

INSPECTION REPORT

BREAKSPEARE SCHOOL

Abbots Langley

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117681

Headteacher: Mrs Gill Williamson

Lead inspector: Mr Declan McCarthy

Dates of inspection: 20-22 January 2004

Inspection number: 258875

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:	2-19 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	61
School address:	Gallows Hill Lane Abbots Langley Hertfordshire
Postcode:	WD5 0BU
Telephone number:	01923 263645
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Danny Desmond
Date of previous inspection:	9 February 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This is a mixed community special school catering for pupils with severe learning difficulties, aged from two to 19 years. There has been a 50 per cent increase in the proportion of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties since the last inspection, and a number of pupils have additional medical needs. All pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Needs and there are currently 61 pupils on roll, including three students in Year 14. There are very few pupils from a mixed ethnic background or who come from homes where English is not the first language. Thirteen per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is below average for this type of school. When leaving school, all pupils move on to continuing education. The numbers of pupils joining and leaving the school at times other than usual is average. The school gained Investors In People status for the first time in 1998 and twice more since then and again in 2003. It has established a successful 'Sign Along' family learning programme involving parents, which has significantly enhanced communication skills. The school is also involved in the partnership with Connexions initiative to ensure successful preparation for life after school for its post-16 students.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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31747	Rhiannon Boardman	Lay inspector	
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17260	Jennifer Taylor	Team inspector	English French
21899	Gillian Lawson	Team inspector	Mathematics Information and communication technology (ICT) Religious education Geography History
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very effective school. Pupils have very good attitudes to learning and their achievements are very good because teaching and the curriculum are very good. The inclusion of all pupils, regardless of their backgrounds and capabilities is very good. The headteacher provides very good leadership and manages the school very well. The school provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Pupils' achievements are very good because teaching and the curriculum are very good.
- The use of assessment information, signing and communication aids to support pupils' learning and achievement is very good.
- Leadership and management are very good, and this has led to strong teamwork, and a shared vision for improvement throughout the school.
- Although there are good resources for learning, accommodation for teaching physical education, art and design, design and technology and science is limited, which restricts teaching and learning.
- There are very good links with parents and highly productive links with local schools and external agencies. This has resulted in, among other things, very good provision for involving parents in developing signing to improve pupils' communication skills.
- Very high quality care and very good provision for pupils' personal development ensures that pupils are happy at school, have very good relationships, are enthusiastic learners and behave very well.

The school has made good improvement since it was last inspected in February 1998. The issues identified in the last inspection have been resolved effectively with significant improvements in all areas. Pupils' achievements have improved, particularly in English, communication, religious education and personal social and health education (PSHE). Leadership and management are now very good. There has been good improvement in teaching, learning and the curriculum. Pupils' achievements are very good because teachers set high expectations for learning, use signing and communication aids more effectively, and make better use of assessment in lessons to move pupils' learning forward. The school is more effective than at the time of the last inspection.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	in relation to individual targets in:	
	Subjects of the curriculum	personal and social education
Year 2	Very good	Very good
Year 6	Very good	Very good
Year 9	Very good	Very good
Year 11	Very good	Very good
Year 13	Very good	Very good
Year 14	Very good	Very good

Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor.

Achievement is very good for all pupils including those with additional special educational needs. There are no differences in the achievements of boys and girls. The achievement of children in the Foundation Stage is good with very good achievement in their personal, social and emotional development, and in communication, language and literacy. Standards have risen and pupils' achievements in English, communication, religious education, PSHE and in their individual education plan (IEP) targets are very good. Pupils have very good attitudes to learning and their achievement over a longer period at school is very good. Students in Years 12 to 14 achieve very well in all

subjects and courses. By the time they are ready to leave in Year 14, every student has gained success in at least one external examination, demonstrating very good achievement since they first joined the school.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good and result in very good relationships, very good attitudes and very good behaviour. Pupils enjoy school, they work hard and respect staff. Attendance and punctuality are good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching is very good throughout the school, particularly in English, religious education and PSHE and, as a result, pupils' learning is very good. Teachers make very good use of signing and communication aids to support pupils' learning and achievement. The strong teamwork between teachers, support staff and therapists ensures that all groups of pupils are supported effectively and achieve equally well. The use of assessment to check and record pupils' progress, set individual targets for pupils and in the planning and delivery of lessons is very good. As a result, learning is very good.

The curriculum is very good with a strong emphasis on communication, speaking and listening. There is a very good work related programme for older pupils and students and a very good range of activities outside the normal school day. Resources for learning are good and accommodation is satisfactory. There are no practical areas for teaching art and design, design and technology and science, and limited space for teaching physical education, which restricts teaching and learning. The school provides very good care for its pupils. Collaboration and partnership with parents, schools, colleges and outside agencies are very good, enhancing pupils' learning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. Leadership of the headteacher and senior managers is very good. Through their shared vision and commitment good improvements to the curriculum, teaching and learning have materialised. Management is very good overall with a clear focus on self-evaluation. Financial management and management by subject co-ordinators are also very good. The work of the governing body is good. Governors are very supportive, have a clear strategic overview and a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Statutory requirements are fully met.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and pupils view the school very positively. Parents receive very good information about the school and their children's progress. Nearly all parents believe their child is making good progress, that behaviour is good, teaching is good and the school is well run. Pupils are proud of their school. They state that pupils behave well with no incidents of bullying or racial abuse and they believe staff expect them to work hard and do their best.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Continue to work closely with the LEA to improve the accommodation in order to provide more effective opportunities for teaching and learning in physical education, art and design, design and technology and science.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement is very good overall throughout the school. It is particularly good in English where pupils reach standards well above those achieved by pupils in similar schools. Pupils also achieve very well in communication, religious education and PSHE and they make very good progress towards their IEP targets. The achievements of children in the Foundation Stage are very good in personal, social and emotional development, and in communication, language and literacy. Students in Years 12-14 are achieving very well in all subjects and in their accredited coursework. There is no significant difference between the achievements of boys and girls or those with additional special educational needs.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement throughout the school has improved because teaching and the curriculum are now very good.
- The school's own analysis of assessment information shows year-on-year improvement in pupils' attainment.
- Pupils make very good progress towards their IEP targets because teachers make very good use of this information to plan effective strategies in lessons to move learning forward.

Commentary

1. Pupils' achievements throughout the school are very good because teaching is very good, pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and the curriculum is very well planned and highly relevant for all groups of pupils. As a result, there are no significant differences between the achievements of boys and girls. Pupils' achievements have improved significantly in mathematics, science, ICT and especially in English, communication, religious education and PSHE. Children's achievements in the Foundation Stage are at least good in all areas of learning with good improvements in the areas of personal, social and emotional development, and communication, language and literacy. There is equally good improvement in the achievements of Years 12-14 students who are achieving very well in their subjects and courses. During the last academic year, all students left school with at least one qualification from an accredited course. In Year 14, six students achieved the bronze Youth Award, four achieved the Home Management Award and one achieved the Towards Independence Award. Two Year 13 students achieved the Home Management Award and six Year 12 students achieved the Basketball Award. One Year 11 pupil received the Great Britain and France Award for knowledge of countries and flags. Currently pupils in Year 11 are working towards a number of awards in physical education, French, literacy, early switch use and coin recognition in mathematics.
2. The school's own analysis of attainment over time shows a steady year-on-year upward trend with more pupils reaching or exceeding their P Scale targets. Progress against IEP targets is very good because target setting has improved with greater use of P Scales and more involvement of pupils in the target setting process. Teachers consider pupils' IEP targets in their planning, which is also supported by a very relevant curriculum. The school has developed target setting very well and its targets vary from year to year depending on the capabilities of particular year groups. However, targets remain challenging for particular year groups and there is clearly an upward trend in pupils' performance against these.
3. The achievements of pupils of all ages in English, communication, religious education and PSHE are very good because there has been very good improvement in the use of signing and communication aids to enhance learning. This has been very effectively supported through the 'Sign Along' family learning programme to develop family communication skills. The National

Literacy Strategy has also been very well adapted to pupils needs and implemented effectively throughout the school. Literacy is very well taught in other subjects such as religious education, PSHE and science where pupils' achievements in lessons were very good. Pupils' achievements over time in mathematics, science and ICT are consistently good with some very good achievement in mathematics by Year 11 pupils and very good achievement in all lessons seen in science across the school. Achievements in practical subjects such as science, art and design, design and technology and physical education are, however, restricted by the lack of specialist rooms for practical work. Teachers compensate for the limitations to the accommodation by making good use of available resources including educational trips and visits and, as a result, pupils' overall achievements in other subjects are good. Pupils achieve well in ICT where it is used to support teaching and learning. This occurs in most lessons, and is an area identified by the school as a continuing priority for development.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance is good overall. Behaviour is very good and pupils improve their self-esteem and independence. Pupils have very good attitudes to learning. Pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development is also very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attendance is very well monitored.
- There is a consistent approach to behaviour management and pupils have very good attitudes to learning.
- Pupils feel safe and secure in this very inclusive school.
- There are very good relationships between pupils and staff members, and between each other.
- Independence is very well fostered.
- Very good provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development ensures that the personal development of all pupils is very good.

