

INSPECTION REPORT

BATTLEDOWN CHILDREN'S CENTRE

Cheltenham.

LEA area: Gloucestershire

Unique reference number: 115828

Headteacher: Mrs E Rook

Lead inspector: Mr M G Whitehead

Dates of inspection: 17th – 19th May 2004

Inspection number: 258867

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	2 – 5 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	37
School address:	Harp Hill Battledown Cheltenham Gloucestershire
Postcode:	GL52 6PZ
Telephone number:	01242 525472
Fax number:	01242 257557
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs P Grieve
Date of previous inspection:	27 th – 29 th April 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Battledown Children's Centre is a day school for children with special educational needs. The learning difficulties of the children range from moderate learning and language difficulties to severe and profound learning difficulties and some physical difficulties. There is also a significant number of children who have autistic spectrum disorders. The ages of children attending the school range from 2 – 5 years, and there are 37 children on the roll of the school which comprises 32 boys and 5 girls. Approximately half of the children attend part-time. Almost all children are White British and there are very few children from different ethnic backgrounds. There are no pupils for whom English is an additional language. The school is situated in the urban area of Cheltenham on the edge of the town centre and is close to the local amenities, mainstream schools and community facilities with which the school is very closely associated. The school was awarded Investors in People status in 1999 and in 2001 it received the Investors in People 'Outstanding School' award. The school has also been selected by the county to pilot new family learning materials for subsequent use in other schools for the foundation stage.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
21061	Mr M G Whitehead	Lead inspector	
12775	Ms J Goodchild	Lay inspector	
25074	Ms J Cox	Team inspector	Areas of learning in the Foundation Stage

The inspection contractor was:

Serco QAA
Herringston Barn
Herringston
Dorchester
Dorset
DT2 9PU

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Battledown Children's Centre is an **excellent** school, with many outstanding features. Children learn and achieve extremely well as a result of the excellent teaching. Children's personal development is excellent. The headteacher's leadership and management of the school are excellent. The centre provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The headteacher's excellent leadership and management ensure that the school's work is closely focused on maximising children's achievements;
- Excellent partnerships between teachers, learning support workers and therapists contribute strongly to children's excellent achievement;
- Children receive excellent teaching; they are very happy at school and work very hard during activities, displaying excellent behaviour and attitudes;
- There are excellent links with parents and the community which support children's achievement and welfare;
- The school provides excellent provision for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development;
- The work that the school does, to support inclusion and integration of the children into mainstream schools, is excellent;

The school has made very good progress since the previous inspection in 1998. All the issues raised at the last inspection have been addressed fully and there have been many additional developments. Especially good progress has been made in the ways in which the school measures and records children's achievement and uses this information when planning future lessons and activities.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Children's achievement is excellent overall. Nursery and reception children achieve extremely well from a very low starting point. Children with autistic spectrum disorders or severe/profound learning difficulties achieve as well as those with moderate learning difficulties because the school is successful in meeting all of their needs. There is no difference between the achievements of boys when compared with the achievements of girls.

Children's personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is excellent. Their attitudes to school and their behaviour are also excellent. They are happy to come to school and are very involved in all activities. Children are able to work independently, develop personal responsibility, and work with each other. Attendance is very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is excellent. Teaching is excellent overall and results in children learning extremely well because the teaching in all areas of learning is never less than very good and there are many excellent features. Teachers and support staff plan activities in great detail, setting out their high expectations for individual children or groups to achieve. They are able to do this successfully because assessment systems are very good. Learning support workers and therapists make very important and very effective contributions to children's learning and achievement. The quality of learning is excellent overall because in all areas it is always very good and in knowledge and understanding of the world and in creative development, learning is excellent.

The curriculum is very good and offers very high quality and well-planned experiences for all children, enabling them to achieve extremely well. It is in the process of change as the school has changed

the number of classes and the way in which it delivers the curriculum. The school is very aware of the importance of the need to review and refine the efficiency and effectiveness of this new approach in terms of planning and assessment. Some of the reception children have excellent opportunities to spend part of each week in mainstream schools. This has proved to be very beneficial when arranging for the future placements of the children either in mainstream schools or special schools according to their needs. The quality of care provided by the school is excellent and this ensures that children are comfortable and very confident, able to play a full part in all activities.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are excellent overall. The leadership and management of the headteacher are excellent. The headteacher and her deputy are very highly skilled in managing the school, supporting and encouraging all staff and children. The headteacher and senior management team provide very thoughtful and effective leadership for the school, carefully monitoring all aspects of the school's performance. Leadership and management skills of other key staff are very good; co-ordinators lead their areas of responsibility very well and work hard to raise children's levels of attainment and achievement. The school is working extremely effectively despite the Local Education Authority's plan to close it in July 2006.

Governance is very good overall; the governors have a very clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are very supportive of the headteacher and her staff. They work very effectively and each is closely involved in monitoring one area of learning, giving them a very close insight concerning the work of the staff and the responses of the children. Governors ensure that all statutory requirements are met.

The outreach provision is extremely well managed and through this contributes significantly to the successful integration of pupils in to mainstream education. Teachers and support workers have excellent relationships with mainstream schools and other establishments. This enables them to work extremely effectively in support of the children and their future educational provision. Teachers from mainstream schools are also invited and warmly welcomed when they visit the school and share their experiences.

