

INSPECTION REPORT

MILL FORD SCHOOL

Plymouth

LEA area: Plymouth

Unique reference number: 113651

Headteacher: Mr John Hill

Lead inspector: Mike Smith

Dates of inspection: 22nd – 24th March 2004

Inspection number: 260363

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 special
Age range of pupils:	3-19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	107
School address:	Rochford Crescent Ernesettle Plymouth
Postcode:	PL5 2PY
Telephone number:	01752 300270
Fax number:	01752 300109
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors	Mrs Julie Rowe
Date of previous inspection:	16th November 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Mill Ford is a Plymouth City Council special school for children with severe learning difficulties. Just over two thirds of the pupils, have profound and multiple learning, or complex learning difficulties. The majority of pupils are aged between four and seventeen and attend the school from three local education authorities (Plymouth, Devon and Cornwall).

Currently, there are 107 pupils on roll, of white origin and where English is the first language. All pupils have a Statement of Special Education Need or are undergoing assessment at the school. There are six pupils in the care of a local authority. Admissions are managed by the Plymouth department for Lifelong Learning through an admissions panel which meets twice per term.

The school has a wide range of specialist facilities which are constantly being developed to meet the needs of the pupils. Two classrooms are situated nearby on a local mainstream infant and junior school site where 14 pupils are able to engage in social opportunities and mainstream school teaching experiences. The school is part of an 'excellence cluster' which was previously an Education Action Zone (EAZ) and is fully involved in a range of inclusion projects and activities.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
15303	Mr M.J. Smith	Lead inspector	Physical education
8937	Mr H. Allen	Lay inspector	
22391	Mr N. Smith	Team inspector	Geography History Music
2512	Mr B. Emery	Team inspector	Science Design and technology
22948	Mrs M. Vallis	Team inspector	Art and design Citizenship Religious education
11239	Mrs S. Flockton	Team inspector	English Modern foreign language Personal, social and health education
2796	Mrs J. Reed	Team inspector	Mathematics Information and communication technology Special educational needs

The inspection contractor was:

Penta International
Upperton House
The Avenue
Eastbourne
Sussex
BN21 3YB

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very good school with a number of outstanding features. Pupils achieve well in their lessons and make very good progress in their personal and social development, as a result of very good teaching and extremely effective relationships with all staff. Leadership and management are very good. The highly committed headteacher, working in a very successful partnership with the deputy and senior managers, leads and supports a dedicated team of staff. The school thinks very carefully about what matters in the lives of its pupils and plans effectively to provide the best opportunities for them to succeed. This is achieved in cramped accommodation that has been imaginatively adapted and substantially improved. Governors take their role very seriously and know their school extremely well. The school successfully meets all its agreed aims and provides **very good value for money.**

The school's main strengths and weaknesses

- Reflective and imaginative teachers, in partnership with very able support staff and speech therapists, help pupils to learn successfully, develop impressive communication skills and become confident, mature young adults.
- The very good headteacher, together with staff and governors work very successfully together, ensuring that everyone feels valued and has high expectations. Governors demonstrate excellent practice.
- Pupils' very good attitudes, behaviour and social skills are the direct result of very positive and carefully structured support; they clearly enjoy being in school.
- All pupils benefit from wide ranging and highly relevant learning opportunities, which include many out in the wider community.
- Statutory requirements for design and technology are currently not met, as there are limited opportunities for pupils to work with resistant materials.
- There is a highly effective commitment to including all pupils in activities, the promotion of equal opportunities and meeting the needs of each individual pupil.
- Very effective links with parents and carers enable working partnerships between home and school to become increasingly close and purposeful.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) throughout the school, by all staff, to facilitate teaching and learning, is very good.
- Assessment procedures are highly developed and effectively reflect how well pupils are progressing and help in the planning of the future work.
- The monitoring role of all subject co-ordinators is not fully developed.
- Very good practice is shared both informally and through staff training, but sufficient formal strategies have not been implemented to enable whole school development.
- The cramped accommodation restricts some areas of curriculum development, as well as movement in classrooms and around the school.

Since the last inspection the school has sustained all of its good work. It has further developed and made very good improvements in all previous areas of weakness. There are now planned programmes for French in Key Stage 3 and health and drugs programmes for all pupils.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Students' 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

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

Achievement is very good. Pupils of all abilities make very good progress as they go through the school, because all staff are committed to including all pupils in all activities. Consequently, there are no variations in standards or progress. Progress is consistently very good in English where pupils increasingly and effectively develop their communication skills. All staff help pupils to achieve very well in speaking and listening. Pupils' achievement is equally high in science, physical education and in personal, social, health and citizenship education. It is good in all other subjects. Achievement post-16 is good and pupils gain very creditable passes in a range of highly relevant vocational courses.

