational needs ensures effective support that successfully promotes good pupil progress. Pupils with special educational needs receive good quality support either in class with work that is appropriately planned for them, or in small groups working on basic skills in literacy groups. This enables pupils to make good progress in their learning.
33. Whilst the personal, social, health and citizenship education is good overall, the school is still in the process of reviewing the provision and formalising the policy. The school has good procedures for taking into account pupils' views and there are firm plans to extend this through the introduction of a school council. Overall, individual needs are very well met for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and those with particular needs, such as 'looked after' children. The high quality of the care, guidance and support for pupils has a very positive impact on the quality of education provided by the school.
34. The school's management of pupils' behaviour has brought about very significant improvements. All staff have high expectations and are quick to praise and encourage pupils. Overall this is a very caring school where each child counts.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Parents have very positive views of the school and, overall, give good support. They appreciate the recent significant improvements in educational provision. The school's excellent links with the local community represent outstanding practice.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents expressed very positive views about the school, particularly with regard to their children's progress and the teaching, including the very good care and support.
- The school's innovative initiatives encourage a high level of parent contact, with increasing numbers attending school events.
- The way that many parents enter the school at the start and finish of the day is leading to very good informal links between home and school.
- Good quality informative newsletters and booklets are provided for parents.
- The school has established excellent and innovative links with the community, particularly in the 'Gateway' (entrance route) part of the building.
- There are good links with other primary schools and very good links with the local secondary school.
- Parent support for pupils' learning, especially at home, could be better for many.

Commentary

35. Parents are extremely supportive of the school and its work. In all discussions, both before and during the inspection, parents were very enthusiastic about all aspects of the school's educational and social provision. The only concern amongst a small number was a view that there should be more homework, notably in preparation for secondary education. The school is giving consideration to this concern.

Example of outstanding practice

The development of a community school

In 2000, the governing body, well led by its inspirational chairman, identified a vision and a unique path for the proposed local reorganisation. This was to create a school which embraced the concept of providing a 'one-stop shop' in terms of education, health, child-care and social services for the community.

The breathtaking new building, which in 2002 realised the vision, comprises three wings, two for the use of the school and the third for the community. The school wings are accessed through an enclosed 'street' ('The Gateway') which houses a healthy living centre, a community information and communication technology suite, a crèche and toddler facilities, a diner, a Language Enrichment Unit, meeting rooms for local and outside use and a large space for informal contact.

Many of these initiatives have attracted extra funding for the school. The impact of this has been to provide fixtures and fittings of a very high quality, enabling the community and its children to be part of something very special and groundbreaking.

The vice-principal, who is not from a teaching background, has the responsibility for developing and improving these community links. Under his very effective stewardship, the links are set to continue to go from strength to strength. The next important development will be in 2004 when the building will be extended to create a neighbourhood Nursery, partly to provide childcare for those in the community who wish to return to work or education. This will be open from 8am to 6.30pm, 51 weeks of the year.

Most of the staff employed in 'The Gateway' are local residents who have undergone 'on-site' training; this is also the case with most of the many classroom assistants and lunchtime supervisory assistants in the school.

The project as a whole is bringing hope and optimism to an area of social and economic difficulty and is impacting on the regeneration of the area. As such, it can be viewed as a blueprint for the future.

36. The school prospectus, governing body annual report and weekly newsletters provide very good information for the parents. Two formal parents' open evenings are held each year together with many opportunities for informal discussion. The pupils' annual reports are satisfactory but give only minimal coverage to subjects other than English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology. The school is very actively encouraging parental involvement in their children's education and in the life of the school, using a range of strategies and initiatives. For example, parental attendance at the recent annual governors' meeting was a great success.
37. The two adults in the Language Enrichment Unit provide a very good point of contact for those parents who themselves may have specific needs; for example, those who may have an insecure grasp of the English language. Additionally, parents are given every opportunity to be involved in reviewing the needs of their children with special educational needs and, when necessary, staff follow this up with home visits. The school is fortunate to have a wide range of supportive staff, including the administrative staff, who enable very good contact to be maintained with parents and with the wider community.
38. The school has many business links and benefits from a wide range of grants and financial contributions. This is having an enormous impact on the level of funding, contributing to the excellent accommodation and facilities. The close ties to the adjacent sports centre allow particularly good arrangements for swimming, including the out-of-school club and the very good opportunities for children as young as Nursery age, to benefit from experience in water.
39. Links with other schools are good and the Year 6 pupils make regular visits to the secondary school ensuring good transfer arrangements. The school has developed very good links with other establishments such as the local university.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall the leadership and management of the school are very good. The school is successful because of the excellent leadership of the Principal. She is well supported by a very hardworking governing body who ensure that governance of the school is very good. The school is very effectively managed.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent leadership of the Principal is establishing clear strategies for raising standards and improving the quality of education.
- The governing body, led by its excellent chairman, has a very good vision for the school.
- The school has been very successful in attracting funding to improve its educational facilities.
- There is a very strong commitment to the further development of a school where every individual matters.
- The administrator makes a significant contribution to the smooth running of the school.