Commentary

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.6	School data	2.2
National data	9.1	National data	0.6

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

4. The school works very effectively to promote full attendance and most pupils come to school regularly. The higher rate of unauthorised absence was due entirely to one pupil. Attendance rates are generally good with most classes averaging above 93 per cent. In the main, absence is due to sickness or hospitalisation. Absence is sensitively followed up by the school nurse and, in cases of persistence absence; the education welfare officer (EWO) is kept well informed. Registration occurs twice daily and registers are marked and totalled in line with statutory requirements.
5. Detailed behaviour management plans give staff and pupils confidence to work at challenging tasks, which leads to high achievement. Teachers motivate pupils and, as a result, they have very good attitudes to learning. Pupils are always reminded to listen to teachers or watch the signing and they work well with each other and/or with support assistants to succeed. Appropriate strategies are in place to deal with outbursts of challenging behaviour and staff work very well together to implement these quietly and effectively, restoring calm and order and enabling all to get on with their tasks. There is always very good use of praise and encouragement, which builds the pupils' self-esteem. Clear explanations of what will happen if

poor behaviour persists are always given. This helps pupils to understand the effect their actions will cause. One pupil has been excluded twice in the past 12 months. This was used as a last resort and correct procedures were followed. The exclusions table has been omitted to avoid identifying individuals.

6. This is a very inclusive school where all pupils are accorded dignity and treated equally. Staff are very aware of the potential for bullying or other forms of harassment. Pupils report that they feel safe and secure and that if there is a problem it is dealt with quickly and fairly. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent.
7. Independence, where possible, is fostered and pupils take on responsibility, for example, returning registers to the office and older pupils helping the younger ones with soft playtime. Great emphasis is also put on pupils doing things for themselves, which also builds their confidence effectively.
8. Pupils' spiritual development is very good. Spirituality is much in evidence in some lessons, for example, a young child turned on the fibre-optic light unaided for the first time showing a sense of wonder, and in assembly there was a sense of awe during the telling of the biblical story of 'Noah and the Ark'. Religious education lessons also make a very good contribution to pupils' overall spiritual development.
9. Opportunities are always taken to impress on pupils, sometimes in the simplest of forms, the difference between right and wrong and the importance of keeping to the rules. They have a growing awareness of their needs and of the needs of others. For example, in a Years 7-14 assembly pupils reflected on their basic needs and were able to show how they feel if these needs are not met; for example, no water supply or no warm clothes. They are developing an understanding that others may not have these basic requirements and they are keen to help and raise funds to help others.
10. Cultural awareness is very well fostered. Pupils are very well prepared for living in a diverse society and learn to respect differences through the good opportunities to learn about the traditions of other religions, and life in other countries. For example, pupils in Years 1 and 2 helped prepare a Seda meal and every pupil was given a very good opportunity to experience this through the teacher's very good use of sight, touch, smell, sound and taste so that all pupils were fully involved in the lesson.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a very good quality of education for all pupils, including those with additional special educational needs. Teaching and learning are very good and the curriculum is also very good. The school provides high quality care, welfare and guidance for pupils and links with parents are very good.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning across the school is very good, as is assessment.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Learning is very good in Years 12-14 and in English, communication, religious education and PSHE because teaching is consistently very good in these areas.
- Teamwork between teachers and support staff is very good and ensures that all pupils learn effectively.
- All teachers maintain very good relationships with pupils and manage pupils' behaviour very effectively.
- Teachers make very good use of assessment information to plan for individual needs and to move pupils forward to the next stage of their learning.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 41 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	20 (49%)	20 (49%)	1 (2%)	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.

11. Consistently very good teaching in Years 12-14, and in English, communication, religious education and PSHE leads to very good learning and achievement. Pupils concentrate and try their hardest in these lessons, persevering in the face of difficulty, and working very productively throughout the lesson. These lessons are always brisk and teachers consistently challenge pupils' learning through, for example, very good use of question and answer sessions. Consistently very good teaching occurred in Year 11 mathematics lessons, in all science lessons seen and in the two physical education lessons. In these lessons, pupils of all capabilities tried equally hard as they were challenged to better their previous performance. The use of signing and communication aids, such as symbols and electronic switches, is a very good aspect of all lessons. This enables pupils to see, use or understand technical language particular to a subject, more consistently. In turn, this has a very positive impact on pupils' achievements. For example, one pupil gained three P Scale levels in a year due to improved communication through signing. This aspect of teaching represents very good improvement since the last inspection when it was identified as a weakness.
12. Very strong teamwork between teachers and support staff, including therapists who support in lessons, ensures that all groups of pupils, especially those with additional needs, learn very effectively. In almost every lesson seen, support staff provided different approaches or resources, often using their very good knowledge of pupils to adapt these spontaneously as required. As a result, pupils are not left feeling frustrated in their learning because as misunderstandings are clarified, pupils become more eager to engage in their activities with increased confidence. Support staff are also fully involved in planning and reviewing lessons with teachers. Consequently, everyone concerned has a very clear idea of how the lesson will proceed and the resources or methods that will be used to maximize pupils' learning.
13. The very good relationships teachers have with pupils contribute significantly to the very good attitudes pupils have for learning. This was a strong feature of all lessons seen and was confirmed in the very positive comments pupils made in their questionnaire responses. All pupils agree that teaching is good, and that they are expected to work hard and do their best. Pupils' very good behaviour in lessons is due to very good management of behaviour by teachers. High expectations are set and strategies used take full account of individual pupils' behavioural targets. Consequently, pupils behave very well in nearly every lesson. As a result, pupils' time is focused on learning rather than disruption. This impacts positively on their ability to concentrate and try their best

14. Teachers' planning for individual needs is thorough and meticulous. Teachers base their lesson plans on their very good knowledge of all pupils' achievements. They take full account of each pupil's IEP to match activities and resources precisely to individual needs. Lessons are planned to accommodate the needs of different pupils, by either modifying the tasks or using different resources and approaches. For example, in a Year 9 science lesson, wide-ranging activities were chosen, involving the use of a stethoscope, bellows pump, digital camera and a sound beam to enable pupils to develop greater understanding or awareness of the function of the heart in the blood circulatory system. In all lessons seen, very good planning was characterised by clear learning objectives for different groups of pupils, which were rehearsed at the beginning of lessons and then reviewed at the end so that pupils knew how well they had achieved. Consequently, all pupils move forward to the next stage of their learning. Targets in small steps, known as P Scales, are regularly set for most subjects including English, mathematics, science, ICT and PSHE. These are developed and shared with pupils and parents so everyone has a clear idea of what pupils are expected to achieve over time. The achievement of these targets is reviewed regularly and pupils' achievements against these are reported to parents. This has had a very good impact on raising achievement.

The curriculum

The curriculum for pupils in Years 1-11 is very good. There are very good opportunities for enrichment through high quality experiences. The school environment and materials to help pupils learn are satisfactory. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum provides interesting and worthwhile experiences that prepare pupils well for the next stage of learning.
- Opportunities are created in all subjects to develop personal and social skills and communication. Therapeutic programmes are often very well integrated into ordinary school routines.
- There are very good opportunities for enrichment, particularly through sports, music and drama.
- The school works successfully to find appropriate external accreditation for pupils.
- The school buildings limit what can be taught in science, design and technology and physical education.

Commentary

15. The school provides a rich and full curriculum. All subjects now have a programme of work that ensures that teachers know what they have to teach, and the work in each class builds on what has gone before. The school is keen to develop and improve provision, and subject co-ordinators make very good use of links with other schools, information and new initiatives to enhance pupils' learning and achievements.
16. Every class has pupils with a wide range of needs and abilities. Activities in lessons are creatively adapted to meet the needs of each pupil. Individual priority targets are available and members of staff and older pupils know what these are. They work towards these throughout the school day and celebrate when these are achieved. Behaviour programmes are very helpful and well used. They enable difficult behaviour to be confidently managed and classes to run smoothly. Symbols and simple communication switches are available in all classes for pupils who need these, and the Picture Exchange Communication System has been introduced for some pupils with autism. Therapists often work in classrooms and provide structured programmes that can be worked on within other ordinary activities. For example, hand exercises and stretches are done in an art activity and speech therapy is carried out in a phonics session.