Pupils' moral, social, and spiritual development are very good and their cultural development is good. This results in there being a harmonious and productive atmosphere in which pupils feel valued, making them extremely well prepared for life after school. Attitudes and behaviour are very good. Pupils are impressively enthusiastic and interested in their lessons and respond very well to the school's positive culture. Attendance is very good, as is pupil punctuality. Pupils love coming to school and being in school.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides **very good** quality education. This enables all pupils to learn successfully and achieve very well. **Teaching is very good and sometimes excellent.** Careful planning means that all pupils can participate successfully at their own level. The good curriculum benefits from the very good adaptation to meet the special education needs of all pupils, including those with autism and profound and multiple learning difficulties. The curriculum is also greatly enriched by a stimulating range of additional activities, many of which take place in mainstream settings. Care, welfare and guidance are very effective. Pupils work and play in a safe environment, where relationships are of the highest quality. They trust all staff to care for them properly. There are excellent partnerships with parents and very good links with other schools, colleges and the wider community.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is led and managed **very well**. Leadership is very good overall and all staff are dedicated to ensuring the development and maintenance of the best educational opportunities and highest standards of achievement. Management is also very good. All managers work in successful partnership to enable the school to fulfill its aims and objectives. The governors fulfill their statutory requirements, know the school extremely well and play a positive and active part in strategic management. Their practice is excellent.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are extremely happy with all aspects of the school and praise the headteacher, the staff, the very good teaching and the quality of the relationships. They know the individual needs of their children are clearly understood and they make progress, which is greatly appreciated. Pupils are exceptionally happy in school. They particularly like their teachers and taking part in a wide range of opportunities and in particular swimming and trips outside of school.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure the role of all subject leaders are fully developed to include the monitoring of the subject across the school.
- Ensure that the statutory requirements for design and technology are met and that all pupils have regular opportunities to work with resistant materials.
- Ensure strategies are further developed to effectively share the very good practice within the school.
- Continue to pursue additional accommodation to ensure that all areas of learning are fit for purpose.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils' progress and achievements are good overall and occasionally they are very good. They are very good in their personal and social development and in their individual targets.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievements are very good in communication skills, science, French and physical education.
- Pupils with additional special educational needs also make good and very good progress.
- Staff have high expectations of pupil achievement.
- There are very good cross curricular links, particularly in information and communication technology (ICT) and this supports the progress made.
- All pupils' achievements prepare them very well for their lives beyond school.

Commentary

1. Pupils continue to make good progress since the last inspection and achieve well in all subjects. The best gains have been in relation to their social and communication skills and the way in which information and communication technology is used to support pupils' learning in other subjects. There are no variations in the achievements of pupils with more complex needs and no differences in the progress of boys and girls or those with particular language needs. On the contrary, the school's commitment to plan for and include everyone, no matter what their particular needs, ensures this evenness of standards for all groups. Likewise, those pupils in the care of a local authority make equally good progress in achieving their individual targets.
2. Pupils make very good progress in their communication skills, science, French, physical education and in their personal, social, and health education. They make good progress in mathematics, information and communication technology, geography, history, religious education, art and design and food technology. Pupils rise to the very high expectations of staff and consequently move to the next stage of their learning, within and beyond school, very well prepared. Their very good personal and social development and behaviour are the outcomes of very high quality support and encouragement from the whole staff team. This means that most become confident, mature young adults. Achievements for many pupils in swimming are excellent and a number achieve performances in line with national expectations. The impact of these achievements on pupils' sense of self worth is extremely positive.
3. The achievement of the pupils is often very good because of the very good teaching and learning and the very good use of resources. This was particularly evident in classes for pupils with more profound learning disabilities and those with autism. The staff give careful thought to provide challenging and imaginative opportunities to enhance the learning environment. Signing is generally used well and together with the use of the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), it effectively helps pupils to understand language. Speech and language therapists work effectively with staff to devise language programmes for pupils so that they are able to improve their learning in all subjects.
4. In lessons, there are good links with other areas of the curriculum, for example mathematics and English. This ensures that pupils are able to reinforce and practice their understanding of these subjects on a regular basis. Information and communication technology supports all subjects well and through the use of the digital camera, pupils' achievements and experiences are very well recorded and assessed. The structure of the upper school programme provides highly relevant opportunities for pupils to learn basic and vocational skills, leading to their confident application in

many settings. They achieve well in the 'Moving On' curriculum and the 'Accreditation for Life and Living' awards.

Pupils' attitudes, values, and other personal qualities

5. Pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to their learning are **very good**. Their social, moral and spiritual development is **very good** and their cultural development is **good**. Pupils' attendance and punctuality is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and social situations outside of school is very good.
- Pupils have a very positive attitude to school and to learning.
- Pupils mature well as they move through the school.
- Very good relationships between pupils and staff support learning and very good personal development.

Commentary

6. Pupils behave very well both in school and in activities out of school. Year 3 pupils on a visit to a local supermarket cafeteria behaved in a mature manner and other customers were unaware of their presence. In lessons they listen well to their teachers and support staff, many indicate that they enjoy lessons by smiling and giving signs, which, because of the very good relationships which exist, staff notice very quickly. As a result, the climate in lessons is excellent; pupils work confidently and securely in an atmosphere free from any form of harassment. The small number of pupils with very challenging behaviour make good progress and learn to respond to adults and to manage their own behaviour. Staff consistently reinforce the difference between right and wrong and point out to pupils that their actions might make another person unhappy.

7. Pupils enjoy being fully involved in lessons and as a result try very hard to achieve and please the adults around them. They make it clear that they enjoy each other's company; for example, pupils were delighted to see their friends receive awards in assembly. They clearly enjoy being at school. Staff report the genuine look of delight on pupils' faces when they return to school after a holiday and see their teachers and learning support assistants. All staff encourage pupils to be independent and take on responsibility, for example, returning registers to the office, or fetching equipment from across the classroom.

8. Considerable thought is given by staff to explore ways in which pupils can develop their spiritual and cultural awareness. Spiritual awareness is raised during religious education (RE) lessons and in the attempts staff make to present activities which pupils will be in awe of. For example, in a science lesson with Year 8 and 9 pupils they were all genuinely astonished and delighted when the rocket experiment worked and the plastic bottle shot into the air. In another lesson, a boy discovered that a table tennis ball could be made to hover over the hot air produced by a hair dryer; he and the rest of the class expressed great interest and delight. Through collective worship and religious education and for example, history, geography and food technology, pupils learn that people come from different cultures and faiths. They study other religions and prepare food from different cultures, for example Italy. In history, they study the French revolution and post 16 students undertake study projects on, for example Africa.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.6	School data	0
National data	N/A	National data	N/A

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

year.

9. Pupils' attendance is very good. Punctuality is also very good, with lessons starting promptly throughout the day. Parents support the school in getting their children to attend and anyway, the pupils love coming to school. There have been no exclusions over the past year or previous years.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

10. The overall quality of education is very good. The school thinks carefully about how the individual and personal needs of individual pupils can be met. The quality of teaching and learning and pupil progress is very good overall. The level of care and welfare provided is very good. Excellent relationships with parents (who hold the school in high esteem) and very good links with the community also have a considerable impact on pupils' personal growth and their academic progress.