Commentary

40. The leadership and management ensure a clear direction for the work and development of the school with clear aspirations for higher standards. The Principal's clear vision is detailed within the thorough school improvement plan that drives the budget and is linked to staff development priorities. It clearly identifies where the school needs to make further improvements and is carefully monitored so that the teachers are not overburdened with too many initiatives. Underpinning this is a clear focus on raising standards which is shared by staff and governors. Strategies have been introduced to help staff share expertise gained from their previous schools. Many of them are teaching different age groups within new staff teams. They are enthusiastic and committed to the vision and ethos of the school.
41. The excellent school building is having a very positive impact on the quality of education. The organisation of the classrooms and the very good level of resourcing are helping to improve the delivery of the curriculum. For example, all classrooms have interactive whiteboards and there are two computer suites. The staff structure and the allocation of staff responsibilities make good use of the unique building and these in turn are beginning to have a positive impact on standards of attainment.
42. The four team leaders co-ordinate the views of all teaching and support staff in their team when making decisions. This ensures that all staff within school are included when formulating policies. The agendas cover curricular and non-curricular areas. In one year, the teams have created a number of policies and written the school prospectus. They have recently started work on a marking policy. The homework policy is a particular success as pupils are regularly returning completed homework, whereas previously this was not always the case. Parents now have the opportunity to help their children with the support of the homework club or help them at home with the use of homework diaries.
43. The Principal has a very strong commitment to providing a school that meets the needs of all pupils. The school successfully promotes racial harmony; all pupils are treated equally and have equality of opportunity irrespective of race and gender. The deployment and workload of the good number of teachers are well managed. The large number of effective classroom support assistants are well deployed and they ensure a high quality of support for pupils with special needs. The policies and systems for special needs and inclusion are all at an early stage but the school improvement plan includes a detailed programme of the planned developments.
44. The school is very effectively managed. Performance management strategies are being developed across the school and there is a commitment by all staff to achieve and give of their best. Many subject co-ordinators are new to their roles but they are all aware of their responsibilities. They have evaluated the provision for their subject areas and have created action plans for their further development; this includes a programme for the monitoring of teaching and learning. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is well managed. The co-ordinator is very conscientious and uses his time effectively in managing this area. There is a good policy which is thorough and inclusive. The special needs provision is having a positive impact on pupils' learning, where good progress is made and pupils grow in confidence and self-esteem.

45. The day-to-day administration is very efficient. The administrator, well supported by the administrative assistants, makes a significant contribution to the daily life of the school as well as to the administrative and financial support. She is very welcoming to staff, pupils and visitors and efficiently manages a wide range of tasks, from organising the text for the plasma screens to being the lead person for first aid within school.
46. The governance of the school is very good and fully meets statutory requirements. The Principal is very well supported by a hardworking and knowledgeable governing body who understand their roles and responsibilities. It was their vision led by the inspirational chairman that brought about the existence of this school. They are very successful in attracting external funding and this is having a positive impact on the quality of provision for all in the school.
47. Financial planning is thorough. It is based on a good understanding of the school's vision and priorities. For example, the funding for a high number of support staff is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning and this is beginning to improve standards. Appropriately, the school employs a full time finance officer with the responsibility for the management of its finances.

Financial information for part of the year Sept 2002 (when the school opened) to March 2003 (equating to seven-twelfths of the financial year)

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income ¹	528,645	Balance from previous year ²	50,000
Total expenditure ³	823,815	Balance carried forward to the ⁴ next	1,500
Expenditure per pupil ⁵	1,448		

48. The school's finances are efficiently managed and are uniquely complex, mainly because funding comes from 12 different sources ('streams'). The principles of best value are central to the school's management of resources. The school successfully does all it can to promote the achievement of all of its pupils. A barrier to this is the poor level of attendance and punctuality for a significant minority of the pupils, which means that valuable teaching and learning time are lost.

¹ LEA funding for the school.

² Budget balance from closure of two previous schools.

³ Includes finance for 'community' funding (of over £300,000) for community elements, much of which benefits the pupils.

⁴ Balance remaining from total funding.

⁵ Figure based on LEA funding (seven-twelfths of year).

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

The excellent start to school life provided in the Early Years Unit (for Nursery and Reception Years) is one of the school's main strengths. The overall provision will be significantly enhanced in 2004 when the building is extended with a purpose built 'neighbourhood nursery' catering for children from six months to three years of age. Currently children can start at Nursery in the term after they reach three years of age, attending part time prior to starting the Reception Year. Nursery and Reception children work alongside one another over three adjoining rooms in three different 'contact' groups.

On entry to the Nursery the attainment of most children is well below what could be expected and a significant number of the children possess poor speaking and listening skills with a number having poor social skills. Assessments made on entry identify this low level of attainment in basic skills which has an adverse effect on learning in most areas of experience. The children with English as an additional language sometimes start at a very early level of English language acquisition. Staff have analysed data which show that boys consistently attain less well than girls.