PARENTS' AND CHILDREN'S VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents have very positive opinions concerning the school. They are very proud that their children attend the school and greatly appreciate the hard work that the headteacher and her staff do to support and educate their children. They are very satisfied with the arrangements for settling their children when they join the school and feel that they are treated fairly and sensitively by the staff. They say that there is a real partnership and considerable mutual trust between themselves and the school.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

In this highly successful school; there are no weaknesses.

The school is aware of some minor areas for development, which are clearly addressed in the development planning. Inspectors agree that these should include:

- Continue to review the curriculum and further develop assessment procedures.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning

Children's achievement is excellent as they learn extremely well and make excellent progress towards their own targets in the different areas of learning.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All children make excellent progress overall;
- Children with complex special educational needs achieve as well as other children;
- There is a high proportion of children whose integration into mainstream education is excellent.

Commentary

1. Children's attainment when they enter the school is very low compared with the national expectations for children of the same age in mainstream nursery schools and children's centres. It is therefore inappropriate to make judgements concerning attainment. The report will focus on the progress and achievement that children make, taking account of their personal targets.
2. The school provides extremely high quality care for pre-Foundation Stage and Foundation Stage children and is the only special school in the county which caters solely for young children. A large percentage of the children are successfully integrated into their local schools as a result of the excellent provision.
3. All children are so well motivated and taught that they make excellent progress and achievement overall. For some pupils they make such good progress that they are reaching levels that are almost in line with the national average. The overall picture however, is one of levels that are well below average. Nevertheless, children develop excellent attitudes towards their work, and behaviour is extremely good. Children begin to take responsibility for themselves and their equipment. They are also expected to help put things away at the end of a session whenever possible. Boys and girls achieve equally well.
4. There are some children who have complex learning difficulties, which include severe and profound difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. The teachers work very effectively to ensure that all children work as hard as each other and that all have the opportunity to learn as fully as possible during the lesson. In these ways the teachers make sure that all children have total equality of opportunity and equality of access to all school activities.
5. Nursery and reception children achieve very well from a very low starting point particularly in terms of their communication, physical and personal skills. All practitioners are extremely skilled in developing and raising children's self esteem and in encouraging children's language and physical development.
6. Very detailed schemes of work for each area of learning have been produced, which is a very good improvement since the last inspection. The deputy headteacher provides very good overall leadership and management of the Foundation Stage curriculum. Learning support workers make a very significant contribution to children's learning and achievement. The teachers who lead and manage the two classes have created two very strong teams. The curriculum has recently been successfully adapted to cater for the decreasing number of children and also to meet the needs of the increasing number of children who have severe and complex levels of difficulty. The school is very aware of the importance of the need to review

and refine the efficiency and effectiveness of this new approach to the curriculum in terms of planning and assessment to ensure full coverage of the Foundation Stage curriculum.

Children's attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Children's attitudes towards school and their work are excellent. The attendance and punctuality of children are very good. The behaviour of children is excellent. The spiritual, social, moral and cultural development of children is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The attitudes that children display towards their learning are excellent and this helps them to achieve well;
- Excellent behaviour and relationships throughout the school have enabled learning partnerships to be established between pupils and staff and these contribute significantly to pupils' success;
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is excellent and makes an important contribution towards their personal development.

Commentary

7. The attitudes of children towards their learning are excellent and contribute significantly to the standards they achieve. They are very happy to come to school and involve themselves in activities. Children respond very well to the high quality teaching that stimulates within them a desire to explore and learn. There is an achievement culture within the school, which is celebrated, and this fosters the excellent attitudes that children display towards their learning. The recent 'Curriculum Celebration Day' was a good example of this. Independent learning skills are taught from the day that children enter the school. For example, after practical tasks they are encouraged to clear away equipment and leave the area clean and tidy. The school is developing pupil-based learning where they are encouraged to exercise choice about their learning and teachers use this on which to build future work.
8. Behaviour in lessons is excellent. Staff have consistently high expectations of children's behaviour and appropriate behaviour is constantly reinforced. Children relate well to each other and visitors. Working relationships between children and staff are excellent and are based on mutual respect. Effective learning partnerships have been established between children and staff and these are a significant feature of the school and make a major contribution to the progress that children make.
9. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children is excellent. Weekly whole-school assemblies promote children's spiritual and cultural development through a range of external speakers. Recently three Nigerian students from a nearby college performed African dances and music in an assembly and children took part enthusiastically. There are many opportunities for children to feel a sense of awe and wonder through music and art as well as walking in the woods at the Forest School. Children's awareness of right and wrong is reinforced through circle time activities where they are encouraged to express their views and consider the effect of their actions on others. A wide range of visits, from residential to a trip to the shops, support children's social development. The Rotary Club sponsors the school to visit Christchurch for a week every year. The Sherborne Developmental Movement Programme, supported by 6th form students from a local ladies college, encourages a sense of trust in children as well as awareness, as they move in their own space and relate to other people, each moving in his or her own space. Mixing with a range of people from outside the school helps children to develop their social confidence. All these activities are very effective and actively promote social awareness amongst children.