Teaching and learning

11. The quality of teaching and learning are **very good** throughout the school. Teachers are not only knowledgeable about the subjects they teach, but also adapt lessons very well to suit individual needs. The increasing and effective use of storing data electronically contributes to **very good** assessment.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' planning is very good and there are high expectations of pupil achievement.
- All pupils have the same opportunities which are aided by the high quality of support staff.
- Teachers need more opportunities to share very good practice.
- Communication between staff and pupils is a significant strength enabling pupils to understand and contribute to their lessons.

Commentary

12. Teaching and learning are consistently good or very good across the year groups and within the subjects of English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology. Pupils' physical development is very good because of the stimulating teaching at school and within the community. Parents support the judgement that teaching is a very strong feature of the school. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. At that time, a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was noted and teachers' planning was a key area for development. Planning is a significant strength and is a major reason why pupils' learning is so good.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 61 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
7 (11%)	24 (39%)	18 (30%)	12 (20%)			

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.

13. The school's emphasis on pupils' communication plays a vital part in involving pupils in all that is happening within school. Teachers, and very skilled and committed support staff, are competent in using a range of communication strategies. They complement speaking with signing, symbols, pictures and switches which allow pupils to activate a range of aids and appliances. It is this consistency across the school which lessens frustration, encourages learning and places value on individual choices. This could be seen in the dining room when patient cooks supported teaching by serving food pupils chose with the aid of Picture Exchange Communication Symbols (PECS). Drama is used very effectively, especially in history and religious education to help pupils understand

and enjoy their lessons. Support for writing is also very good across the curriculum, with pupils recording their thoughts and findings in many subjects through words, pictures or symbols.

14. The intentions, aims and approaches of the good teaching and learning policy are evident within each classroom. Very good relationships and concern for individual needs are apparent within every lesson. Subjects are linked very well so that pupils can see the connections of topics and the relevance of literacy and numeracy skills, although teachers still maintain the emphasis of each subject. Despite the limitation of some small classrooms, experimentation still takes place, for example in science or mathematics. In a lesson where the teaching was excellent, younger pupils passed round a box, taking out a 'big' or 'little' frog when the singing stopped and comparing its size. They then activated the frog to jump into water. Numbers were reinforced through the use of a number board and touch screen. The use of good resources, often made by staff, make a good contribution to learning. Teachers are very good at using a wide range of multi-sensory resources to support pupils' learning and this is clearly one of the reasons pupils enjoy coming to school so much and are learning so well. There is much fun and laughter linked to purposeful activities at this school.

15. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, the only weakness being design and technology where a current lack of knowledge and expertise means that at the moment there is no regular provision for working with resistant materials. Teachers also have very good knowledge of a wide range of special educational needs including autism, sensory impairment and behavioural difficulties. Staff, including support staff, are looking continually to upgrade their knowledge and skills to benefit pupils as much as they can. Currently, there has been insufficient sharing of the very good practices, including behaviour management, within individual classrooms through lesson observation or joint teaching. This was apparent where teaching was less effective. However, teachers are generous in the time and support they give to colleagues informally, during training days and in their regular training sessions in school.

16. Pupils' enjoyment of their lessons and the positive relationships with teachers and support staff are obvious. This helps them to achieve well. *'If something is hard, I ask the teacher and she helps me,'* said one boy. Pupils are involved in setting their own targets and reviewing their individual education plans according to age and ability. In this way, pupils are encouraged to be as involved as they can in their own learning.

17. Assessment is very good and is a strength of the school and is still improving. The school is leading a local initiative to collate electronically information about very small steps in learning for each pupil. Via laptop computers, most teachers swiftly access information they require and update the data. Photographic evidence supplements the highly personal and informative reports to parents. The information is used to inform targets on individual education plans and to adjust teaching for individual pupils. On going assessment within lessons is also a strength. All staff use praise well to tell pupils what they are doing right and let them know how to improve. Most lessons end with the celebration of pupil success.

18. The school makes very good use of additional opportunities to enhance the curriculum. For example, the physiotherapist delivers individual programmes within physical education. Pupils requiring therapy benefit from individual music or art provision and local teachers trained in circus skills provide challenge and excitement for other pupils.

The curriculum

19. The curriculum is good and meets the needs of all pupils. The school provides very good opportunities for enrichment. The resources are good overall and the accommodation, although limiting in some areas, is satisfactory overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good progress has been made with the development of the curriculum since the last inspection but, because of the stage of development, medium-term planning is not yet consistent across all subjects.
- Currently there are few opportunities for pupils to work with resistant materials. Therefore full statutory requirements are not met.
- Visits out of school, including residential visits, enrich the curriculum very well.
- There is good provision for pupils with additional special educational needs such as autism and sensory impairments; staff work hard to include all pupils in all activities.
- There is good preparation for the next stage of education.
- Accommodation overall is satisfactory, but some areas are too small, which limits some pupils' access to some aspects of the curriculum.

Commentary

20. The curriculum provides pupils with good learning opportunities and includes the National Curriculum and religious education. Since the last inspection, the school has introduced a new system of planning the curriculum, which is based on the 'Equals' commercial scheme. This provides programmes based on the National Curriculum for pupils with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Because the revised version of this programme is not available for all subjects, some continue to be planned using national guidance and the national strategies. At present, class teachers undertake medium-term planning, and because of the different basis for this planning, some plans are of very high quality and clearly reflect the needs of the different groups of pupils in the school, while others are more general. The move towards key stage planning which is also being developed aims to ensure that pupils cover appropriate aspects of the curriculum as they move through the school. There has been increased collaborative planning in key stages which has been a useful opportunity for staff development and shared expertise. The provision for design and technology does not meet statutory requirements. There are few opportunities for pupils to work with resistant materials and currently there is no staff expertise in this area. In addition, there is no workable space that would be fit for purpose.