17. Pupils are successful in a range of sporting activities. The football team recently won the SLD inter-schools league at the Gosling Stadium in Welwyn. There were also several gold medals in swimming at the National Junior Olympics at Stoke Mandeville. The school arranges trips to major events in London such as the ballet at Covent Garden and Bright Sparks concerts at the Festival Hall. There are residential trips for older pupils to Dorset and France and younger children have exciting 'sleepovers' at school with breakfast at a local supermarket. Opportunities are taken to celebrate and participate in events such as the World Cup with early football breakfasts. Kitchen staff are involved in theme days producing dinosaur food or jelly and sandwiches for jubilee street parties. Parents and members of the community contribute to lessons through sharing their faith, taking turns as qualified lifesavers in the pool.
18. There is a good range of external accreditation for learning in subjects such as French, coin recognition, early switch use and literacy. Pupils of all ages also gain swimming badges from the earliest duckling awards to ASA distance and survival tests.
19. The accommodation has been significantly improved recently, for example, the office space is much better and the pool's changing facilities have been upgraded. The environment is welcoming and stimulating, providing a useful resource for celebrating and displaying work. However, the multipurpose hall limits what can be taught in PE and there are no specialist teaching areas for design and technology and science, and this limits achievement. Narrow corridors make movement around the school difficult for the many pupils in wheelchairs; there is no common room for older pupils and very little specialist teaching space. Resources are good and creatively tailored to the needs of specific pupils and units of work. Members of staff are well trained; they share their skills and work as close confident teams. Their very good work with some very challenging pupils, changes their behaviour for the better so that they focus more on learning rather than disruption in lessons.

Care, guidance and support

Care, welfare, health and safety are very good throughout the school, as are support and guidance and the way pupils' views are taken into account.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a strong, caring and supportive environment and all who work in the school are totally committed to the welfare of the pupils.
- There is an ethos of mutual respect, and a very good level of guidance and support is given to all pupils.
- Very good procedures are in place to welcome new pupils into school, particularly at the Foundation Stage.
- Older pupils have very good access to careers guidance, although there are limited work experience placements for them in the local community.
- The views of pupils are sought and this practice has been much strengthened by the introduction of the school council.

Commentary

20. There are very good procedures for protecting pupils in line with locally agreed child protection arrangements. All aspects of health and safety are formally assessed regularly and the results made known to the governing body. This ensures the safety of all in school. Day-to-day care is of the highest quality and the school nurse ably supports staff or takes a lead with more complex medical problems and procedures.

21. Each pupil has a very good and trusting relationship with one or more adults. There is mutual respect and academic, physical and pastoral progress is well monitored with small, but achievable, targets being set in consultation with the pupil. Personal records of achievement, of which pupils can be rightly proud, display pupils' work and show their successes in the very best light.
22. Very good procedures are in place, including home visits for Foundation Stage children, to ensure that new pupils settle well into school. The school works closely with the family to make transition as smooth and comfortable as possible.
23. Pupils overwhelmingly responded in their questionnaire that there is an adult in the school with whom they can communicate if they have a problem. Parents also confirmed at the pre-inspection meeting that all staff treat pupils fairly and that there is a very good promotion of equality. No pupil is denied access to any area of school life because of disability, gender or ethnicity.
24. Much support is given by the local education authority and other agencies to develop the staffs' strategies for teaching pupils with more complex needs and meeting their diverse and various medical needs.
25. There is a very good range of professionals who can be called upon when necessary. This includes the school's own nurse, as well as external counsellors and therapists. The occupational therapist provides a very good service, coming every week to advise the school on aids and adaptations for pupils with physical disabilities. Therapists set and monitor programmes, often working with classroom staff to train them to deliver regular sessions.
26. The views of pupils are taken into account when changes are to be made, for example, pupils sat on the interview panel for a job placement so that they would have an input. In addition, a school council has been set up and this has proved popular, particularly with the older students. They feel they now have a voice and that their concerns will be listened to and, if appropriate, acted upon.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has significantly improved its relationship with parents and there are now very good links. Links with the community are good, although there are some shortcomings in providing work experience for pupils in the immediate community. Standards and achievement for all pupils are significantly enhanced by the high quality of these links.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school is proactive in working with parents to help them fully support their child's learning.
- Communication with parents is very good. There is an open door policy and parents receive regular bulletins about the life and work of the school.
- A noteworthy feature of the school's links with the community is their very successful Autumn Fayre, which is very well supported and attended.
- Liaison with a local secondary school is very good with staff exchanging views and expertise, all of which benefit Breakspeare pupils.
- There are very good ongoing links with the local F E College, which supports very well pupils' learning.
- Parent governors are very supportive of the school.

Commentary

27. Parents are kept very well informed about their child's work and health principally through the home/school diary. These enable parents to follow up their child's day at school and let the school know daily of any changes or difficulties. In addition, telephone calls are given a same

day response and newsletters are regularly sent out, keeping parents up to date with school news and other events. At the pre-inspection meeting, parents spoke highly of these arrangements and particularly the seminars on 'Holding' and PHSE, which they found extremely useful. The school seeks the opinions of parents and has identified that parents are welcome in school and that their child is always encouraged to work to the best of his/her ability. There is also a very good rate of participation among parents for the annual reviews, enabling them to learn first hand how they can help their child and to offer advice to the school on how to manage their child.

28. There is much financial and other support from the community for the school's annual Autumn Fayre at which considerable sums of money are raised, which greatly benefit resources at the school.
29. There are very good links with the local church. The vicar visits to lead assembly and there is a carol service at the church, which all pupils attend. Family and friends are fully involved in this as transport to the church is quite an undertaking. This whole 'let's work together' emphasis benefits pupils greatly and enables them to be part of this village community.
30. Breakspeare pupils benefit greatly from the links with other schools. For example, teachers from a local special school visited and were central to the recent questionnaire canvassing parents' views. Much work too has been undertaken by the temporary deputy head who has reviewed school policies, for example, on equal opportunities and racial harassment, which now fully support the PSHE programme that pupils study, improving their awareness of rights and other issues effecting all groups. Another secondary school loans much-needed computer equipment giving all pupils access to ICT and improving their knowledge and computer skills.
31. Particularly beneficial to the Years 12-14 students is the close liaison with the local F E College. During the inspection several pupils took part in a childcare class. They worked alongside able pupils, relationships were excellent and much benefit was derived from both groups. The course is very well structured for their needs and pupils stated that they really appreciate the opportunity to work alongside students of their own age.
32. The total commitment of the parent governors builds upon the home/school links. The governors interviewed confirmed that they are kept very well informed and that the school fosters very good links with all the parents. As governors, they play a very active part in the governing body. Their views are listened to and acted upon.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The very effective leadership of the headteacher has ensured a clear direction for the school, with a strong shared commitment for improvement and raising standards. Leadership by the assistant head and subject leaders is also very good. The school is very well organised and managed. School governance is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher provides very good leadership, developing a shared commitment for improvement throughout the school, which is reflected in the very good teamwork between staff.
- The very good ethos of the school promotes inclusion very well.
- Governors provide good levels of support and challenge to the school making a good contribution to its success.
- The rigorous monitoring of lessons by the headteacher and subject co-ordinators has led to the very good quality of teaching and learning throughout the school.