Observations of the children and assessments undertaken indicate that, although they often achieve well in relation to their abilities, a number will achieve only the lower levels of attainment in the Early Learning Goals identified as targets for the end of the Reception year, especially in communication, language and literacy and mathematical development. The exception to this is in the area of physical development where many achieve well in large motor skills; for example, when pedalling tricycles and playing with large toys. Poor linguistic ability has a negative impact on the levels of attainment in mathematical development and knowledge and understanding of the world. Nevertheless, most children progress very well during their time in the unit and standards are rising. This positive start for the children is an important basis for the school's main aim of raising standards.

Most children, including those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, achieve well because the teaching is very good. There are very good systems in place to track the progress of individual children through the 'stepping stones' which lead to the Early Learning Goals in the six areas of learning. The curriculum is appropriately planned to provide a wide range of interesting activities, which are well matched to children's needs. All adults set excellent role models for the children and manage them well. There is a good ratio of adults to children, ensuring that the needs of all are well met. All staff work very well as a cohesive team, carefully monitoring all children's progress. The co-ordinator provides very good leadership and management. The accommodation inside and outside is of a very high order and resources are very good. The only barrier to learning is that, for a significant minority of children, attendance and punctuality are poor and this has an adverse effect on the children's achievements.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children achieve well because of the very good teaching they receive by staff.
- Members of staff have very high expectations and give children very good opportunities to work and play together.
- Only around two thirds of the children are likely to meet the Early Learning Goals and few, if any, are likely to exceed them.

Commentary

49. The area of personal and social development is rightly seen as a priority and children progress well in this area. Some children enter the unit with underdeveloped social skills and find it hard to conform to the high expectations set by the staff who show a very good knowledge of both the social and the educational needs of individual children. However, clear boundaries and the consistent role models set by the staff ensure that children know what is expected of them, so that most quickly learn to behave appropriately.
50. Children gain confidence in a range of familiar and new situations; they start to establish effective relationships with adults. All children are eager to explore new learning situations and their pleasure is clear to see. They learn to select and use activities and resources independently; for example, when making choices from water and sand play, role play, construction, painting and writing. They learn to share and take turns with equipment such as in outdoor play.
51. Across the unit, children are given good opportunities to work, play and learn together well. They begin to develop positive relationships and learn about other people in activities such as 'getting to know you' as part of 'Circle Time'. They learn to share equipment without difficulty and they are usually kind to one another. They learn to co-operate well, such as when they work in a large group on activities which use a parachute. The children are enthusiastic about their learning and become well engaged. The adults treat the children with respect and friendliness. They encourage the children to become independent. A very positive feature is the amount of praise given, which helps to promote the children's self-esteem.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning is very good and children achieve well.
- There are very good opportunities for developing speaking and listening skills through activities such as role play.
- Thorough assessment arrangements mean that needs are well met.
- Only three-quarters of the children are likely to meet most of the learning goals, many will not meet the reading and writing competencies and very few will exceed the goals.

Commentary

52. Most children are beginning to listen attentively in a large group. They enjoy stories such as 'The Three Little Pigs' and 'The Gingerbread Man'. They are learning to follow instructions; for example, when playing shape recognition games. All staff take every opportunity during all activities to successfully develop the children's vocabulary through clear, focused questioning. For example, when the children were mixing dough to make gingerbread men, the teacher continually asked questions, so that children had to think and choose appropriate words to describe what they were doing.
53. Children listen attentively in assemblies and to favourite stories such as 'Elmer the Elephant' and 'The Runaway Chapati'. They enjoy listening to nursery rhymes at the 'listening station'. Children benefit from a wide range of imaginative provision to stimulate spoken language; for example, they enjoy playing together and talking together in the home play area and the role play areas such as 'A Baby Clinic' and the 'Three Bears' House'. They practise their language skills with puppets. They benefit from hearing stories when taking the 'talk, talk bags' home. Most show good understanding of the adults' questions and explanations. They copy adults' writing and, in time, start to write independently. Children, notably the girls, enjoy books, knowing that print is read from left to right. Increasingly, they are showing word

recognition skills. A good range of information and communication technology software helps the children to reinforce and practise their skills. Examination of current planning and of children's work done in the previous school year, indicates that there is a good emphasis on the recognition of sounds to help children learn to read and write.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers plan a wide range of activities to support learning which ensures that children achieve well.
- Every opportunity is taken in all activities to promote children's mathematical development.
- Just three-quarters of the children are likely to meet the expected levels by the end of the year and very few will exceed them.