21. Pupils age 14-19 have a curriculum based on National Curriculum core subjects, together with modules of the Accreditation for Life and Living (ALL) course. "Moving on", an extension of the "Equals" curriculum is being introduced for pupils post-16. These courses provide good learning opportunities for the pupils in this age group, and gives them recognised qualifications for modules of the course.

22. Within the school day there is a very good range of opportunities for pupils to go out on visits, which both enrich the curriculum and develop their personal skills. Visits to the coast, the moors, Buckfast Abbey, garden centres, theatres and historical sites help to develop pupils' understanding of different subject areas. Such visits also give pupils opportunities to communicate with other adults and to develop their social skills, as do visits to places such as shops and cafés. Additional activities such as riding, swimming and hydrotherapy, the use of a dark room and a sensory room, broaden the range of experiences. Links with other schools provide additional opportunities, for example, some attend the local community school for activities such as music and circus skills. Pupils have also joined with mainstream pupils using the excellent facilities of the dance studio at the Theatre Royal. Visitors to the school also contribute to pupils' learning, with coaching in football and basketball, and visiting artists such as a ceramicist, sharing their expertise. Many pupils also have the opportunity to take part in residential trips, including youth hostelling, sailing and visits to France. Pupils take part enthusiastically in the Ten Tors challenge.

23. The curriculum further meets the individual learning needs of its pupils by making very good provision for those with the most complex learning needs and for those capable of higher attainments. The individual education plans effectively support the curriculum offered to individual pupils by ensuring that planning, challenge and expectations are appropriate to each pupil. A very strong emphasis on promoting communication skills is evidenced by the additional activities

available, such as the effective use of signing and symbols in the classroom and by use of specific programmes for those pupils who have autism. Very good opportunities exist for all older pupils to have their achievements recognised by taking courses leading to nationally recognised awards.

24. More able pupils leave the school at age 16 or 17, and most of these go to the local further education college, an experience for which they are well prepared. They are advised both by school staff and by a representative of the Connexions service, and college staff visit the school to talk about the courses. These pupils successfully attend college for a day a week during their final year, for a series of taster courses, and to experience college life. Pupils also benefit from undertaking work experience in places such as shops, supermarkets, garages and libraries. The school also provides a leavers' course considering topics such as interviews and CVs, work preparation and self advocacy. As part of a modular programme pupils run a tuck shop as a mini enterprise scheme. Pupils with more complex and severe needs usually remain at school until age 19. These pupils also have the help of a Connexions adviser in considering post-school opportunities. Some undertake work experience, often within the school setting. Consideration is being given to developing an involvement in conservation work. An important aspect of their learning for pupils age 14-19 is preparation for them to become as independent as possible, both through the development of skills, and through opportunities to make choices.

25. The school makes very good use of additional opportunities to enhance the curriculum. For example, the physiotherapist delivers individual programmes within physical education, pupils requiring therapy, benefit from individual music or art provision and local teachers trained in circus skills provide challenge and excitement for other pupils.

26. The school has made the optimum use of the space available, by extending and changing the use of some rooms, and by developing two classrooms on the site of the local mainstream junior and infant school. However, because of the changing population in the school, with many pupils having more complex needs, the amount of space currently available, is insufficient. For example, in classrooms where many pupils are in wheelchairs or special seating, there is not always room to move around to ensure that all have as many opportunities as possible. While the staff do everything in their power to minimise these difficulties, there are occasions on which time is spent moving several pupils because one needs to be moved. In classrooms with a number of pupils with autism, where the TEACCH method (therapeutic education and communication for children) is used, there is not room to set up appropriate working spaces. The hall is too small to provide access for all pupils and staff at one time, limiting opportunities for the school to meet together as a community. While the school has developed some specialist teaching spaces, these too are not large enough for all classes. There is no space available for developments such as the provision of a social area for post-16 pupils, to help them develop their independence.

Care, guidance and support

27. The level of pupil care, welfare and health and safety procedures are very good. The support, advice and guidance pupils receive is also very good. Involvement of pupils through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The effective caring and inclusive nature of the school.
- The effective attention to the detail of pupils' individual needs.
- The effective all round teamwork, including very good multi-agency support.
- Teachers and learning support assistants know the pupils very well.
- The school works very hard to overcome the limitations of the accommodation and ensure staff and pupils' work in a safe environment.

Commentary

28. The school has successfully maintained high standards of care and support since the last inspection. The happy atmosphere throughout the school and the attention to individual pupil needs is very impressive. The trust the parents have in the school being able to meet the needs of their children in every respect is fully justified.

29. Pupils are very well looked after. The support provided by a range of health professionals to a dedicated and caring team of teachers and learning support assistants is of a high standard. Other staff including lunchtime support staff, office staff and premises staff, play an important part in enabling the school to successfully meet its stated aims by their consistent care and approaches to the pupils. All health care professionals confirm they enjoy working at the school as they feel part of a caring team that strives to improve pupil opportunities within the classroom. Individual pupil care-plans of a very high quality are maintained and kept in the classroom so all staff are aware of any pupil's needs. Both the nurse and the wide range of therapists who attend the school on a regular basis work well together to share expertise with classroom staff to the benefit of the children. Child protection issues are dealt with appropriately with all staff being aware of the correct procedures. The school nurse supports the headteacher in ensuring any concerns are handled correctly and is available throughout most of the week to support pupils' health needs and undertake direct support in the giving of medicine and first aid.

30. The pupils' individual education plans follow a standard format and these are very specific for each pupil in different areas of their learning. They are easy to read and include comments and suggestions from parents. They are readily available in the classroom and are used as a working document and the targets inform individual learning objectives within the daily lesson plans. The support assistants play an active role in ensuring that these targets are met and they contribute to the evaluation of pupils' progress in all areas of development.

31. Health and safety issues are well handled by the school. Issues such as manual handling and risk assessments relating to school trips are well planned. Despite the narrowness of the corridors causing difficulty for some pupils when moving around the school, this is well managed by staff who successfully ensure pupils move from room to room quickly and safely.