Commentary

33. The headteacher provides very good leadership and her input has been key to the good improvements that have been made since the last inspection. She has pioneered a number of effective initiatives such as the 'Investors in People' and the 'Sign Along' family learning programme, developing strong teamwork and creating an atmosphere where everyone's contribution is valued. The headteacher has successfully overcome long-standing difficulties with recruitment, particularly in filling the vacant post of a deputy headteacher. She has reorganised the senior management team and provides very good training and ongoing support for subject leaders and new staff. The headteacher leads from the front, holding weekly meetings with the senior management team to discuss policy and progress of the school improvement plan. Further weekly meetings are held with subject leaders to evaluate and review progress in subject action plans. This has led to greater openness and trust, more effective teamwork and a shared commitment by all staff in raising standards and improving provision. Consequently, there have been significant improvements in the quality of teaching, an improved curriculum and higher achievement throughout the school. For example, working closely with subject leaders, the headteacher has ensured that lessons are well planned and pupils' progress is assessed systematically so that tasks are always matched to pupils' abilities.
34. The very good role models governors, senior managers, teachers and support staff (including therapists) provide for pupils make a significant contribution to the warm and welcoming ethos of the school. All pupils are happy and feel comfortable in approaching adults because all staff maintain consistently very good relationships with each other, parents and the pupils. The school community values the contributions of different groups of pupils, recognising their strengths and talents and not merely their limitations, resulting in very good inclusion throughout the school
35. Governors are actively involved in the strategic development of the school. Although some governors are newly appointed, they are developing their roles quickly and are already familiar with the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The headteacher, with the support of the LEA, has identified good training opportunities for governors to significantly enhance their role. Governors also share the same drive for improvement and actively seek to develop the school further. They have ensured that statutory responsibilities are met, they regularly discuss the school's effectiveness, contribute to the development of policies and monitor the budget closely so that money is spent on the school's real priorities. Governors, particularly the Chair, pay good attention to best value by monitoring the effectiveness of spending in detail. School improvement planning is well focused on raising standards and supports coherent development.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	981,200
Total expenditure	959,031
Expenditure per pupil	14,985

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	38,694
Balance carried forward to the next	14,441

36. The large carry forward budget is reducing and much of this has been earmarked for improvements to the accommodation, in line with the school's priorities for development, with a smaller proportion as a planned contingency. Management is also very good with very good use of self-evaluation and use of performance data to set targets for raising standards and improving provision. Subject leaders have developed their management role very well in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. The limitations of the accommodation have been identified as barriers to learning and achievement. However, the headteacher and staff have taken effective steps in minimising these by improving resources

for learning, forming effective links with neighbouring schools, for example, in ICT, and developing very good in-house training and support to improve teaching, learning and the curriculum.

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is good. Lessons are very well planned, and precise learning objectives are set for the children in all the areas of learning. Assessment and target setting are used very well to ensure that work is matched to the needs of individual children. The Foundation Stage teacher, who was appointed at the beginning of this academic year, has made a very good start in extending children's learning experiences. Leadership and management are good and there has been very effective work to ensure that the curriculum, assessment and teachers' records reflect closely the six areas of learning. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The quality of teaching has improved and is very good in personal, social and emotional development, and communication, language and literacy. As a result, children are achieving very well. Teaching and learning are good in all the other areas of learning, giving rise to good achievement. Liaison with outside agencies and therapeutic staff within the school is very good. Parents are kept very well informed about how their children are doing through the detailed completion of home-school diaries. Children's learning is supported by good accommodation, which is effectively enriched by the adjoining multisensory room.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children are clearly happy, feel secure and enjoy the range of activities on offer.
- They are very well cared for and enjoy the learning activities provided for them.

Commentary

37. Staff enjoy warm relationships with the children and the teacher has established an excellent rapport with each child in the class. Staff pay careful attention to explaining to the children what is about to happen and it is obvious that they trust the adults who work with them. Wherever possible, staff encourage children to be independent and provide good opportunities for them to make choices. Nearly all the children show particular preferences and higher attaining children understand the consequences of their decisions. Some of the children are learning to dress and undress themselves. Most need help with personal care and all co-operate with daily routines. The children relate positively to one another, taking turns and sometimes holding the hand of the child next to them. Some are beginning to understand the relationships between people and to recognise similarities and differences. Higher attaining children show initiative in selecting activities they enjoy. All children, including some with profound and multiple learning difficulties, concentrate for several minutes at a time. The children clearly feel secure and show a lively interest in the activities on offer. The staff ensure that individual needs are met and that each child is made to feel valued.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good attention is paid to developing children's communication skills.
- Innovative techniques are used to stimulate learning.
- Lessons are very well planned, so that learning builds precisely on children's prior attainment.

Commentary

38. Lessons are organised very effectively into three parts. The introduction mainly involves communication by the teacher with the whole class, where a good range of pictures, symbols and objects is used to support children's understanding. The teacher varies her questions and matches her explanations to the needs of individual children very well. She supplements her spoken communication with consistent signing and encourages children to sign also. A few are able to vocalise, some know a number of signs and nearly all use switches to aid their communication. Children with profound and multiple learning difficulties use different vocal sounds to indicate their response. All the children are active communicators who benefit from the very good eye contact and enthusiastic interaction the teacher provides.
39. In the middle part of lessons, where children have direct hands-on experiences, most are learning to make marks in one way or another. An approach known as 'write dance' is very effectively developing the early writing skills of higher attaining children. In this system, music is used to promote physical movement that leads on to making bold vertical and horizontal marks with chalk on large sheets of black paper. In a lesson during the inspection, the teacher built on this experience very well by taking some of the children into the sensory room, where they drew with fluorescent pens. The ink glowed under ultraviolet light, as one drew a recognisable human figure, which included a head, arms, legs and the suggestion of facial features, and traced over dotted lines. The other practised using circular movements, showing growing control. These activities provided very good challenge to higher attaining children. The remaining children made marks with paint, some with their hands and others using brushes or objects.
40. All children are making good progress in developing early reading skills. Average and higher attaining children turn the pages, and sometimes link pictures with parts of the story. They are able to choose particular books that they like best. Children with profound and multiple learning difficulties look at illustrations in books and explore the props that are used to support storytelling. They show their enjoyment by making sounds and movements when a story is being read to them. When the class look at a 'big book' together, the teacher uses good questions to prompt careful looking at the pictures and challenges children to predict what might happen.
41. The teacher uses the conclusion to lessons very well to check with the learning support staff how well each child achieved and to consolidate children's learning and communication skills.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in mathematical development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lessons are carefully planned, based on children's individual education plan targets.
- Number songs are used to very good effect to support children's knowledge and skills.

Commentary

42. A good range of activities supports children's learning, with a particular emphasis on numeracy. All the children enjoy a wide and stimulating repertoire of number songs, which are brought to life with some imaginative props. The teacher is careful to make sure that all children see what has happened so that they relate the vocabulary of 'gone' with an empty frying pan when the last 'fat sausage' has 'gone bang'. A number line effectively supports higher attaining children in recognising and counting numbers one to five. The most able child knows that if there were five frogs to start with, when one 'little speckled frog' jumps out, four will be left. Children with profound and multiple learning difficulties show good concentration during number songs, because staff make the learning fun and engage them in active learning. The teacher

emphasises the vocabulary of number as she encourages higher attaining children to help with handing out equipment and counting the number present.

43. Average attaining children match objects by colour with prompting, complete wooden puzzles when half is already completed for them and take turns with an adult in building one brick on top of another. Higher attaining children can match pictures, sort by colour, complete simple jigsaw puzzles and experiment when building with different sized bricks.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A range of outings supports children's developing knowledge of the world around them.
- Children have good direct experiences that provide opportunities for them to learn about the materials and processes.

Commentary

44. Staff regularly take children out into the local community. They have recently been on visits to the market to buy food and fabrics, to each other's houses, to garden centres to see Christmas decorations and to shopping centres. This effectively supports the development of their understanding of the world. Children have visited the local church and they have heard stories from the Bible.
45. The children explore the qualities of a range of materials, including sand and water, and observe changes, for example, when dye is added to water or fabric. They experiment with sieves, funnels and tubes, and learn about whether objects will float or sink. There are good opportunities to use ICT and to find out about cause and effect with various switches and toys. Higher attaining children are able to use the mouse as well as a number of different switches to make things happen when they are working with the computer. They also know the location of different places in the school. Average attaining children can activate a computer program with a switch, and show interest in photographs of themselves when they were younger.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

46. This area of learning was not inspected in detail, but records show that provision is at least good and that children achieve well.
47. Teachers' plans show that very good attention is given to physical development and to children's prior attainment. Children have daily opportunities to feel and explore textures, to stir, glue, make marks and improve their physical control. Average and higher attaining children are able to balance, throw a beanbag into a hoop, crawl, slide, climb and kick or throw a ball. Some are also able to catch a ball. Children have regular experiences in the water, where they gain in confidence and some meet with success in reaching the early stages for which accreditation is available. They also have access to the soft play facilities, which provide opportunities for all children to work at their own particular level.
48. Each child has a personal exercise programme that is devised collaboratively by the therapeutic staff, the teacher and learning support assistants based on their individual needs. Higher attaining children work, for instance, on balancing and on hand-to-eye co-ordination, while children with profound and multiple learning difficulties concentrate on stretching and strengthening their bodies.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

49. This area of learning was not inspected in detail, but in the one lesson observed, the teacher's planning and photographic evidence of children's attainment shows that provision, achievement and teaching are good.
50. The very good range of resources in the class is used well to enable the children to explore and experiment with various materials. They have daily opportunities to work with a range of media. They are given good opportunities to select materials and to make creative decisions for themselves. In a creative development session that focused on the colour for the week – which was green – children were able to choose from green net, green hessian, sequined fabric and tissue paper. This provided opportunities for them to experience the different qualities of the materials and to combine some in their collages. Children with profound and multiple learning difficulties are given good opportunities for sensory experiences and the teacher shows sensitivity to children's responses.
51. All the children enjoy songs and take part as best they can. They love making music and have the chance to experience a number of different instruments. Higher attaining children copy simple sound patterns played by an adult, and many children can differentiate between playing loudly or softly. Children with profound and multiple learning difficulties show excitement at the vibration made by some instruments.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1, 2, 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE (FRENCH)

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Across the school, pupils achieve very well in communication and literacy. This represents good improvement since the last inspection.
- Teaching is very good throughout the school. Consequently, pupils make very good progress.
- Assessment is very good. It is clear and helpful and guides teachers in what to teach next.
- Teaching materials are very good.
- Curriculum leadership in English is very good.
- Literacy and communication are very well developed across the curriculum.