Commentary

54. Nursery children are beginning to use mathematical language and this is promoted all the time. Some can count to five and some can count beyond that. All children like to join in number rhymes such as 'Five Brown Teddies' and counting games and they begin to learn to write numbers. During the inspection, well-organised work was observed in which children were helped to identify circles, triangles and rectangles. Children learn to sequence events such as the times of the day. A good range of mathematical experiences is given to children, including practical activities which promote discussions using the vocabulary 'more than' and 'less than'. Very focused questioning helps to extend the children's learning.
55. Children sort and match objects and talk about sorting. They benefit from a good range of jigsaws. Older children are able to match and recognise numbers to nine. Children are encouraged to recognise and confidently use mathematical and positional language such as 'bigger', 'smaller', 'above', 'below' and 'behind', for example when they are working with sand and water. They make 'long' and 'short' cheese straws. They make 'wide' and 'narrow' shadows. Very good teaching and learning was observed in this area of development with a wide range of imaginative provision.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A range of interesting activities is planned to promote learning in this area.
- Staff use questioning very effectively to enhance the children's knowledge and understanding of the world around them.
- Poor language skills impact negatively, and only around two-thirds of the children are likely to meet the learning goals, with few if any children exceeding them.

Commentary

56. The children are given a good range of experiences to help them to find out about the world and they make good progress, achieving well in relation to their capabilities, in spite of the poor language skills of a number of the children. They learn about their position in the family and use photographs to compare themselves now with when they were babies. Through a topic on 'People who help us', they enjoy meeting visitors such as police and fire fighters.

Valuable visits outside include ones to Mowbray Park, to the local shops, to a museum and to St Ignatius' Church where they find out about the work of the priest.

57. Children are given good opportunities to use their senses such as to explore onions and carrots, which leads to them making vegetable soup. They learn about the seasons of the year when, for example, magnifying glasses are used to study conkers, leaves and cones. There are many good opportunities for learning which are linked to the topics and books being studied, such as when children bake gingerbread men, when they build a table, chair or a cave for a teddy and when they make masks of characters from stories. Children have good access to computers and many learn to manipulate the mouse well, such as when they are 'dressing' a teddy. Boys and girls become well engaged in this area of learning and the quality of teaching and learning is very good. A positive feature of the very good teaching is the way all adults ask careful questions to help the children to develop their language skills by putting their thoughts and ideas into words.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in physical development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The staff provide good opportunities to develop skills in a wide range of activities with plans to develop the provision further.
- Children benefit from regular opportunities to develop physical skills in a swimming pool.
- Children attain better in large physical activity than in the development of fine control.

Commentary

58. Although children enter the Nursery with a wide range of physical abilities, because of the high quality of teaching children achieve well and the vast majority are in line to meet the learning goals for the physical area of learning by the end of the Reception year. In the case of many children, there is greater competency with large physical skills than there is with fine control. Children learn to write their name and control scissors and paintbrushes. They learn to hold a pencil, use scissors and control a paintbrush effectively and can join pieces of construction kits. Fine motor skills are developed through a good range of activities such as cutting and modelling. The children have access to the very good outdoor play area which is well resourced. They use bikes and large toys gaining a lot of pleasure from playing outside whilst at the same time developing their social skills. They could benefit from the provision of large co-operative toys.
59. Children are given regular opportunities to practise skills such as cutting and manipulating mouldable materials and, as a result, most begin to control their fingers and hands well. They handle tools, objects and materials safely. They use the computer mouse with increasing control. Children gain valuable experience in physical education lessons in the school hall where they develop their early gymnastic skills. In addition, for two terms of the year, in eight weeks of each, children experience valuable activity in the swimming pool of the sports centre adjacent to the school.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The children thoroughly enjoy working in this area of learning and make very good progress.
- Over three-quarters are likely to achieve the goals but few, if any, will exceed them.

Commentary

60. Children enjoy the creative area of learning which is well provided for in the unit. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and all children are enabled to achieve well. Children paint and experiment with a good range of resources. Children can recognise the primary colours red, blue and yellow. They use crayons and felt tips to create increasingly colourful drawings, including ones of models they have made. They use paints to mix dark and light shades. They enjoy using lots of materials to create collages, often co-operatively, such as the ones to depict 'The Three Little Pigs' houses'. They enjoy printing using fingers, hands and wheels.
61. Children increasingly use their imagination in art, dance, imaginative play, 'small world' play and in work with puppets. They sing simple songs from memory, begin to recognise repeated sounds and sound patterns and match movements to music. They enjoy playing a range of percussion instruments with everyone having the use of an instrument. They sing a good range of number rhymes, action songs and nursery rhymes. The quality of imaginative play is generally good and children enjoy playing in the role play area. The provision for the creative area of learning offers a good variety of experiences and is well taught, being an important part of the provision for the Foundation Stage which is one of the school's strengths. The attitudes and achievements of the children augur well for the future of the school, with its main aim of raising standards. The foundations for this are being built in the Early Years Unit.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 AND 2

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in English are below average at the end of Year 2 and well below at the end of Year 6, particularly for boys. These standards are, however, improving.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Speaking and listening skills are very well promoted in all classes.
- The very good relationships between adults and pupils enhance the pupils' learning.
- The use of literacy across the curriculum is developing well.
- The marking of work is generally very good, though in some classes pupils pay too little attention to what teachers have written.