32. Health and safety practice is generally good, although some aspects could be improved. Safety audit procedures could be more formalised with regular reviews and action plans. Currently, risk assessments are not extended to include all potentially hazardous curriculum activities. Although science and design and technology are evaluated, physical education is not.

33. The relationships that teachers and learning support staff have with their pupils are excellent and every pupil has a trusting relationship with at least one member of staff. The induction procedures for pupils and parents new to the school are very good. The needs of every pupil coming to the school are considered with individual induction plans produced to ensure children new to the school settle well and are able to progress from a very early stage. Initial part time attendance for some pupils is arranged where considered appropriate and parents are fully involved in any induction plans. The small steps teachers are looking for in pupils progress covers both their personal development as well as the academic development. Challenging targets that help develop pupils' confidence and self-esteem help them to cope better with everyday life. Pupils whose progress warrants their moving to a different type of provision are encouraged to do so by the school. Both pupils and their parents are well supported in any such transition. Older pupils receive good support in making choices about further education or other life opportunities.

34. Pupils are consulted about their views during the review process and teachers and learning support staff ensure pupils are consulted on a regular basis about individual likes and dislikes. However, the school does not currently have a forum, such as a school council for seeking pupils' views, to ensure they can influence aspects of school life that directly affect them. Many senior pupils, in particular, have sufficient ability to be given higher profile roles in the school.

Partnership with parents, other schools, and the community

35. Partnerships with parents are excellent and those with local schools and colleges and the community are very good. There are very good examples of provision for preparing pupils for the next stage of their development and for leaving school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school listens to what parents have to say, and has excellent procedures to make sure that parents are happy with the results.
- Very good day-to-day contact with parents is maintained and parents feel they are equal partners.
- The quality of information to parents is excellent.
- Parents give very good support to the school.
- Pupils have a wealth of opportunities to visit the local area and beyond.
- There are very good links with local schools and colleges.
- The links with support services provide pupils and parents with high quality preparation for leaving.
- Environmental activities help to enrich the curriculum and to provide stimulating and interesting teaching and learning.

Commentary

36. Parents consistently speak highly of staff at the school and consider that the school serves their children very well. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. The school operates an 'Open Door' policy and this enables parents to contact staff, or visit whenever they have concerns or need to talk about their child.

37. Most parents are as actively involved as possible. The school has developed very effective partnerships and encourages parents to help in school, to become governors, and to join the various support and fund raising groups. The school listens to parents carefully and they feel that their views are important and they welcome the support and advice from the high quality staff. For example, parents welcome the information and evaluation of their children's individual education plans and reports that provide ideas to consolidate school work at home. This means that the school provides very good opportunities for parents to share with school.

38. Parents' responses are very positive; they raise funds for resources that are used to improve the quality of education for their children. They join the Parent Teacher Association and the monthly support group. They also support community activities and concerts. Very strong relationships develop between families and the school.

39. Many pupils live some distance from school, but the school procedures are effective in ensuring that every family has good access to the school and information. Reviews do not take place without parents; the school ensures that all parents are able to attend reviews by offering flexibility in terms of appointments. A 100 per cent attendance is achieved, which is excellent. The reports that parents receive as part of the Annual Review process provide parents with excellent information to gauge the progress their children are making. The school is linked with a national pupil achievement system that compares the achievements of like pupils and this helps provide extremely accurate information on pupil achievements. Social workers attend, where appropriate. The depth of support at reviews includes access to college planners and help with careers through the excellent Connexions link consultant. These services encourage and reassure parents. All of this combines to provide a very effective and broad base of support for parents and their children.

40. Home/school contact books maintain contact; they are well used by teaching and support staff. The school has been used as an example of excellent practice in partnership by the local authority.

41. The school sends out regular information for parents, this ensures that they are aware of events that pupils have been involved in, and know what is planned for the future. The annual report of governors to parents meets all statutory requirements and gives parents clear information of school and pupil progress. The office staff keep careful watch and are so well involved that they recognise the voices of parents when they telephone the school. Staff support is very good; the specialist nurse maintains a close interest in sickness and absence. The school has produced an excellent prospectus for parents which addresses any worries parents may have before, during and after leaving the school. It also helps to explain how the school management will help to co-ordinate with many agencies to improve the quality of care at the school. These include speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, nurses, clinical and educational psychologists.
42. The level of consultation with parents is excellent. The school consults with parents on a regular basis about the quality of provision that pupils and parents receive. Recent questionnaires for pupils and parents clearly show a happy school with satisfied customers. For example, a senior pupil discusses confidently his work experience and life after school because he has received excellent support from colleges and Connexions. Parents respond very well to requests for support and many accept the responsibility of becoming school governors. Former parents, when interviewed, show the same enthusiasm for the school as the current parent group. This is excellent provision, carefully planned, with pupils needs clearly understood. This leads to very good planning for the future.
43. The school has very good links with the community. These are over and above the just fund raising efforts. Every pupil has the opportunity to experience local areas and beyond to increase and enrich their understanding of life outside of the school. The school works hard to link an excellent range of activities and adventures to motivate and challenge pupils. Pupils visit beaches, the local countryside and visit France. Many projects are reported in the local press and the school has received recognition for the excellent way in which they involve pupils with the environment and community around them.
44. Links with other schools and colleges are very good. Pupils attend a wide range of mainstream schools; they have a range of individual programmes which are designed to provide opportunities, when appropriate, to access social and teaching opportunities in both primary and secondary mainstream classes.
45. Secondary college provision is good, especially for those about to reach their nineteenth birthdays, and the Connexions staff input ensures that leavers are well informed.
46. The whole school provision is designed to effectively meet the special individual needs of all pupils. The pupils' first experiences are positive and every stage of their life in school is carefully and sensitively planned. The result is a smooth passage through school and onto the most appropriate provision afterwards. Individual consultation continues after school.
47. These excellent relationships enrich the daily routine and staff and pupils are inspired and encouraged to work towards providing personal development opportunities for every pupil.
48. Parents feel that all concerns are addressed. The feedback from pupils and parents questions indicates very high quality provision. This is clearly a very understanding school, everyone concerned does their utmost to listen and advise. The depth of support in every area, from therapists to lessons in mainstream schools makes it possible for every pupil to achieve at a very high level, every need is assessed and the information used to improve pupils life in school and afterwards. The management of these issues results in a hard working school where everyone is concerned about excellence.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