Commentary

52. Overall, attainment in English is very good. Pupils achieve very high standards, compared with pupils in similar schools, in speaking and listening through the many opportunities that they have to communicate throughout the school day. Verbal pupils are actively encouraged to contribute, respond, express their feelings and ideas, and to ask questions. Where pupils use non-verbal means to communicate, adults watch for communicative gestures and look carefully for preferences and choices. Many of these pupils work hard to express 'yes' and 'no' and are encouraged to persist by vigilant adults. The review session at the end of each lesson ensures that all members of the class have a chance to tell others what they have done. In a lesson observed in Year 9, pupils responded very well to each other and were quiet and respectful while others talked. Even some of the younger pupils showed that they understood how another pupil communicates. One pupil did this by fetching an object of reference (in this case a small book) to explain that the next lesson would be English.

53. Reading and writing also have appropriate importance within the curriculum. Every pupil has his or her own challenging objectives and work is planned for each individual within the current topic. Therapy is also very well integrated into learning activities, so that when a younger pupil is working on 's' sounds in speech therapy it is also part of his phonic work in class. The broad curriculum emphasises literacy for different purposes, so that many pupils learn that text carries meaning and are interested in a range of printed matter and enjoy opportunities to write in different ways. Higher attaining pupils use a word processor that adds symbols to text. This helps them to recall and decode what they have written and share it with other people later.
54. Teaching and learning across the school are very good. Lessons are planned to a common format and address the individual learning needs of each pupil. Time is very well used and in every lesson seen during the inspection pupils were working hard on challenging activities from the very start to the end, with no time wasted. Pupils pick up on this purposeful ethos and higher attaining pupils learn to organise themselves for work and become increasingly independent. Pupils of all ages look forward to lessons, especially when they study literature and stories such as 'The Gingerbread Man' for younger pupils or 'The Highwayman' for older ones. Assessment is very good and the final review section of the lesson always helps pupils and members of staff to think about what has been learned, while this information is appropriately recorded.
55. There has been significant spending on books, so that when pupils read a story together, there is a copy for everyone. The literacy assistant is given time to create and manage resources for specific topics and pupils, so that each time a lesson is taught good quality materials are added. As a result, there is now an impressive bank of book boxes containing symbols activities and sensory materials.
56. The co-ordination of English is a major strength. There is very good whole-school practice encouraged by effective monitoring. The combination of a secure, planned programme of work, staff training and whole-school strategies to develop handwriting and phonic skills is having a very positive impact on achievement. There is continual good work, linking to other schools in the authority and beyond, to find appropriate texts and resources and to further develop the provision. One of the very helpful recent innovations is 'Write Dance'. This is a programme that encourages pupils to move to music, creating large patterns in the air and on paper, leading to early letter formation. This can already be seen to have a good impact on handwriting. Data is effectively analysed and compared to similar schools in order to evaluate the work that is done.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

57. Literacy and communication are very well developed across the curriculum. All members of the classroom staff, and many pupils too, are aware of each pupil's priority targets and these are displayed on symbolised cards. Symbol cards and signing are well used to underpin much of the verbal communication and members of staff, as well as more mobile pupils, quickly interpret and respond to the expressive gestures of others. Pupils at all stages are expected to find information from videos, pictures, books and other print sources, and record using pencil and paper or a computer, often with a symbol word processor. This ensures that literacy skills are used for real purposes and reinforced throughout the school day.

French

Provision for French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well. They gain external accreditation for their work.
- Teaching is good and addresses the learning needs of each pupil.
- The broad programme of work is enhanced through educational visits to France.

Commentary

58. There has been good improvement in provision for French. All pupils in Years 7-11 now study the language. Even pupils with high support needs and no verbal communication show that they notice the difference between French and English and laugh with anticipation at the songs that start the lesson. Many of the higher attaining pupils join in with the French 'bonjour' song and can answer 'bien' or 'comme ci, comme ca' with appropriate signs. The oldest pupils have a good vocabulary of weather, food and transport words and remember some numbers and colours.
59. Lessons are very well planned to meet the needs of each pupil. Activities are provided that address individual learning objectives at an appropriate level within the topic. When one class was looking at transport, some played bingo using French words and symbols, another pupil did one-to-one matching with model cars and another did word-picture matching. In this way pupils make good progress both in French and in other priority areas.
60. The co-ordinator is a skilled French speaker and has taken many opportunities to give the pupils a high quality experience of the language and culture of France. They have had a French assistant on the staff, who made a major contribution to provision while he was in post. There are good links with the local authority twinning officer and older pupils have had opportunities for educational visits to France.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is at least good in all years and very good in Year 11 and, as a result, learning and achievement are very good.
- Teaching teams are skilled particularly in using more structured and sensory approaches for pupils with autism and very complex learning needs.
- The National Numeracy Strategy is sensitively adapted and is taught well.
- Assessment is now central to the teaching process. As a result, pupils' performance is carefully tracked and pupils are enabled to work at the right level for their individual needs.
- Management of the subject is very good. Planning and the curriculum are very good.

Commentary

61. The achievement of pupils in mathematics is good throughout the school and very good in Year 11. The National Numeracy Strategy is adapted sensitively, and together with a strong sensory and developmental curriculum meets the learning needs of all pupils. This allows all pupils to reach their potential. Teachers go to great lengths to find new approaches for those pupils with regressive conditions to support them in developing to their full capacity. Teaching teams are skilled, particularly in using more structured and sensory approaches for pupils with autism and very complex learning needs. For example, the very good behaviour plans and routines enable pupils with autism to begin, with support, to manage their own behaviour. They are able to mix, settle and work in groups for longer and longer periods of time. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls. Pupils with English as an alternative language (EAL) make similar progress to their peers through informed and skilled support.

62. Higher attaining pupils in Year 2 know and can order numbers up to ten. They can find 'one more' or 'one less' than a number from one to ten and they reinforce their learning matching numbers and doing simple sums on the computer. Pupils with the most complex needs, feel, hear and track the movement of objects presented, enabling them to develop an awareness of their physical properties.
63. By the end of Year 6, through precise and knowledgeable teaching, pupils have experienced a wide range of numeracy activities. In Year 7, pupils reinforce their learning of shapes and can label clock times on the hour and each quarter independently. In Year 11, pupils enjoy counting together in twos and fives and they count on or back in tens. They learn to solve number puzzles by working in very practical ways.
64. Overall, teaching and learning are good with very good teaching in Year 11 where there is a fast pace and effective level of challenge. Effective teaching enables these pupils to make significant gains in their responses through purpose in their choices Teachers are secure in using the numeracy strategy lesson format, which means pupils understand the routine and settle quickly and purposefully to the lesson. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well in lessons for pupils, including those with the most complex difficulties and higher attaining pupils. Teachers work very sensitively with pupils with autism, using structured and sensory stimuli and ensuring that the learning environment is meaningful and calm. Behaviour plans are carefully tailored to pupils' individual needs and interests .All lessons include a plenary session, which reinforces and celebrates pupils' learning. Teachers target the work extremely well to the stage the pupil is at with the result that learning is good or in some cases very good and most pupils move on at an appropriate rate in their understanding. Teachers and support assistants plan and work very effectively together in skilled teaching teams. This ensures smooth flowing lessons and a consistency of approach. Lesson plans are detailed with clear objectives and assessment criteria so that each member of the teaching team can support the pupils, who then focus on their tasks. Relationships in class are very good and even those pupils with the most complex learning needs behave very well. Pupils respect and trust their teachers and assistants and know they are valued and the work they produce is appreciated. The highly appropriate focus on communication skills in signing, concrete objects, pictures and photographs and clear worksheets with symbols, together with technological aids, makes certain that all pupils are included in the lessons and can participate. The improvements in planning, assessment and evaluation ensure that teachers develop more fully the breadth of pupils' mathematical skills and understanding.
65. The assessment system is very good. As a result, pupils' performance is precisely tracked and individual targets are precisely set. Resources have improved in quantity and quality and are good. The subject leader has a very clear focus on whole-school development and improvement, and monitors and evaluates the provision for the subject very effectively. She also has an appropriate range of developments planned within the school improvement plan. There has been a good level of improvement since the previous inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

66. Teachers consolidate numeracy skills well in a number of other lessons. All pupils have individual targets for numeracy, which they are aware of and work to, with teachers' support. Opportunities are used well in music, religious education, ICT, and science to measure, count and match shapes.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' achievements in lessons seen during the inspection were very good, due to very good teaching.
- There is no specialist practical area for science and this limits teaching and learning, and achievement over time.
- The subject is very well led and managed, resulting in good improvement since the last inspection.