Attendance

10. The attendance of children and punctuality to lessons are very good. Parents fully support the school in ensuring high attendance of their children. There are effective systems in place to follow up absences if notification has not been received from home. Occasionally unavoidable difficulties with school transport means that children are late arriving at the start of the day.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	10.8 *
National data	8.9

Unauthorised absence	
School data	1.39
National data	1.9

*The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.
* This figure includes children's absence from Battledown when they attend other schools for supported integration.*

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides an excellent quality of education for all its children. The children receive an outstanding quality of teaching that is always very good and sometimes excellent. Consequently the children make excellent progress and their achievement is also excellent. The very good curriculum is presented in such a manner as to make it totally relevant to all children and enjoyed by them. Children receive excellent care, guidance and support from the teachers, learning support workers and other outside agencies with which the school has excellent links. There are also excellent links with local mainstream schools, both primary and secondary.

Teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning in Battledown Children's Centre is excellent. Assessment is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers and learning support workers are extremely effective in encouraging and motivating children;
- Expectations that teachers have of the children are very high;
- Teachers insist on very high standards of behaviour from the children;
- Excellent use is made of the school's resources and the time available during lessons;
- Pupils make excellent progress during lessons and this is clearly indicated by the very effective systems that the school has for recording the progress that the children make;
- Pupils are extremely keen to learn and thoroughly enjoy being at the school.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 13 lessons

Excellent	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	11	0	0	0	0	0

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

11. Throughout the inspection the teaching was never less than very good and there was a significant proportion of excellent teaching. Teachers and learning support workers are very

effective in their work as they have an excellent knowledge and understanding of the needs of each child. The very effective ways in which all staff work together ensure that all children have opportunities to take a full part in all lessons and, with the extra support and guidance available, all children make at least very good progress in lessons and their achievement overall is excellent. The consistently very good and excellent teaching makes the overall quality of teaching excellent, which indicates very good improvement since the last inspection.

12. Teaching is excellent overall with outstanding features in all the areas of learning and, as a result, all children achieve extremely well. The staff are a very skilled, extremely hard working and dedicated team who are ambitious for the children, set high expectations and provide a very good and imaginative curriculum, which meets the children's very diverse needs extremely well. The skills of the teachers and learning support workers ensure that the children's learning is excellent. Staffing levels are generous, which results in three teachers and three learning support workers for each of the two classes. Consequently, all children are supported very well. In addition, staff from external agencies, such as speech and language therapists, provide excellent support for children. There are also occupational therapists and sensory integration therapists, all provided from the school's charitable funding. They work very effectively with the staff to raise children's achievement in their language and physical development. Relationships between all the various practitioners are excellent and as a result children's personal and social skills improve rapidly impacting very positively on their attainment and achievement.
13. Children make their individual 'learning journeys' and staff respond flexibly to children's interest and, where possible, follow their lead. Inevitably this can result in adjustments to intended learning objectives. For example, staff respond very effectively to unplanned learning experiences such as going on an impromptu picnic when the weather was warm and sunny.
14. The staff show infinite patience and persistence as they work with the children. They have high expectations and the children respond extremely well. Throughout the lessons the adults use signing and symbols, where it is appropriate, to enable the children understand clearly what is expected of them, including high standards of work and behaviour. Teachers pay extra special attention to personal and social development of the children and build very close relationships with them. This is very effective in motivating the pupils towards hard work and continued improvement. The teachers and learning support workers monitor the children, the responses and the work that is done very carefully and record their findings. This produces irrefutable evidence of excellent achievement overall. The school has recently changed its number of classes and the way in which it delivers the curriculum. It appropriately intends to review its assessment systems to ensure full coverage of the Foundation Stage curriculum is maintained.
15. The children receive such high quality teaching that they thoroughly enjoy their lessons. This is clear from the attitudes of the children when they arrive at school, and when they leave at the end of the day. They have enjoyed their lessons and are keen to come back for more.

An example of outstanding practice.

A lesson for pupils in nursery and reception age groups who visited local forest land for a lesson concerning knowledge and understanding of the world. This lesson was led by a learning support worker. The teaching, learning, and the behaviour of the children were excellent.

The planning was excellent; pictures of ducks had been hung amongst the trees and shrubs in local park land and children showed high levels of enthusiasm. On arrival at the 'forest school', all the children, who were appropriately dressed in protective, waterproof overalls and Wellington boots, walked eagerly and sensibly up the cart track toward the top of the hill. A tractor had left deep furrows in the muddy track. One boy followed the tracks carefully, deviating only once in order to walk through some extra thick mud. Meanwhile a girl took a detour from the main track, totally enchanted by the fallen leaves that must have lain all winter. They were dry and deep, up above her knee height. She shuffled through them enjoying the sounds made by the dry leaves. The experience was magical as the sun was shining and the birds were singing. Children gathered pictures of ducks, counted them carefully, helping and encouraging each other. They learned about sounds of the forest, the habitats of birds, and reinforced their counting skills through the activities and songs.