49. The leadership of the headteacher is **very good**. Together with an effective and supportive management team, they continue to further improve the school. The general management of the school is also very good and school governance is excellent. There is very good financial management.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher has a clear vision, a sense of purpose and high aspirations for the school.
- Very good quality staff have been recruited and a positive learning environment has been established.
- There is a committed and supportive teaching and learning support staff.
- The schools' own self-evaluation processes effectively support improvement.
- The school is well organised and efficiently run.
- Governors have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and are fully involved in strategic planning.
- The positive support and contribution made by the administrative staff and site manager.
- The role of all subject leaders is not yet fully developed in terms of monitoring the subject across the school.

Commentary

50. The headteacher is dedicated to ensuring that the needs of all pupils are met. He leads by example, as does the able deputy and they ensure the school day runs smoothly.

51. All staff present very positive role models for the pupils and reinforce the school aims and belief that, teaching, learning, care, support and mutual respect is at the heart of everything the school does. These aims, together with the mission statement of the school, are clear and they are successfully demonstrated within its community on a daily basis.

52. The deputy headteacher has a good grasp of curriculum development and takes a leading role in the school management team. All senior staff have a responsibility for Key Stage curriculum coordination and lead planning within groups of classes. Subject leaders have clear responsibilities and roles. However, their role could be further developed in terms of monitoring the subject across the school, to ensure the consistency of quality provision. The processes for school self-evaluation are well established and there is increasing analysis of useful recorded data that helps formulate strategies for improvement. The senior management team undertake effective whole school monitoring of planning, teaching, learning and pupil achievement and constructive feedback is given to staff for improvement. Performance management for teachers is well established and linked to school improvement and pupil achievement. The school is currently further developing the performance management procedures for support staff.

53. The school is very well organised and efficiently run. Day-to-day organisation and management is smooth and teaching and support staff communicate and support each other very effectively. There are clear procedures and documentation provided for staff is helpfully focused on what the school is about and how it operates. Induction procedures for new staff are very good and the well planned and relevant school based training also makes a significant contribution to the effective teaching and seamless teamwork of support staff.

54. Management of resources, including staffing and learning resources, is good. There are clear policies to guide the work of the school, which are successfully implemented, ensuring the school's focus remains on students' learning and their personal development and overall achievement. There is good support for the school from local education officers, both in terms of curriculum development and student support.

55. A positive learning and caring ethos has been created through very good management, which also contributes to the governance of the school, which is excellent overall. The governing body successfully fulfils all its statutory duties. Governors take an active part in strategic planning and decision-making and relationships between them and the school are very good. The governors receive, scrutinise and respond to regular monitoring reports from the headteacher and/or school staff. The chair of governors is also a parent of a current pupil and takes the responsibility very seriously. The chair and governors are proactively engaged in doing the very best they can. The chair has a very supportive and helpful relationship with the headteacher and school strengths and development areas are clearly understood. Governor organisation is effective, policies are regularly reviewed and there is a clear corporate view of the direction in which the school is developing. Governance is a strength of the school.

56. The school is committed to ensuring that all pupils are fully included in all opportunities and the needs of each are met and school policies promote this. Policies, procedures and practices related to all aspects of special needs provision are in place. The school's procedures for monitoring and recording pupils' progress are very good. There are excellent and constructive links with outside agencies and with specialists who work with the school to support pupils. All statutory requirements are fully met.

57. The headteacher, senior management team, governors and administrative staff work closely to ensure that best value principles are effectively adopted. The administrative staff and site manager provide a very effective and positive 'wrap around' service to the school and contribute positively to the overall ethos of the school, its public face and the care and support for the pupils and their parents and carers. There is very good financial planning and management; all policies are in place, controls are very good and overall the school is efficiently run. Pupil costs are low and considering the very positive pupil outcomes, the school offers very good value for money.

58. There has been good progress since the last inspection and the leadership, management and governance of the school is ensuring that improvements continue for the benefit of both pupils and parents/carers.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	1307644
Total expenditure	1291397
Expenditure per pupil	11370

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	11322
Balance carried forward to the next	16247

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING

SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE

59. The provision for English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make very good progress in developing communication skills.
- Teaching is good which enables pupils to make good progress.
- Very good links with parents encourage the use of signing and symbols at home.
- The subject is well led and the coordinator is clear of the further developments needed.

Commentary

60. Because of the emphasis which is rightly put on the development of communication skills, pupils are enabled to make very good progress in this area. This is an improvement from the last inspection when progress in communication was judged to be good. The use of sensory resources, signing and symbols to promote communication for all pupils is very good, Reading and writing are well supported by signs and symbols where this is appropriate. A teacher and nursery nurse are very skilled in the use of symbols and the picture exchange communication system (PECS) and have shared this with staff, including those who serve lunches. As a result, pupils continually develop their skills in communication. This is built on by the close links with parents, who are helped and encouraged to use the symbols at home, ensuring that pupils use these regularly. Similarly, teachers and a speech and language therapist work with parents on signing. Pupils with complex needs begin to make choices using symbols, and develop this use into short sentences. Some with the most significant needs, respond to their names by smiling, or greet others by pressing a switch. More able pupils answer questions, follow instructions and share their news. They extend their vocabulary and learn to take turns in speaking and listening.