Commentary

62. Standards are below the expected levels for seven-year-olds and those for 11-year-olds are well below those expected nationally. These judgements do not, however, reflect the considerable improvement that is being made throughout the school, for literacy has been, and still is, a very important priority. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, achieve well. The evidence of low attainment of boys is a particular concern and the school is developing strategies to raise their standards. Boys are now achieving better than they were previously.
63. Speaking and listening skills are promoted very well. Many pupils enter school with poor speaking and listening skills. Teachers work hard to address this weakness and provide many well structured opportunities for pupils to participate in developing these skills. In many lessons, very good use is made of 'talking partners', which gives all pupils opportunities to speak and listen.

64. The standard of reading is below average for most pupils. Although pupils are encouraged to take books home and to read to an adult, some do not do this on a regular basis. The constructive use of home-school reading records, where a parent or carer writes a comment, is not widespread.
65. The pupils' library skills are generally poor. Although some have a reasonable knowledge of contents and index, few of any age know how to find a particular book. Full development of the library is planned.
66. Standards in writing are improving but remain an area for continued development. Although the writing of higher attaining pupils is lively and captures the reader's interest, many pupils lack the language skills to put their thoughts into words. Staff are working hard to improve handwriting which is often poorly formed and is rarely joined.
67. Teaching and learning are very good in the majority of lessons and around a fifth are excellent. This is the reason standards are rising. Teachers have good subject knowledge and teach phonics and spellings effectively. Lessons are very well prepared and the pace is brisk with the result that pupils are learning at a faster rate. Many lessons are imaginative and a few observed were inspiring. Examples of this were in a Year 6 lesson where a newspaper reporter came to lead the pupils through writing a review; a lesson in Year 4, where pupils compared and contrasted various poems, giving their preferences; and a lesson in Year 2 where pupils were involved in writing instructions. Very good relationships between adults and pupils enhance pupils' learning.
68. Pupils display very positive attitudes and are willing and eager to learn. Classroom assistants are fully involved in lessons and clearly enjoy their work, making a positive contribution to pupils' achievements. Pupils with English as an additional language are well supported, partly through the Language Enrichment unit, and this enables them to achieve well. All adults give praise to reward and encourage pupils and the vast majority of lessons make learning interesting and enjoyable, with pupils fully involved. Guided reading sessions are used purposefully as teachers support pupils with difficult words, sometimes explaining the meaning of unfamiliar words and at other times encouraging pupils to use dictionaries and thesauri to deepen their understanding.
69. Assessment is satisfactory. Day-to-day assessment is constructive and relevant, with most teachers giving considerable time to marking their pupils' books. Assessment practices in English have been a priority and are consistently applied; they are better developed than in other subjects. There are times when pupils give insufficient attention to what has been written by their teacher. There is too little evidence of the use of information and communication technology in literacy, except for word-processing.
70. The subject is well led and managed and the work of the subject co-ordinator is helping to raise standards, although up to now there has been insufficient time to monitor the subject in other classrooms. The very high standard of accommodation and the high quality of resources make a very positive contribution to the subject where standards are set to rise. The subject meets statutory requirements.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

71. The National Literacy Strategy has been implemented well and adapted appropriately to support effective learning. Growing use is made of other subjects to develop writing skills. These opportunities include history, where Year 6 pupils have written 'A day in the life of . . .'; geography, where Year 4 pupils wrote about their journey to the park; and design and technology, where Year 3 pupils wrote about their sandwich designs. Opportunities are also provided for extended writing to develop pupils' ability to sustain their skills.

MATHEMATICS

Provision for mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most pupils achieve well because of the good teaching and learning, but standards of attainment, especially of boys, need to be higher.
- Planning is clear and differentiated for the needs of all pupils.
- Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language are given very good support.
- Pupils do not always present their work neatly enough and marking is not consistent.