16. The excellent teaching results in children making excellent progress, as they develop their communication skills and mathematical understanding. Creative development and knowledge and understanding of the world are areas where children also learn extremely well because the teachers and learning support workers expect the very best of the children, who rise to these expectations. Pupils also enjoyed an excellent lesson that was conducted by a speech and language therapist and a music therapist. This excellent team work was extremely beneficial to the children. They made sure that all children were able to take a full part in the lesson and had opportunities to perform independently and as a member of a group. Children followed instructions excitedly and responded to the sounds produced by the music therapist. Later in the lesson the children were totally engrossed as they tapped out and repeated simple rhythms using drums and shakers. As the children worked enthusiastically the music therapist accompanied them using saxophone or recorder to produce an enchanting and very moving performance. A truly spiritual experience for the children.
17. The staff have carefully re-organised the classes from four to two and excellent relationships between teachers, learning support workers and outside agencies has helped this transition to work very effectively to the benefit of all children. Nursery and reception children benefit from being placed in the two mixed aged classes and children work in large and small groups and sometimes individually on specific objectives, which are often linked to their individual education plans.
18. Teachers and learning support workers have very good knowledge of the special educational needs of the children and make sure that all children are able to complete their tasks during lessons and take a full part in all activities. Children are taught to play independently and also to play with each other, taking turns and sharing equipment. Excellent use is made of the time in lessons and no time is wasted during the day.

The curriculum

The school provides its children with a very good curriculum. It enriches children's learning through a very good range of interesting and exciting activities. The very good accommodation and resources meet the needs of the curriculum.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is enriched through a very good range of activities and events, visitors and visits;
- All children benefit from a curriculum that is well matched to their individual needs.

Commentary

19. The school plans an exciting and stimulating indoor and outdoor curriculum, which ensures that all children achieve extremely well. Children have daily access to a very large and impressive outdoor play area, which ensures that they make very good progress in their physical development. Staff work very hard to ensure that all children are fully included in every aspect of the curriculum. For example, very careful and effective arrangements are made for meeting the needs of children with multiple learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders – for instance, by grouping children flexibly, according to their particular strengths and difficulties.
20. Curriculum planning and class organisation have been undergoing considerable change during the last eighteen months. The school now has two classes instead of four with three teachers and three learning support workers in each class. The teaching and learning spaces have been re-organised. Outdoor play and learning have been successfully extended so that during the morning and afternoon an outdoor activity is planned. The curriculum has recently been successfully adapted to cater for the decreasing number of children and also to meet the needs of the increasing number of children who have severe and complex levels of difficulty. Teachers and learning support workers are in the process of evolving their practice in the light of accompanying children's 'learning journeys.' The school is very aware of the importance of the need to review and refine the efficiency and effectiveness of this new approach to the curriculum in terms of planning and assessment to ensure full coverage of the Foundation Stage curriculum.
21. There are very good opportunities for children to engage in activities planned by adults and also those that they plan or initiate themselves. They enjoy choosing from a wide variety of stimulating and challenging tasks. Practitioners are very skilled at blending 'work' and 'play' so that children are unaware of the difference and have time to become engrossed in and complete activities. The school organises very good 'Curriculum Celebration Days' each term, for each of the areas of learning, where children enjoy a wide range of interesting and challenging activities.
22. The school makes very good provision for curriculum enrichment activities. Due to the young ages of the children and the fact that many come long distances to the school by taxi it is not appropriate to provide after school clubs. However, staff more than compensate for this by planning many off-site visits during the school day and by inviting many visitors into the school to enrich the curriculum. The school also arranges an annual holiday play scheme for Battledown children and their siblings. Children have enjoyed, amongst other activities: Nigerian dancing, using clay with a potter, train journeys and farm visits. Twelve reception children each year take part in a residential visit to Christchurch in Dorset where they stay in holiday chalets, exploring the beach and rock pools and enjoy a ferry ride to Hengistbury Head. This visit makes a considerable contribution to children's personal and social skills.
23. Sufficient high quality resources are available to meet all the demands of the curriculum. They are managed very effectively and strongly support all aspects of the curriculum. The staff are very well qualified and experienced and are a hard working and dedicated group of people who demonstrate infinite patience and considerable care towards all the children. Learning resources are of a high quality. Accommodation and outdoor areas are safe, attractive and well maintained, and very suitable for young children. There is full access for all children regardless of age, ability, gender or ethnicity.

Care, guidance and support

The provision of support, advice and guidance based on monitoring is excellent. The steps taken to ensure the children's health and welfare are excellent. The school seeks and acts on pupils' views very well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The induction of children arriving at the school is excellent;
- Progress tracking procedures are excellent;
- Excellent integration programmes prepare children well for transferring into mainstream education.