Commentary

67. In the lessons seen during the inspection, pupils achieved very well due to very good teaching that focused on practical investigations, and the development of pupils' understanding of scientific vocabulary. Teachers ensure that lessons are brisk, making very good use of resources and signing to develop pupils' understanding of science. For example, in a Year 2 lesson the teacher introduced the lesson quickly, communicating her learning intentions clearly using signing, symbols and objects such as toys to demonstrate pushing and pulling forces. Pupils then worked in groups in the classroom with smaller objects and outside with a support assistant using larger play equipment to investigate pushing and pulling forces. By the end of this lesson all pupils had a very good understanding of pushing and pulling. Another feature of very good teaching resulting in very good achievement is the very good use of support assistants during practical investigations in lessons. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on the circulation of blood in the human body, the teacher encouraged pupils to use a stethoscope to listen to the heart beating while a support assistant used a bellows pump so that pupils with more complex needs could feel the air pressure as they squeezed the bellows, linking cause and effect. Meanwhile, another support assistant made very good use of ICT, in guiding a higher attaining pupil in his use of the digital camera to take photographs of various pumps around the school, download these on the computer and print the images off to use as a basis for consolidating understanding of the action of pumps, such as the heart, with the rest of the class at the end of the lesson. As a result of the very good use of resources and strong teamwork, pupils of all abilities developed a very good understanding of the action of a pump, relating this directly to the heart pumping blood around the body. Science lessons are always very well planned and organised by teachers. For example, in a Year 6 lesson on light and sound, the teacher quickly recapped on pupils' previous learning and then provided a very good demonstration to develop pupils' understanding of making colours. Pupils were then grouped by ability for different activities, such as the use of different materials over torches to produce different colours of the spectrum.
68. Despite their very good achievement in the lessons seen, pupils' achievements over time are judged to be good, because there is no specialist teaching area for practical investigations in order to fully develop pupils' understanding of scientific enquiry. Teachers have worked very hard to overcome this barrier to achievement in making the best use of resources available to the school and local environment to enrich pupils' investigative skills. For example, Foundation Stage children and Year 1 pupils make good use of dough to investigate squashy materials and a variety of objects with different buoyancies to investigate floating and sinking. There is a good range of visits to garden centres, playgrounds, parks and local amenities and the subject leader is organising a science week in March, which will include making and flying kites.
69. The science co-ordinator manages and develops the subject very effectively, observing lessons to monitor teaching and learning and identify areas for improvement. These are then incorporated into very well-chosen priorities for improvement. As a result, teaching, learning, the curriculum and assessment have improved well since the last inspection. Opportunities for using ICT to support teaching and learning are developing with the purchase of resources such as CD-ROMs and digital microscopes. Furthermore, IEPs are used more consistently in planning learning activities and P Scale assessments have been introduced very effectively to record and track pupil progress in order to set targets for achievement.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well because the subject is effectively planned and organised.
- The use of ICT in other subjects is developing well to promote pupils' learning and achievement.
- The subject leadership is good.
- There is a shortage of secure storage space.

Commentary

70. Pupils' learning and achievement are good throughout the school. Although no discrete ICT lessons were seen during the inspection, pupils were seen working on computers in a range of lessons. Pupils are taught ICT skills in other subjects and have good opportunities to use computers or technological aids to support learning. Overall, pupils make good progress in these lessons and achieve at levels appropriate to their special educational needs.
71. Higher attaining pupils in Years 1 and 2 are able to use an animated alphabet, sort objects electronically, and control the mouse. Pupils with complex needs use switches to make choices and decisions in lessons. Skilled and patient support from teachers and teaching assistants enables pupils with the most complex needs to communicate through switches and technological aids. The school uses a writing program to enable pupils to develop communication and write in symbols, which they then read. Pupils in Year 6 copy and print out symbols independently. They choose programs from menus on the screen and can change options, to select new programs. Pupils in Years 7-9 develop good communication through switching. Some pupils anticipate turn taking, match objects to pictures and develop effective looking and listening skills. They use digital cameras to record work in class with minimal support. Higher attaining pupils are able to open, save and run many programs with growing confidence and proficiency. They carry out basic word-processing and know how to print out their finished work with minimal support from staff. Higher attaining pupils use a fax machine and they make good progress in developing skills in accessing and using sites on the Internet. Pupils with more complex learning difficulties show pleasure and excitement when experiencing the effects of paint programs and when running storybook sequences. Higher attaining pupils in Year 11 make good progress in developing their word-processing skills and producing posters and documents for school events. They are able to use commercial word-processing programs and incorporate pictures into their work. They can use different styles, sizes and fonts to get the effect they want, with minimal support. They use storybook packages to support their reading and writing with symbols. They are confident in using the Internet for research. Pupils with more complex needs use a variety of art packages using either a touch screen or switches.
72. All teachers have completed training in ICT and are computer confident. No whole-class teaching was seen, but teachers and teaching assistants were observed working with individual pupils, often those with the most complex learning difficulties. They are skilled and have a good understanding of the individual needs and levels through clear and detailed assessment procedures. This enables them to build securely on what pupils already know. Targets and learning intentions are shared with pupils. As a result, pupils are well motivated and keen to learn and their behaviour is very good. Even pupils with the most complex needs respond well and make a tremendous effort in fulfilling their targets.
73. The school uses its very good links with a local mainstream secondary school to borrow eight laptops. This has enabled a group of pupils to work side by side to develop ICT skills. The school is now looking to buy a bank of laptop computers, which could form a 'moveable' computer suite. The shortage of secure storage space remains a problem. The quality and number of computers in the school have improved and the range of software available to support work across the curriculum available to teachers is good. Programs like 'Writing with

Symbols' are accessible in all classrooms and additional licences are available for teachers to use them at home to prepare teaching materials.

74. The subject leader has a good insight into the needs of the department and the development plan for ICT is clear and highly appropriate. She is rewriting the scheme of work to incorporate the newest planning for pupils with more complex difficulties and to include the ICT strand of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Monitoring of teachers' plans and pupils' work in ICT is thorough. There has been good improvement since the last inspection in teacher training, planning and resources and this has improved teaching and learning. As part of an ongoing project with the LEA pupils took part in video conferencing with two other special schools. They made good progress in their communication skills and developed positive self-esteem. The school also makes very good use of its links with a local mainstream school to provide opportunities for enrichment and has used their ICT technician to assist with software installation. At present the school has no ICT technician on site, but the subject leader is managing this well.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

75. Pupils use computers and various communication aids with developing skill and confidence in all subjects. Good use is made of new technology to provide symbols for pupils to support them in communication. Teachers use computers well to aid learning in their subject and technological aids, particularly switches, power link and air link are used well in all lessons. Pupils use various counting, matching and shaping applications in mathematics. They have developing control when using paint programs. The further development of the use of ICT across the curriculum has rightly been identified as a priority area in the school development plan.