Commentary

72. Standards of attainment are below average by the end of Year 2 and well below average by the end of Year 6. At the time of the inspection no data was available to make comparisons with national standards. Pupils make good progress throughout the school and, in relation to their capability, they achieve well. There are significant differences between the attainment of girls and boys; across the school boys' attainment is lower than that of girls. The school is beginning to address this issue. The low standards of attainment are mostly due to the poor numeracy skills shown by pupils. Throughout the school, but mostly in Years 3 to 6, too many pupils do not know simple number bonds and do not have a good understanding of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. The school is successfully using the National Numeracy Strategy to improve this and standards are beginning to rise.
73. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in relation to their abilities. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are well supported and achieve as well as their classmates. All pupils are well challenged and teachers make the learning purposeful by putting activities into practical contexts. Pupils respond well to this by showing good levels of motivation and interest in the subject. However, on occasions pupils' work is not presented carefully enough and marking is not consistent across the school. This has already been identified by the school as an area for improvement and there are firm plans to develop a more consistent approach to the presentation and marking of work throughout.
74. The quality of teaching is good overall. There is very good support provided by the classroom assistants. The attitudes and behaviour of the pupils are very good and make a significant contribution to their learning and achievement. The planning is always clear and appropriate to the capabilities of all pupils. Teaching includes clear explanations and instructions and often very good use is made of the interactive whiteboards. In Years 5 and 6, pupils are grouped according to attainment for the daily lessons. This is effective because teachers can plan work that is closely matched to individual needs, although the use of a very small room for one of the groups is less than ideal.
75. Good use is made of the opening and closing of lessons when pupils are challenged and are willing to explore numbers in new ways. Teachers set a good pace and make these sessions enjoyable. Groups for lower attaining pupils, including those identified as having special educational needs, are deliberately kept small so that individual attention can be given when it is needed. This is a strength in the school and it facilitates the good achievement of all pupils.
76. The provision for homework is satisfactory throughout school and works well when parents encourage their children. The recent introduction of the homework bags and diaries is a success. The homework club welcomes parents and carers and provides opportunities for help with homework at home and in school.

77. The assessment of pupils is satisfactory. The school is developing its systems to assess pupils' attainment and assessment is being used to inform planning. The end of key stage data from the 2003 national tests have been analysed, showing that there is no specific area of weakness but that the level of attainment across all areas of mathematics is poor. Clear strategies for improvement have been identified and put in place.
78. The leadership and management of the subject is being successfully developed. There is understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement and this is beginning to have an impact across the school. Planning is monitored and teachers are given the help they need to make changes to the teaching programme. A regular pattern of monitoring teaching and learning is not yet established but is planned to start this year. The subject meets statutory requirements.

Mathematics across the curriculum

79. Pupils use mathematics as part of their work in other subjects and are able to develop an appreciation of the practical use of these skills; for example, they use the organisation of shape and form in art and design to help make two-dimensional drawings and visualise three-dimensional shapes. Mathematical skills are used in science as part of data handling and in work on co-ordinates in geography.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good quality of teaching enables most pupils to achieve well, although standards of attainment need to be higher.
- Classroom assistants make an important contribution to pupils' learning.
- The subject benefits from strong, well informed leadership.
- There are good links with other curriculum subjects, especially English.
- Effective assessment is not yet in place.

Commentary

80. Standards of attainment are below average at the end of Year 2 and well below average at the end of Year 6. In 2003, no pupils in Year 2 reached the higher Level 3 in the teacher assessments and very few pupils in Year 6 reached the higher Level 5 in national tests. This year's results are likely to be a little higher in Year 2, but similar in Year 6. Poor levels of literacy have a negative impact on standards when pupils record their work. The attainment of girls is higher than that of boys. Standards are beginning to rise, especially those of the younger pupils and, across the school, most pupils are achieving well relation to their abilities.
81. Pupils enter school with a well below average understanding of the world around them and poor social skills. These have a negative impact on the standards being reached. The school is very mindful of this when planning the curriculum. Standards at the end of Year 2 are improving but the result of past disruption is still very evident in the work of the older pupils. Currently, in Year 6, pupils are insufficiently skilled to independently carry out scientific investigations. They are becoming aware of the need to control variables when devising a fair test but need help in selecting appropriate equipment for their work. Good instruction is enabling them to record their findings systematically. Although there is an emphasis on using scientific recording to develop writing skills, standards of work and presentation are often poor.

82. The teaching is good overall, with some very good teaching in Year 6. The very good teaching observed enabled pupils to understand difficult concepts through very clear instruction, appropriate pace and constant reinforcement. Pupils worked well collaboratively to devise an effective investigation into the properties of light, facilitated by the teacher and classroom assistants who guided their thinking. Concentration and perseverance were very good, resulting in very good levels of achievement for all pupils, including those with special educational needs. In all lessons seen, teachers captured pupils' interest by making lessons fun. Most tasks were presented in a way which allowed pupils of all abilities to work at appropriate levels, with good support being given to lower attaining pupils, although some written tasks were inappropriate for these pupils. The quality of teachers' marking lacks consistency. Some teachers make good use of diagnostic comments which help to improve pupils' work, others less so. The best marking involves dialogue with pupils to clarify and extend their understanding.
83. The science co-ordinator is leading and managing the subject very effectively. She is well informed about standards and has high expectations. The planned development of the subject is very thorough. There has not yet been sufficient opportunity to fully develop her management role. Whole-school assessment systems are not yet in place. The school is well placed to continue making improvements. The subject meets statutory requirements.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are excellent ICT facilities.
- Teachers are very good role models in their use of ICT.
- The pupils behave well and show enthusiasm in their work.
- There is very good leadership and management of the subject.
- Standards are not sufficiently high, although achievement is satisfactory.
- ICT is not used sufficiently well across the curriculum.