61. Teaching is good, with many very good features, which enables pupils to make good progress across the curriculum and in their individual targets, an improvement from the last inspection when progress was judged to be satisfactory overall. Many teachers plan very well to meet the needs of all their pupils. Teachers make very good use of a variety of resources to engage pupils' attention and to bring meaning, for example, in listening to stories. Pupils with most significant needs are fully involved as all their senses are stimulated, for example, as they listen to the rime of the Ancient Mariner or to The Tyger. Teachers and learning assistants work very well as class teams. They have very good knowledge of their pupils and understand the ways in which they communicate and learn and so set appropriate tasks. Most are skilled in managing those with more challenging behaviours, for whom there are clear intervention plans. As all adults are aware of these plans, there is consistency in how these pupils are dealt with, so that they are enabled to settle quickly and return to their tasks.

62. Pupils have a developing awareness of reading, and many pupils understand how to follow the text when books are read to them. More able pupils read short sentences, following a reading scheme. Some are being helped to recognise the names of their peers or of the characters in their reading books, while those with more complex needs identify the symbols for the weather or the time table for the day. Writing skills are being well developed with some pupils making marks on paper or in sand, while others copy patterns. More able pupils copy under writing which they have dictated to an adult, copy short sentences from the board, complete information text through cloze exercises and are beginning to attempt some independent writing. They learn about writing for different purposes, for example in writing a class poem or in sequencing instructions. They learn about basic punctuation. Progress in reading and writing is further developed through the use of symbols as pupils learn to sequence them to make a simple sentence, or to give information. Many pupils use

these as a way into reading and writing, as they learn the symbol, then the matching word and eventually drop the use of the symbol. Support is also provided through computer programmes which provide text in both words and symbols. Other pupils use computers and word process their work.

63. The coordinator has a clear vision for the development of the subject. Since the last inspection there have been effective changes in the curriculum which ensure, for example, that pupils experience a good range of literature. Further developments are planned when the “Equals” curriculum is published. The use of PECS has been introduced, and this is strength of the school. The coordinator monitors the curriculum to ensure that all aspects are covered, provides training for colleagues, and monitors teaching. Pupils’ achievements in English are tracked using a locally developed assessment package, and the coordinator is supporting this well with examples of work at different levels.

Language and Literacy across the curriculum

64. The use of signing and symbols allows pupils to participate in all areas of the curriculum. Speaking and listening are well promoted as pupils are encouraged to listen carefully to what others are saying, and helped to respond appropriately. Key words are used in different subjects such as science, history and geography, so that pupils become aware of subject specific vocabulary, and many opportunities are taken to extend pupils’ vocabulary. Big books are used in subjects such as science to introduce topics. Writing is developed in different subject areas such as citizenship and religious education, with pupils being given opportunities to use both writing and symbols to record their work.

FRENCH

65. It is not possible to make a judgment on the provision in French, although, examination of school documentation shows that it is well planned for all pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 and for a small group of older pupils. This now meets requirements and deals with the issue at the last inspection when there were no opportunities for modern foreign languages at Key Stage 3. The subject was sampled and two lessons were seen during the inspection where teaching and learning were very good and excellent. The teacher is a subject specialist and plans very carefully to involve all the pupils. As a result, in the lessons seen, pupils made very good progress.

Example of outstanding practice

A lesson for a group of Key Stage 3 pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties

In this lesson, pupils were gradually introduced into the subject by music, the teacher wearing a beret, and by individual greetings in French. They were then taken on an imaginary ‘virtual reality’ journey to Paris. Starting from Waterloo station they heard the Eurostar announcements, the sounds of the train through the tunnel and the arrival at the Gare du Nord. All their senses were used as they were given experiences of life as it would be in Paris – they heard the sounds and music of the city; saw slides of major buildings; smelled the perfumes; felt the wind and water on the river; tasted French food. The responses were very positive with pupils showing a great deal of enjoyment of the various activities. They showed great awareness of the experiences, for example, of the change from lively music to quiet music, representing the visit to Notre Dame. At this change all the pupils stilled and listened quietly. The key to the success of the lesson was the detailed planning and the ‘virtual reality’ type exposure that helped pupils to experience in a sensory way, social life in France.

MATHEMATICS

66. Provision in Mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall teaching is good, and as a result, the achievement of pupils is good.
- The curriculum has been well planned and follows the format of the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS).
- Pupils enjoy the lessons and respond well to the imaginative use of resources.

Commentary

67. Pupils achieve well across a wide range of activities. They learn successfully about the sequence of the days of the week, shapes and numbers and, as they get older, start to apply their learning well to solve problems. Some pupils can use calculators and make simple measurements. Older pupils make good progress and achieve well following their accredited course. This provides them with the basic skills of using numbers and handling money, and teachers plan very well for them to put their skills into practice.

68. This good level of achievement is the direct result of good quality teaching. Lessons are well planned and have been very successfully adapted from the National Curriculum and the NNS and take full account of the special educational needs of all pupils.

69. Since the previous inspection there have been improvements in the mathematics curriculum and the subject coordinator has ensured that the National Numeracy Strategy forms the basis for the planning documentation. The plans outline the areas of learning for the varying needs of pupils and this provides a good basis for teachers to consider individual pupil targets.

70. Overall teaching is good, with some very good and excellent features in classes for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. In these lessons the teachers provide a vibrant learning experience and the relationships between the staff and pupils are very positive. Because the staff have a good understanding of the pupils' needs they expect them to participate and contribute fully to the session. A wide range of communication strategies are used, for example PECS, signing and symbols and these help the pupils to understand what is happening and what will come next. There is a very good use of songs and rhymes to reinforce counting from one to ten. The teachers are very imaginative and they provide the pupils with a stimulating learning environment with resources which support the current topic. Pupils were helped to understand the difference between heavy and light and long and short with a series of activities which involved holding and feeling objects.

71. In most lessons the NNS format is observed and pupils are very familiar with the format and respond very well to the structured lesson. In small group work, they concentrate well and show great pleasure with the resources which are presented to them, particularly for those pupils who require additional sensory stimuli because of their particular special needs.