Commentary

24. The school has developed a high quality pastoral system that provides excellent support for children and their families. Children joining the school are sensitively introduced and key workers and teachers build good, trusting working relationships with them and their families that are supportive and promote good learning. There is an 'open house' system to support parents as they settle their children into school, and this continues throughout their placement at Battledown. Very good knowledge of children and their background helps the school to provide additional support when needed. Strong links with Health Trust colleagues provide additional care, support and advice. The school has been fortunate to recently gain a music therapist funded by Youth Music. Together with the speech and language therapists, they are running a pilot project to develop language, through music and social interaction. This is already proving to be a great success.
25. The use of assessment data for tracking progress is excellent. The Foundation Stage Profile Summary complements the system for reviewing areas of child development on a half-termly basis. Any areas of concern are quickly identified, parents alerted, and additional support plans put into action. Children's profiles are clear and detailed and contain any information that is relevant to their care such as feeding plans or medication.
26. The process of integration into mainstream education is excellent. In the previous school year, 77 per cent of children were successfully transferred. Of the 12 children integrated into mainstream education the school is confident that seven would have needed specialist provision without the early intervention strategies of Battledown. A programme of visits of increasing length ensures that children are confident about their new environment and staff before transferring. Staff from the receiving school visit Battledown to learn how the children have been taught and cared for. A key worker is allocated to each child who works closely with the receiving school and the child's parents for as long as support is required. The progress of children is tracked after they leave Battledown and until they reach the secondary phase of education. Three children have gained places at local grammar schools. Teachers and support staff take very careful notice of the feelings and opinions of the children and take this information into consideration as they plan the work of the school
27. Health and safety procedures are very good and ensure the safety of children. The arrangements for child protection are excellent and all staff benefit from awareness-raising training.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The effectiveness of the school's links with parents is excellent. The quality of the school's links with the community is excellent. The school's links with other schools are excellent as is outreach work.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent partnership with parents promotes the excellent progress that children make;
- The school provides excellent outreach work for staff from other schools who work with special needs children in early years settings;
- The school is a training provider for 12 other schools for the 'SHARE' family learning project;
- Partnership with other schools is excellent.

Commentary

28. An effective working partnership has been established with parents that supports children's learning and also the daily life of the school. The school operates an open door policy and parents are encouraged to share class activities with their child. A parents' room, with a wide range of information, has also been provided. Information on the progress of children is available to them at all times. Parents who attended the meeting prior to the inspection and completed the questionnaire were highly delighted with the school and the support it provided for them. The family worker establishes links between home and school and arranges transport for parents who have difficulties getting to school. She also works with parents to help them to manage children's difficulties.
29. The parents' forum gives them the opportunity to air their views about the school and ways that it can be improved. The daily contact diary has been adapted in response to suggestions by parents that symbols be used so that the child can show parents what they have been doing during the day. The SHARE family learning project gives parents ideas and confidence in how best to support their children's learning. Topics such as non-verbal communication are covered and parents are encouraged by the school to attend external workshops such as 'How to help siblings'. Battledown Friends Group funds the play scheme, which is run by teachers and learning support workers. Parents are very supportive of each other and the parents' room is well used by all. The parents feel that the headteacher is outstanding. She has empowered them and helped them to gain their confidence so they are better able to contribute to discussions and planning by the many agencies involved with their children.
30. Links with other schools are excellent. The integration work with mainstream primary schools is successful. Relationships with other special schools are also strong. Students from local secondary and 6th form colleges visit the school and take part in assemblies, work experience and other activities. Weekly visits to the local university for swimming give students training to be teachers the opportunity to develop their skills with special needs children.
31. The outstanding work undertaken by the school in its outreach training is recognised and funded in part by the Early Years and Child Care Services. The learning support worker team carries out a significant amount of training - the LINK project, for example, for early years settings. The family worker is currently training participants in the 'Sure Start' programme. Staff at receiving primary schools, covering a wide area, also benefit from training by visiting the school and observing. The pre-school project has been so successful that it is being extended to other schools to give staff the expertise to work more effectively with children with special needs. The Head is the SHARE training provider for 12 schools.
32. Links with the community are excellent. The school uses local resources very well to obtain the best possible learning opportunities for children. Visitors from the community are always welcomed. Links with local businesses and charities have enriched children's educational experience by providing, for example, a beach area in an inner courtyard that gives a great deal of pleasure to children.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership of the headteacher is excellent, as is the management; the leadership of other key staff is very good; the governing body provides very good management and guidance.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher has excellent clarity of vision and sense of purpose for the school;
- Strategic planning is excellent and the staff are inspired and highly motivated by the foresight and inspiration of the headteacher;
- Leaders provide excellent role models for other staff and the children;
- Excellent support and professional development are provided by the senior managers;
- The management of the school's finances and the extent to which principles of best value are applied are excellent;
- Governors provide excellent support to the senior managers in the school.

Commentary

33. The headteacher provides excellent leadership and management of the school. This shows very good improvement since the last inspection. Together with her deputy, she provides very strong and extremely professional support for all staff. Despite the extremely difficult situation concerning the imminent closure of the school, the headteacher has managed to encourage and guide her staff, keeping them as positive as possible about the future; a future that focuses on the children, their parents and the staff who are working with them each day. They are excellent role models that are clearly presented to the other staff and the children. They show how a totally professional approach to the challenges that lie ahead can be turned into a positive learning and developmental process for all concerned.

An example of the outstanding leadership and management qualities of the headteacher.

When the headteacher and the rest of the staff learned of the proposed closure of the school, she continued to work unstintingly and fervently at raising and maintaining the morale of the staff.

The headteacher organised an in-service-training day, to which all governors, staff teachers, learning support workers, therapists, and administrative staff were invited. The focus was on the management of change, and through this extremely well planned and initiated strategy, the headteacher was able to help the whole staff to look towards the future in a positive manner. They began to address and overcome their feelings of anger and disappointment as well as learning to cope with the uncertainty of the future.

As a result of this day of in-service-training the ethos of the school has remained very positive: the staff are working very well together. They are determined that, despite the local authority's decision to close the school, they will continue to provide the very highest standard of education and care. The experience was one that has had a very positive impact on all the staff and they continue to talk about how greatly they have benefited from it.