Commentary

84. Standards of attainment are below average at the end of Year 2 and well below average at the end of Year 6. Standards are affected by the lack of suitable experiences for pupils in the past. Pupils' achievement is at least satisfactory. There have been some setbacks with the new equipment but now that systems are up and running and the school has a full time technician, opportunities for pupils have been greatly increased, and this is having a positive effect on standards. There is already evidence that a significant number of the youngest pupils are attaining appropriate standards.
85. Basic skills are gradually improving. Pupils are beginning to benefit from the increased range of opportunities that they are given to apply these skills in lessons. Many pupils, particularly the older ones, have insufficient understanding of the many applications of ICT. Although planning documents and examples of work show that they are now experiencing work in all areas of ICT, their level of competence is below what it should be and many need considerable help.
86. The pupils now systematically develop their word-processing skills and use an increasing number of options such as the size and style of fonts, spell checks, adjusting the size and position of images they have imported from other software, a digital camera and the Internet. The pupils in Year 6 used the 'PowerPoint' program to organise, improve and present information on the role of working class children in Victorian Britain. There was a wide range of competence amongst pupils but the achievement of many pupils was limited by the speed with which they were able to access information and by their poor literacy skills.

87. Pupils throughout the school are keen to learn, interested in their work and behave very well which impacts positively on how well they achieve. Year 6 pupils spent a useful day creating a website at the local secondary school and an ICT club for Years 5 and 6 is accelerating learning for those who attend.
88. The limited amount of teaching seen during the inspection was at least satisfactory. Teachers are very committed to raising standards. They have had considerable training to improve subject knowledge and ICT lessons are well prepared. The school benefits from excellent facilities and the teachers act as very good role models by making effective use of ICT as a teaching aid. Very good use is made of classroom computers and interactive whiteboards to teach specific skills. Pupils comment that laptops and whiteboards make learning fun. Classroom assistants give valuable support especially to pupils with special educational needs. This was seen to good effect in a Year 1 lesson in the computer suite, where pupils were 'dressing' a teddy. Prior to the session they had dressed real teddies. All pupils agreed that dressing the teddy on the computer was easier than the real thing. The teacher and classroom assistant worked together to ensure all pupils, including those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, achieved well. Planning does not always identify learning opportunities sufficiently well in lessons where ICT is used to support other areas of the curriculum. There are occasions when the organisation of lessons in the computer suite does not allow pupils to gain maximum benefit from the equipment and the quality of learning is affected.
89. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The co-ordinator is knowledgeable and a good support to all staff. She has a good overview of the subject and ambitious plans for the future but needs more opportunities to fulfil her management role. Assessment procedures are at an early stage of development. A portfolio of pupils' work samples across the ICT strands is being developed. The subject meets statutory requirements.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

90. Pupils have insufficient opportunities to use ICT across the curriculum, although this is improving. During the inspection, insufficient use was made of classroom computers to support learning. Many of the oldest pupils have a very limited range of skills and this makes it difficult for them to work independently on tasks. All pupils have controlled access to the Internet and they use this well to support their learning. The range of information they can usefully access is limited by their reading skills.

HUMANITIES

Work in history and geography and in art and design, design and technology, music and physical education meets statutory requirements. These subjects were not specific areas of focus for the inspection and only a limited range of evidence was sampled. As a consequence there is insufficient evidence to make overall judgements on the quality of the provision. The available evidence did, however, indicate that standards in art and design are good across the school and that standards in swimming are good.

History

Although no teaching was seen in Years 3 to 6, the small amount of pupils' work seen indicates that poor literacy skills are a barrier to pupils attaining satisfactory standards in history. In the two lessons seen, teaching was good and pupils were achieving well. Teachers were very sympathetic to the needs of the pupils, explaining carefully and showing great patience. They made good use of effective questioning and spent much time in developing vocabulary.

History has not been a priority for development and so the co-ordinator does not yet have a good overview of the quality of work through the school. Resources are adequate. Planning documents indicate that pupils are receiving an appropriate curriculum.

Geography

Little work and no lessons were seen during the inspection and so no judgements are possible on standards achieved or teaching and learning. There is evidence, however, from teachers' planning, from displays around the school and from the pupils' books that the subject is covered appropriately.

Very good use is made of the local environment and all groups have good opportunities for educational visits. There is an enthusiastic co-ordinator who is relatively new to the post. Geography has, understandably, not been a high priority since the school opened, but will be in the future. The subject is already being developed as a useful means of encouraging literacy.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The new co-ordinator has a clear agenda for improvement with plans to raise the profile of the subject.
- There are productive links with the local church and its priest.
- Standards are below average across the school.