HUMANITIES

Religious education was inspected in detail and is reported in full below. One lesson was seen in history and one lesson in geography. Discussions were held with the subject leaders and pupils' work was also sampled in these subjects

76. Work seen in **geography** and **history**, suggests that pupils' achievements are at least satisfactory and pupils are attaining P Scale levels in line with other subjects. In the lesson seen, Years 8 and 9 pupils achieved very well as a result of the teacher's good subject knowledge, imaginative use of good resources and learning made lively by varied activities. These pupils were distinguishing between the appearances of people at various stages of development and then went on to compare old and modern day artefacts. They looked at clothes from the past and knew they could not be worn today, and discussed differences and similarities using signing. In geography, the youngest pupils look at different buildings and become more aware of their surroundings. They notice their local environment and can identify certain features. Pupils by the end of Year 6 can find places on a map and locate several places in following the escapades of 'Barnaby Bear'. Higher attaining pupils have been involved in making a map of the village and can find a variety of shops and buildings from their map. They know the road and position of some named features. Pupils in Year 9 learn about the local woodland and make good progress in close observation. They know geographical terms such as 'motorway', 'bridge', 'park' and 'road'.
77. Pupils continue their work in history and geography in Years 10 and 11 through their work on ASDAN and apply their knowledge and understanding of this area through practical activities. The subject leaders provide good management. They have a clear vision for their subjects and their action plans are good. They provide guidance for other staff and monitor and evaluate their subject areas effectively. The curriculum for both subjects has been evaluated and reviewed and resources have been audited. Geography and history are satisfactorily resourced, and include an appropriate range of multicultural materials and useful artefacts.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well because teaching is very effective.
- Pupils are interested in the lessons and learn effectively from each other. They have a good respect for each other's feelings, values and beliefs.
- Assemblies, visits and visitors greatly enhance the provision in religious education.
- The subject is very well planned and organised from the locally agreed syllabus.
- Assessment is very effective.
- Not enough use is made of ICT in lessons.

Commentary

78. Most pupils achieve very well in religious education because of sensitive, skilled teaching that is well matched to pupils' learning needs. This enables pupils to make very good progress towards targets in their individual education plans (IEPs). Pupils with autism and PMLD receive expert individual support in class and, therefore, their progress is at least good and often very good. Pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) make similar progress to their peers through sensitive and knowledgeable support. They develop good self-esteem and become far more confident in joining in class activities. There is no significant difference in achievement between boys and girls.
79. Teachers have good subject knowledge, and use careful questions and prompts to check pupils' understanding. Very good use is made of sensory and practical resources to bring lessons alive and, as a result, pupils are interested in the lessons and learn effectively from each other. A good example of this was during a Years 1 and 2 lesson where pupils shared a Seder meal as part of their work on Judaism. Higher attaining pupils prepared the 'Charoset', following a recipe of traditional ingredients. Through the good example of the adults around them, they showing a good respect for each other's feelings and values and were beginning to recognise some Judaic and Christian beliefs and an awareness of other religions. The teachers and support assistants gave all pupils, including those with the most complex needs, opportunities to feel, smell and taste all the ingredients of the meal and were careful to encourage pupils' independence and decision making. Teachers and teaching assistants showed great respect for each pupil's dignity.
80. Assemblies play an important part in enhancing the provision for religious education. Through them, pupils hear stories from other religions, they learn about festivals in other faiths, and join in prayers and reflections on good and evil.
81. Older pupils learn about important Christian, Judaic, Hindu and Islamic festivals through sensitive teaching, role play and storytelling. They begin to understand that a major element in different faiths is that of caring for one another and the environment. Teachers and support assistants use sensory and practical ways to give meaning to the story for pupils with the most complex needs. They also use technological aids and switches well to show pupils' preferences and choices, but there is limited use of information and communication technology to support pupils' learning
82. A very effective part the teaching is the very strong relationships throughout the school, which enable pupils to express their feelings openly and confidently in an atmosphere of trust. Pupils develop good self-esteem and have good opportunities to reflect upon their learning and understanding of religious issues.
83. Religious education makes a good contribution to the development of pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development through close links with local religious and faith groups, visits to churches and other religious buildings and visitors from a variety of different faiths. These visits and visitors further enhance the curriculum.

84. The management of religious education is very effective. The subject leader ensures, by careful monitoring and evaluation, that the school policy and requirements and expectations set out in the locally agreed syllabus are met. The assessment system is very good. P Scales and individual response sheets are used very effectively. As a result, pupils' performance can be precisely tracked and individual targets can be more precisely set.
85. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

Art and design, design and technology, music and physical education were sampled.

86. A very good scheme of work has been developed by the subject leader for **art and design**. This ensures that skills are systematically built on each year and pupils achieve well as they move through the school. The subject leader manages art and design very well, providing a good range of training opportunities and building up a good range of art and design resources, particularly ICT to develop teaching and learning. Standards, teaching and learning are monitored on a regular basis. Although teachers' plans for **design and technology** are good, the lack of specialist teaching space limits teaching and learning particularly in the use of resistant materials. However, teachers compensate for this very well, by making the best use of available resources in the school. This was seen, for example, in a very good food technology lesson with Years 10 and 11 pupils where pupils made a list of ingredients and then worked together to prepare a meal, using a variety of kitchen utensils such as a cheese grater, safely.
87. Although **music** lessons were not seen, there were many examples of pupils listening to and appraising music in lessons with some pupils joining in singing such as the 'Hello' song. In assemblies music is also promoted well. For example, during a whole-school assembly based on God's Creation, pupils joined in with sound effects of animals to the song 'Who Built the Ark?', accompanied by a guitar. Work planned in **physical education** is varied and interesting, although it is restricted by the small size of the hall, which cannot accommodate ropes or wall bars. Nevertheless, teachers compensate for this well, by providing interesting activities such as dance and gymnastics. Dance therapy is also provided for individual pupils, and in a dance lesson with Years 7-9 pupils, where teaching was very good, pupils created interesting movements to music by stretching and travelling to various rhythms. All staff challenged all pupils to work as hard as they could in developing their performances and, as a result, they all achieved very well. Good use is also made of the heated swimming pool where pupils develop their confidence in water and improve their swimming skills as a result of very good teaching. In one lesson seen, the teacher made very good use of floats while support assistants provided very good encouragement for pupils to swim independently. As they move through the school the oldest pupils have very good opportunities to gain accreditation, for example, in basketball. In 2003, six pupils gained the AQA Basketball Skills award, which represents very good achievement since joining the school. Pupils of all ages also gain swimming badges from the earliest Duckling awards, to ASA distance and survival tests. Pupils are successful in a range of sporting activities. The football team recently won the SLD Inter-schools League at the Gosling Stadium in Welwyn. There were also several gold medals in swimming at the National Junior Olympics at Stoke Mandeville.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

PSHE and citizenship are taught to all year groups, but appropriately combined in Years 1-6. PSHE was inspected in full, as reported below, and citizenship was sampled.

88. The scheme of work shows that **citizenship** is well planned with a focus on preparing pupils to play an active role as citizens. A citizenship assembly is held every week and pupils develop increasing confidence in their ability to influence what goes on around them. For example, they

attend their reviews and help to set their own targets, having a say in what they want in the future. Last autumn term, pupils participated in a questionnaire about the school and readily gave their views on a variety of subjects connected with the school, for example, their favourite subjects and what they would like to see changed. Pupils think of others less fortunate than themselves through their involvement in activities such as fund-raising for Unicef and Harvest Festival. In order to raise pupils' awareness of the workings of democracy, the school held mock elections for government during the last election and they met the local Member of Parliament on her visit to the school.

Personal, social and health education

Provision in PSHE is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a very wide range of activities included within the provision.
- Teaching is very good and extends pupils' learning ensuring their very good achievement.
- Assessment is very good and is used very effectively to improve pupils' personal development.

Commentary

89. The scheme of work in PSHE is very well thought out and includes a wide range of different topics relevant not only to the needs of different year groups, but the differing capabilities of pupils. These include important issues such as independence, personal hygiene, friendships, relationships, drugs awareness and sex education. This very good programme of work enables pupils to build on their knowledge and skills systematically as they move through the school. PSHE also permeates through all aspects of school life. Pupils are encouraged to think about issues such as friendship, relationships and sexuality and to share their feelings in lessons. They learn how to greet people, how to deal with saying "no" and issues worrying pupils are dealt with sensitively and with discretion. Older pupils are encouraged to show initiative and take responsibility, particularly through the school's council, where they consider such issues as the rights of a child through the Children's Charter. Pupils develop a greater awareness of the needs of others through, for example, the personal experience of a teacher with the African Water Project.
90. Very good teamwork between teachers and support assistants ensures that activities are carefully matched to individual needs and that all pupils are fully included in PSHE activities. For example, in a Year 2 lesson, pupils were encouraged to interact socially with each other as staff and pupils took it in turns to greet one another, using signs, symbols and electronic switches to aid communication where appropriate. Teachers encourage pupils to show initiative and to act maturely when considering important issues, such as feelings and emotions. In a lesson with pupils in Years 7-11, pupils worked in mixed ability groups to explore the feelings people may experience with no food, shelter or clean water. There was a very 'grown-up' atmosphere in the lesson as pupils used thoughtful words such as 'upset', 'lonely', 'sad' and 'angry' to describe the range of feelings others may have. As a result, they achieved very well in the lesson.
91. The very good systems of assessment include well-conceived individual priority targets for PSHE, learning intentions, and an individual record book that lists the pupils' achievements. Consequently, pupils know exactly how well they are doing. Teachers make very good use of PSHE to plan activities and pupils are fully involved in the setting and review of their targets. As a result of this, pupils develop in maturity and confidence as they move through the school. Teachers also make very good use of P Scales to track pupils' progress so that more challenging yet realistic targets are set to enhance learning and achievement.