34. The headteacher is very successful in empowering her staff and enabling them to work extremely effectively as one large team or as several smaller teams, according to the demands of the situation. The headteacher is very highly respected by the staff and the parents of the children in the school. She is also held in extremely high esteem by the people who work within other schools and organisations in the community.
35. The school's planning is very good and the staff carry out their work in an extremely professional manner. They take very careful note of the programmes that have been developed for the coming weeks and plan in great detail how they are going to achieve what has been planned. These programmes that have been developed include excellent arrangements for the teachers and learning support workers to receive professional development and training. Similarly, governors receive continuing training and play an increasing role in monitoring the work of the school. Governors are assigned to different areas of learning and the co-ordinators work closely with them. All governors are very clearly aware of the many outstanding features of the school and the plans that the school has for improving even further. They provide very good support to the headteacher and staff, carrying out their duties with care and commitment. Over recent months they have become much more knowledgeable about the school because they have been fighting to try to overturn the decision of the Local Education Authority concerning the closure of the school.

36. Teachers and learning support workers who hold management responsibilities are very effective and are still developing their own roles and areas of expertise. There is very good leadership and management of each of the areas of learning as co-ordinators' roles have improved considerably since the last inspection. They provide excellent support for other members of staff and the parents of the children in school. They are very effective in organising and managing training sessions for staff and for parents. This also includes special meetings in which the professional knowledge and expertise of staff is reinforced and developed to support the new curriculum and ways of working with the children.
37. The school's procedures for financial administration are excellent as are their procedures to ensure principles of best value. The finance secretary is extremely efficient in the administration of the school's finances and ensures that correct procedures are followed by all staff when spending the school's money. All money that is handled by staff is very carefully recorded and appropriate receipts and vouchers are obtained. The finance manager on the governing body is only a few months in post and has not yet worked through a full year as a governor. Nevertheless, he has a very clear knowledge of the strengths of the school and the value for money that the school provides. He ensures that appropriate finance documents are provide for governors meetings and finance committee meetings, with the support of the finance secretary.
38. The day-to-day administration of the school's activities is extremely efficient and the responsibilities are shared between the finance secretary and the school secretary. They work very well together and each supports and complements the other. The responsibility for much of the organisation of invitations and documents for special meetings and annual reviews is carried out very efficiently by the school secretary. They are extremely efficient in their work and present a very warm, caring and professional welcome to visitors to the school.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004.

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	464,918
Total expenditure	453,082
Expenditure per pupil	11,050

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	3,990
Balance carried forward to the next	15,826

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

The quality of education is excellent overall and this is a result of the outstanding teaching that is never less than very good and often excellent. Pupils' learning is excellent because the skills of the teachers and learning support workers enable the children to take a full part in all lessons and make very good and often excellent progress. This represents excellent achievement for the children as they gain a secure foundation upon which they can build their knowledge and skills. The areas of learning are very well managed by the co-ordinators who make sure that the curriculum is carefully matched to the needs, interests and abilities of the children.

Personal, social and emotional development

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent relationships between children and adults create an atmosphere of highly effective learning;
- All staff focus skilfully and successfully on improving children's personal, emotional and social skills so that they move from being dependent to independent learners.

Commentary

39. Children achieve very well because of the excellent teaching, excellent relationships and the ordered environment in which children quickly settle. Throughout the day, teachers and learning support workers work very hard to help children develop the attitudes and skills they need for daily life and to help them become increasingly confident learners. Children's personal, social and emotional development is critical to the school's ethos and forms a very large part of its work through focused sessions, such as circle time, and through everyday activities. Children make excellent progress from a low starting point on entry to the school. All children make excellent progress through the stepping stones and the most able children are in line with their peers in mainstream provision. Although the attainment of the majority of children is below the expected levels, their very good achievement in this area is due to every child being treated as an individual and the staff's considerable expertise in developing every child's potential. Nursery and reception children are skilfully encouraged to become interested in learning, and to become increasingly more confident, independent and well behaved. New and very young children are naturally still heavily dependent on adults but others have been encouraged to take more responsibility and are confident to work independently on their tasks.
40. Nursery and reception children settle very quickly at the beginning of each session. They enter the classroom confidently and happily and are encouraged to select one of the carefully organised activities to play with. Staff welcome every child individually with a smile and a friendly word, which makes the children feel valued and happy. On the rare occasions that children are upset, staff support and comfort them quickly and sympathetically. Children feel safe and secure and begin to learn the routines. Making decisions about their tasks for the day gives children confidence, and they settle to their tasks for extended periods.
41. Children vary considerably in their ability to take turns; but all make very good progress in learning to share equipment, as the staff are very good at ensuring 'fair play.' For instance, one child, who was very attached to a red spade, was patiently and sensitively encouraged to share it with others. All the staff are highly skilled in knowing how young children with special educational needs learn effectively and plan a very good range of stimulating activities, which lead to sustained interest and concentration from the children.

Communication, language and literacy

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Resources and activities are exciting and encourage children to communicate;
- Every opportunity is seized upon to enhance children's communication skills;
- The involvement of speech and language therapists is very effective in supporting and raising children's attainment and achievement.