Commentary

91. Although an appropriate amount of time is given to religious education, during the inspection just one lesson was observed, a Year 3 lesson on the significance of the cross, where teaching and learning were good. Evidence considered included a scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning and observations of acts of collective worship. Discussions with pupils showed that some pupils tend to confuse religious education with history. The available evidence indicates that pupils achieve standards which are below those normally seen. In the work seen, there were occasions when the work required a limited response from the pupils and more could have been expected of the higher attainers. The work will benefit from pupils having more opportunities to develop their writing skills in religious education.
92. The early priorities of the school's life have appropriately focused on literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology and now the profile of religious education needs to be raised in the school, led by the recently appointed co-ordinator. The quality of curriculum leadership is now good and there are firm plans to develop the management of the subject. A new policy and scheme of work are being introduced and there are plans to develop assessment. There have been several useful visits such as to nearby St Ignatius' Church, to Durham Cathedral and to a local synagogue. There are plans to visit a local Sikh temple. Such visits support the work of the school in teaching the children about the major world faiths.
93. The co-ordinator is aware of the improvements needed in the subject, improvements which can help to raise standards. The work in religious education, well supported by acts of collective worship, serves to clarify and affirm the values of the school.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

Art and design

No lessons were observed during the inspection. As a consequence no judgements can be made about teaching and learning. However, a scrutiny of pupils' work, including work on display indicates that standards are good in art and design across the school. Many pupils produce work of a high standard in a subject which is not affected by the poor basic literacy skills of a number of the pupils. The examples of work displayed throughout the school show the extensive variety of media used. These include textiles, collage, pastels, charcoal and paint. The artwork on display is of a high standard and the careful presentation helps to create a stimulating environment in keeping with the new building. The leadership and management of the subject is good and the two co-ordinators have many interesting ideas for future developments.

Design and technology

During the inspection just one lesson was seen; the teaching and learning were very good. The pupils responded with enthusiasm and focused well on the tasks. They gained a lot of information and considerably improved their observation skills. This led to an enthusiastic discussion about what they had observed. There is photographic evidence of designing, making and evaluating sock puppets, hand puppets, glove puppets, stick puppets and making a chair for a bear. An aeroplane designed and made by a pupil with some learning difficulties is of a high quality and is an example of the very good support for the individual needs of all pupils. Teachers' planning and the scrutiny of work indicate that pupils are receiving an appropriate curriculum.

Music

There are plans to significantly develop music led by its new enthusiastic co-ordinator. One lesson was seen during the inspection, in Year 4 when teaching and learning were good. Pupils were helped to understand that music, like pictures, can describe images and moods. Having listened to 'Music for the Royal Fireworks' by Handel, pupils successfully created their own pictures to depict their feelings about the music. In the singing heard in classrooms and in assembly, the pupils sang tunefully and enthusiastically. There was little evidence of work in music in the work scrutiny.

A music specialist is currently visiting twice weekly to take classes, but it is too early to judge the impact of this. A number of older pupils are benefiting from guitar, flute and keyboard tuition after school. There is a newly formed after-school music club and a weekly recorder club. The co-ordinator hopes to start a school choir as part of a move towards developing performance through concerts. A scheme of work, based on national guidelines, is guiding the teaching and learning. The co-ordinator's new action plan will guide the raising of the profile of the subject, a subject that is enjoyed by pupils throughout the school.

Physical education

No lessons were seen during the inspection, so no judgement can be made on standards or the quality of teaching and learning. However, it is apparent that there are strengths within the subject, in particular swimming, where very good use is made of nearby facilities. Pupils from Years 1 to 6 have lessons for eight weeks for each of the three terms. The younger children have regular lessons over two terms per year. As a result of this good provision, very few pupils are unable to swim by the time they leave the school, ensuring standards which are above those expected nationally. There is a very good range of activities provided outside the school day, giving the pupils good opportunities to extend and develop their sporting interests.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

This area was not a focus of the inspection and, as a consequence, there is insufficient evidence to make firm judgements about overall provision. Nevertheless it is clear that the school sees personal development as an important part of its work, as seen by the way that each class is allocated a small amount of time for the work on a weekly basis.

During the inspection, brief observations were made of 'Circle Time', one in the Early Years Unit and one in Year 2. The youngest children responded well, passing a puppet and answering the teacher's questions. In the Year 2 lesson, pupils, following talk in pairs, conformed to the rules about one person speaking and good questioning skills from the teacher enabled each pupil to contribute.

The school's perception is that the strong ethos and culture of the school supports PSHCE, which contributes to the caring climate. An important feature of this work is the organisation of 'circle groups' on one afternoon each week, when children from Years 1 to 6 meet together in mixed age groups. The groupings help to promote the idea of older children mixing with and taking responsibility for the younger children in their groups. During the inspection pupils of all ages showed a very good awareness of how to behave in a community as they worked together very well in a supportive and caring way.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	2
How inclusive the school is	2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	N/A
Value for money provided by the school	2
Overall standards achieved	6
Pupils' achievement	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	5
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The quality of education provided by the school	2
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	2
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
The quality of the school's links with the community	1
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2
The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	2
The leadership of the Principal	1
The leadership of other key staff	2
The effectiveness of management	2

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