POST –16 PROVISION: THE 16-19 ENTERPRISE (FURTHER EDUCATION) DEPARTMENT

Provision in the 16-19 enterprise department is **very good**.

Strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well because of the very good teaching and high expectations set by the staff.
- Every opportunity is taken to promote students' independence and self-autonomy skills, and prepare them for life after school.
- Excellent relationships based on real respect make students feel confident, happy and willing to take risks in their learning.

Commentary

92. Students achieve very well in the department. They make very good progress over time in all subjects in their course of study. They make very good progress against their individual targets in their individual education plans. Targets have been designed to be easily read by students, (by the use of symbols etc) and are understood. Students, therefore, know what they are working on. The very good teaching in the department is in large part due to the very good planning. Very good teaching and high expectation underpin the achievement of all students, including those with profound disabilities. Students are able to move about their department with confidence and make decisions for themselves. They act in a mature way and take pride in their achievements.
93. Staff consistently look at ways in which students can take control over their own lives. They look for ways to build practical skills that will help them when they leave school. Students use the kitchens attached to the classrooms to make themselves drinks at break times. They use the video and television sets, and the other leisure equipment independently. They will speak up in public settings like assemblies. They take an active role in the school council. In their careers studies they consider their own strengths and areas for development, and then the action plan to address them.
94. The success of the department's provision in securing high achievement for its students is based on the relationships in the department. Relationships between staff and staff, students and students, and students and staff are all excellent. Students are always respected, never patronised and are always afforded great dignity. This includes those students who at times exhibit severely challenging behaviour. Students have developed in this atmosphere and are emotionally secure. This enables them to share their concerns and aspirations without fear or ridicule and, consequently, make great gains in their understanding of themselves and their own needs.
95. The 16-19 department is a very well led. The head of department has brought about many changes since the last inspection. These include second class, new externally accredited courses, and a clearer view of monitoring standards. Improvement since the last inspection has thus been good.

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers plan very well and make very good use of symbols and signs to help students achieve very well in English.

Commentary

96. Teaching is very good. Teachers' very good planning for both lessons and in targeting individual student's needs enable students to achieve very well. Students with the most complex disabilities respond to situational clues and to clear signing by their teachers. Most students are able to write their own names and addresses. Many high attaining students can fill in missing words in sentences and they use adjectives to describe characters in stories they have made up. They are able to show a range of writing styles. One student demonstrating the persuasive style of writing wrote to her father requesting 'Colourlight' hair extensions. During lessons, students who needed additional help to access the written word were given special symbolised worksheets. During assembly, non-verbal students had access to large symbols to enable them to point to the symbols and so contribute their opinions and feelings. Sensitive questioning by staff in lessons brought about good levels of class discussion, with students listening and respecting each other's contributions. Individual education plan targets are made accessible to all students by printing the targets on separate cards and accompanying the writing with symbols. Assessment is very good and includes a range of ways that students can self-evaluate.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well in mathematics because teachers make very good use of resources to move pupils' learning forward.
- Mathematics teaching is often directed at helping students enhance their independence and life skills.

Commentary

97. Students are achieving very well in mathematics and are working at levels that stretch their capabilities. They know, for instance, how to conduct surveys and how to interpret the results. They know how to transfer survey results to computers and produce electronic bar graphs. Motivating activities and the use of borrowed laptops (from the local secondary school) together with the good use of teaching assistants to support students, help students to learn very well.
98. A great deal of the teaching in mathematics is geared to enhancing students' life skills. This very appropriate focus means that many students have good skills in using money, understanding time and measuring. Students apply this knowledge in shopping and cooking situations and when using public transport. Other students use their mathematical skills to recognise symbols that denote key functions on personal tape recorders, and settings on the controls of a microwave oven.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (PSHE)

Provision in PSHE is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent relationships and a clear focus on preparing students for their lives after school mean students achieve very well.

Commentary

99. Teaching and learning are very good. Consequently, students' achievements are very very good. Their knowledge, understanding and practical skills in this area are very good. They know what they as individuals need to do to become more independent. They understand a range of issues like how their own personal hygiene can affect others' perception of them. They have a range of practical life skills like making hot drinks, making snacks and meals, laying tables and making beds. The excellent relationships built by the staff, give students the security to explore personal issues and have the confidence to meet the high expectations placed on them. Carefully chosen and well-prepared resources, like a video of a young man washing and shaving, support students' learning in lessons. A student council helps students learn to speak for themselves. Many students have jobs to do around the school, which gives them a real sense of responsibility within the school community. There is an excellent 'buddy' scheme that teams up pairs of students, usually one more able and one less able. This scheme makes the department very inclusive and develops high levels of care and concern between students.

CAREERS EDUCATION AND GUIDANCE.

100. No lessons were seen in careers education. It is, therefore, not possible to make a firm judgement about provision. Inspectors held discussions with the head of department and subject co-ordinator, looked at students' completed work, and at a range of resources and displays.
101. In careers education, it is evident that students have benefited considerably from the provision. Students are very reflective about their own strengths and areas that need development. They address these needs by writing their own action plans. They reflect on what their dream job would be and whether their personal skills and qualities would match this job. Students gain real insights about themselves. In the lower part of the department students have work experience opportunities within the school. For students in the upper part of the department these opportunities are in the local community. Placements include Marks and Spencer's, the local library and the school kitchens. Formal applications are made for these experiences and students know how to dress and prepare for interviews. Students greatly value these opportunities.
102. Careers guidance in the department is very well supported by the local Connexions Service personal advisers. These advisers visit the school regularly. They speak to students, provide them with advice and information, and take occasional lessons. There are very good careers guidance resources that include customised brochures featuring the department's own students. The careers teacher has also produced special resources for students with profound and multiple disabilities. The use of MENCAP's 'Transactive' computer software is just being established. This allows students to create their own profile in a dedicated web site. Students with communication difficulties can then share information about themselves at transition meetings, by simply pressing a switch.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Provision in religious education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Imaginative teaching methods lead to students achieving very well.

Commentary

103. Standards in relation to students' capabilities are high in religious education. The good teaching informed by very good planning mean that students have very good knowledge about world religions. They can name all the world religions and can give characteristics of them. They know, for instance, that people who follow the Hindu religion worship in a temple and take their shoes off to do that, and that all animals, especially cows, are sacred to them. The teaching in religious education is often imaginatively linked to the citizenship curriculum and so students know that following some religions means looking after the world. In one religious education lesson all students were able to participate in giving answers to a quiz by holding up boards with 'yes' or 'no' written on them. In the same lesson, higher attaining students went to the computer by themselves, logged on to the Internet and used a search engine to find out more about Hinduism.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

INDEPENDENT LIVING, SPORT AND LEISURE, COMMUNITY AND CITIZENSHIP.

No lessons were seen in these subjects. It is not, therefore, possible to make a firm judgement about provision. Inspectors did speak to co-ordinators about their work, looked at their planning, spoke to students about what they had learnt and examined students' work.

104. In **independent living** it was evident from student portfolios that they had accumulated significant skills. Students with very significant disabilities could sort socks into pairs and enjoy sensory experiences in cooking. Higher attaining students were able to cook meals, make beds and successfully use public transport. In **sport and leisure**, students spoke enthusiastically about their lunchtime football club and about winning football competitions. Students talked about their swimming ability and photographic evidence indicated they had good skills in horse riding. Some students were able to control their horse, trot with it and then look after the horse's needs after the lesson. In **community and citizenship**, very comprehensive whole-school planning showed that students had a rich diet of subjects to enjoy. Students' work showed that in an imaginative module on recycling rubbish, many produced equipment, such as plastic bottle mobiles, to entertain those with sensory needs. Externally accredited work folders showed students making good progress in understanding different types of useful information found in the media.

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	3
Value for money provided by the school	2
Overall standards achieved	2
Pupils' achievement	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	3
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	2
The quality of teaching	2
How well pupils learn	2
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	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2
The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	2
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). In a special school such as this standards achieved are judged against individual targets and not national standards