Commentary

42. Most of the children experience severe difficulties in speaking, listening and understanding when they join the school. This area is taught very well and children's achievement is correspondingly very good, although attainment is well below the expected level in the reception year for the majority of the children due to their specific language difficulties and varying special educational needs. All staff encourage children to communicate throughout the day and there are very good opportunities for children to develop their language skills in a wide range of interesting and stimulating activities and resources. For instance, children can practise their developing language in the attractive garden centre and café role-play areas. Teachers and learning support workers intervene at precisely the correct moment to extend children's play and to introduce new vocabulary. Consequently, children begin to develop their imagination and language. In both the classrooms there are attractive displays and resources, which inspire and interest the children and provide them with something to talk about.
43. Although a few of the nursery and reception children are not able to speak, they learn to make themselves understood – for instance, by using signs, symbols or gestures. The staff limit the vocabulary they use and allow the children plenty of time to communicate their wishes. As a result, children understand what is required of them and do not feel under pressure. They are confident to try out their developing skills, making very good progress in their learning. There is an excellent working partnership between the speech and language therapists and the staff. For example, during a language development lesson, two children took turns in matching pictures of animals to puppets with the speech and language therapist, whilst the teacher was singing and signing alongside. The children were captivated and made very good progress in communicating and in developing early reading skills.
44. Staff are very skilled at providing an exciting and stimulating range of activities for children to enjoy and talk about. All children are treated sensitively and lovingly and are never *'put on the spot'* or forced to respond if they don't want to. Consequently, children grow in confidence and self esteem and begin to utter single words and phrases unselfconsciously about the exciting activities provided by the teachers and the learning support workers. For instance, a group of nursery and reception children were completely absorbed and enthralled when catching plastic ducks from a paddling pool and used words such as 'big' and 'small'.
45. Staff encourage children to think of themselves as readers and writers whatever their stage of development. Large supplies of paper, pens, crayons and pencils are always available and children readily use them to make pictures. Staff read stories, rhymes and poems, expressively with clear diction and make excellent use of facial expression which catches the children's attention. Children quickly learn to do 'good listening' and to look at the pictures as well as attempting to put in some missing words. Puppets and costumes are always available for children to act out stories and rhymes. All children achieve very well at their own level of language development because of the staff's determination and dedication to help all the children to communicate. For example, a very young child who had not been at the school for very long and had virtually no spoken language, happily said the word 'pop' at exactly the right moment when the teacher sang 'Pop Goes The Weasel.'

46. As soon as they join the school children are encouraged to recognise their own names. They quickly identify their name in print when they place their name on a register in the 'Welcome' session each morning and afternoon. Reception children are becoming increasingly familiar with a good range of rhymes and stories with repetitive passages, such as 'The Gingerbread Boy' which enables them to begin to develop a sense of the patterns in language. Children and parents have weekly opportunities to borrow an attractive 'story sack' to share at home, which successfully involves parents in their children's language and literacy development. In addition, parents can borrow library books to read with their children. The school is looking to improving its stock of books, particularly to make it more relevant to boys. The literacy consultant and the school library service provide regular and very useful advice on ways to develop and extend reading and writing skills for the more able reception children.

Mathematical Development

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and places a high emphasis on learning through practical activities;

Commentary

47. Children's achievements are very good in this area because staff provide many interesting and exciting activities to develop children's mathematical skills. They also take opportunities within other work to strengthen children's mathematical thinking. Staff have a very good awareness of each child's current level of understanding, so they are able to consolidate existing skills and extend concepts through the wide range of tasks that children tackle. High quality advice and support have been received from the numeracy consultant and there are interesting developments being made regarding the use of the outdoor environment. The quality of teaching observed in this area is very good. One or two children are on course to attain their targets in mathematical development by the end of the reception year but the majority attain well below the expected level.
48. Reception children enjoy counting and some count confidently up to five. Their counting is extended as they enjoy clapping and singing number songs and rhymes. In the lesson seen many children recognised numerals up to 5 and matched two numbers. Children learned to sort items into groups correctly. During singing rhymes, children gained an awareness of basic subtraction when they used plastic frogs to act out the words of 'Five little speckled frogs sat on a speckled log.' More able children were confident in their working out how many were left each time.
49. Children were developing a good awareness of measurements. They described items as 'big' or 'small' and a few reception children used comparisons of 'bigger' and 'smaller' or 'taller' as they compared the height of their towers of blocks or footprints. Their ideas of capacity are developed well as they use a variety of containers during play with sand or water and some children understand 'empty' and 'full'.
50. In common with the other areas of learning the school organises a highly successful annual mathematics 'Celebration Day' where nursery and reception children can engage in a series of exciting practical mathematical activities. For instance, children enjoyed planting bulbs and used mathematical language such as 'heavy' when they pushed a wheelbarrow. They also printed different geometrical shapes and learned the words 'square', 'round' and 'circle' to describe them. They achieved very well when engaged in a circle hunt around the school.

51. Teaching and learning are very good and give a very clear focus to helping children begin to use mathematical language more confidently and to develop problem-solving skills through play. In these practical activities the very good accommodation and resources impact very positively on children's achievement. For example, children counted the number of Busy Lizzies and Geraniums they planted in the garden.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

Provision in knowledge and understanding of the world is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent teaching provides children with endless opportunities to learn about the world around them;
- The school provides a wealth of exciting visits and visitors to enrich children's learning.

Commentary

52. As a result of excellent teaching children's achievement is very good, although attainment is well below the expected levels due to the children's specific learning difficulties. Careful planning and organisation by the staff ensure that children are provided with a wide range of interesting experiences that help them to use all their senses as they find out more about the world. For example, staff encouraged children to listen, look and feel such as, searching for small plastic toys that have been buried in therapy putty or looking for mini-beasts in the wild garden.
53. Children are provided with a wealth of first hand opportunities to learn about their world. A very successful link has been made with a local landowner to establish outdoor learning opportunities. This is known as 'Forest School' and is based on Scandinavian principles of enabling children to enjoy the outdoors in a safe and supportive environment whilst providing a unique learning experience. Groups of nursery and reception children are taken to the woodland site where they are encouraged to explore the outdoor environment and to appreciate nature. They achieve very well in activities such as identifying leaf patterns, making bark rubbings and table decorations using natural materials. They use full-size tools appropriately and learn physical and social behaviour boundaries. Children grow in confidence and independence through mastering small achievable tasks.
54. Visits and visitors, along with excellent resources such as the sensory room, strongly support this area of learning and ensure all children achieve very well from a low starting point. Indeed four children progressed extremely well towards meeting their targets and one child attained the age equivalent level for this area of learning, which represents significant progress. In religious education the children celebrate many of the important festivals and take part in a nativity play at Christmas.
55. The co-ordinator, through her very good monitoring identified the fact that cultures and beliefs had not been covered adequately and the school has worked hard to address this. For instance the children were captivated and enthralled by some Nigerian girls who performed lively and exciting dances. Some of the children confidently and skilfully joined the girls in the dancing and demonstrated a good sense of beat and rhythm. All children are fully included – for instance, when a pupil with autistic spectrum disorder was reluctant to sit and watch an act of collective worship, a teacher sensitively and skilfully let him select a toy to take to the assembly so that the toy could experience the dancing as well.

Physical development

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The involvement of therapists is very effective in supporting and raising children's attainment and achievement;
- A very good range of exciting activities is provided to promote children's physical development.

Commentary

56. Teaching is very good in this area and a physiotherapist, a sensory integration therapist and an occupational therapist provide very effective support for children with limited mobility. Children achieve very well and many children attain the high levels that are set as their targets. Overall attainment is below the expected levels. Plenty of time is allocated to children's physical development, both their mobility and their smaller movements, for example, holding and using paint brushes or building with construction toys. Children enjoy regular gymnastic activities in the hall and weekly swimming sessions at a nearby pool. Many children are extremely nervous of the water and the school staff and the pool staff very successfully help children to overcome their fear. Children achieve 'Duckling Awards' denoting their achievements in swimming. Large blocks provide good opportunities for balancing and jumping. Outdoor provision includes a garden, which offers very good opportunities for developing children's physical development. Forest school sessions provide real challenges in walking up steep muddy tracks, climbing trees and sliding down hills.
57. The co-ordinator uses 'Sherborne Developmental Movement' sessions successfully for some children, to develop children's confidence in using and controlling their bodies. The children achieve extremely well in these sessions because the teaching is so assured, relationships with adults are very positive, and the stimulating activities are closely matched to children's individual needs. The children thoroughly enjoy these sessions and try very hard indeed. Therapists work in close partnership with the teachers and learning support workers. They regularly provide expert advice and individual support during lessons, enabling them to check how well children are developing and identifying activities and programmes to help them maintain their very good progress.
58. Very good use is made of a well-equipped outdoor play area, where children skilfully pedal tricycles and explore the large and exciting fixed play equipment. Children enjoy physical activity; they confidently and happily run, jump, balance, pedal and climb on the equipment and show a developing awareness of the needs of others in the space around them. Many children with limited mobility benefit considerably from weekly riding sessions at Cheltenham racecourse. At the riding stables the children happily and confidently learn to sit on horses and to enjoy the experience of trotting and cantering. Teachers and learning support workers provide a very good range of activities to develop and improve children's finer movements; for example, small construction kits and puzzles.

Creative development

Provision in creative development is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children are provided with a vibrant range of activities that enriches their learning;
- Visiting music and art specialists make an excellent contribution to children's excellent achievement.

Commentary

59. Staff plan a wide range of stimulating activities and with excellent teaching and high levels of support the children achieve extremely well. Over half of the children attain high target levels which indicates very good progress. Attainment is below the expected levels for children of this age. The children need a lot of help to learn important skills when they first join the school and therefore the direct teaching of specific skills is the focus of many activities along with very good opportunities to plan and experiment freely.
60. They are taught, for example, the skills needed to mix paint, which they do successfully to make large containers of blue and green for feet painting. Children really enjoyed stepping into the paint and making footprints to resemble Monet's pond.
61. The school makes very good use of visiting music and art specialists to enrich the curriculum and to raise children's achievement. The music therapist, acquired through a successful National Lottery bid, has considerable expertise and provides very good support to staff and children. She is building up their musical skills very successfully as well as helping them to slowly build up a good repertoire of favourite songs and rhymes.
62. Children have worked with a visiting artist to create stunning mosaic tiles, which have been exhibited in Cheltenham museum and will eventually reside in a nearby primary school as part of a community project. Two staff from the Cheltenham Everyman theatre visited the school and ran an Imagination Project, which covered all aspects of children's creative development.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

*** Standards achieved are judged against individual targets and not national standards*