72. The newly appointed subject coordinator has made good progress in the development of the subject. She is enthusiastic and knowledgeable and committed to ensure that all pupils will achieve well. Subject planning is monitored, although the co-ordinator is aware that a more rigorous approach needs to be adopted to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and the achievement of pupils across the school.

Mathematics across the curriculum

73. Provision is very good. Teachers take those opportunities that occur informally to reinforce mathematics learning in other subjects and in registration periods and lunchtime activities. Increasingly as pupils get older, opportunities are increased in lessons for practical applications to practice their knowledge and understanding.

SCIENCE

74. Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils in all age groups achieve very well and make very good progress.
- Teaching is very good.
- Teachers use very good assessment arrangements very effectively.
- The leadership of the subject is excellent.

Commentary

75. Pupils throughout the school, including post-16 students receive very good quality teaching, enabling them to achieve very well in a wide range of science activities. They increase their knowledge and understanding of basic scientific principles in areas such as the human body, heat and cold, the properties of materials, the growth of plants and the effects of various forces. Teachers use very effective methods to present science to pupils in a way which gains their attention and interest and promotes learning; investigations and experiments are particularly well used by staff to help pupils' understanding.

76. In a lesson with Year 2 pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties very imaginative, effective teaching stimulated the pupils interest in exploring materials. In an imaginary journey through water, wind and rain the pupils were able to hear bubbles, feel stones, look for fish, feel frog spawn and feel the wind and the rain on their faces. Teachers and learning support staff used music, lights, fans and water spray and the impact on pupils' interest and learning was very high. In another class with younger pupils, the teacher effectively used the National literacy strategy format of lesson planning to start the session with a 'Big Book' introducing the topic of senses. After a good discussion of taste, smell, touch and listening, the pupils worked in groups, some used the game 'Grannies Attic' to explore unfamiliar objects and others used the sensory room to explore light and sound. Due to the very good teaching, young pupils in these lessons were introduced to, and started to make sense of, some basic scientific principles.

Example of outstanding practice

Year 7,8 and 9 pupils undertaking scientific enquiry

In an excellent lesson with Year 7, 8 and 9 pupils studying the topic 'Earth and Beyond' pupils investigated how a rocket would be powered and launched and how the astronauts might be protected on return to earth. Using the air and water method of propulsion, plastic rockets were launched in the playground carrying payloads of small Easter eggs. The pupils showed fascination, delight and wonder as the rockets launched into the air. They were eager to know whether the Easter eggs had survived 're-entry' because they had protected them with cotton wool. This innovative, highly skilled teaching demonstrated to pupils by first hand experience, principles they had only ever seen in books or on TV.

77. Pupils with profound and multiple difficulties show great interest in the plants they are growing. They are interested in what happens to the seeds and bulbs and well organised activities enable the pupils to participate by feeling the soil, investigate whether a daffodil will change colour when dye is added to its water and open an Aloe Vera plant to feel the oil on the back of their hands. By various means, smiling looking and signing, the pupils show pleasure and understanding.

78. The older pupils in the post-16 groups continue to undertake study in science topics. In a very good lesson with year group 12 students with profound and multiple learning difficulties aged 17 and 18 they studied the effect of wind power as part of their project 'How Things Work' with in the post-16 'Moving On' curriculum. Very skilled and imaginative teaching allowed students to discover at first hand the effects of wind power. Using straws and table tennis balls, fans and hair dryers, pupils conducted experiments using the various methods to create wind power and move the ball across the table. A magical learning moment occurred when a profoundly learning impaired boy discovered entirely for himself that a table tennis ball could be kept in the air by the force of air from a hair dryer; the whole class (and staff) were very impressed and the impact on the learning of all the students was very significant.

79. A major contributory factor in the very good teaching and learning in science is the excellence of the subject leadership. Since the last inspection, all issues identified have been thoroughly addressed. A very effective assessment and recording system is now in place and the subject coordinator using her excellent knowledge and understanding has set in place a programme of scientific topics which meet the wide range of pupils' needs very well. There is a need to increase the monitoring of teaching and learning in the subject across the school by regularly observing lessons.

80. Good use of learning in other subjects enhances science lessons. For example, Big Book introductions, making tallies of data from experiments and using ICT to present information. The subject is now a significant strength of the school.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

81. The provision for information and communication technology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Information and communication technology effectively supports teaching and learning.
- Pupils' achievement is at least good.
- The leadership and management of the subject is very good.
- The very good use of computer devices enable pupils to communicate their needs.
- Information and communication technology effectively supports the work of other subjects.

Commentary

82. The use of ICT in its various forms, by pupils and staff to support teaching and learning, is a very good feature of the school. The equipment available is wide ranging, including switches and other communication aids, as well as sound and vision recording and playback devices.

83. Pupils engage in a broad range of activities that have been selected and modified from the National Curriculum to be relevant to their learning needs. Areas of work covered are very well designed so that pupils can build up their skills progressively at their own pace and make good progress. There is a strong emphasis on computers, but other aspects of information and communication technology are very well utilised. Pupils whose special educational needs restrict conventional access to computers use alternative input devices, such as touch screens and adapted keyboards and they too make good progress.

84. Pupils' achievements benefit greatly from the good ICT skills of the staff. Pupils develop their skills well in ICT lessons and also through their constant use of ICT throughout the school day in other subjects. Teaching is consistently good and this leads to good achievement.

85. Staff are enthusiastic about the use of the new resources such as the interactive whiteboard and digital cameras and they can clearly see the new possibilities these will provide in terms of enriching teaching and learning. The different aspects of ICT support the curriculum very well.

Images from the digital camera are used very well to assess learning and to plan further targets. This is good practice and ensures that the pupils' knowledge and understanding are being constantly reinforced and recorded.

87. The good work in ICT has been sustained since the last inspection. The school has a considerable number of new computers and has successfully kept abreast of new initiatives and has kept pace with the growth of the subject. An additional subject co-ordinator has been appointed who has a considerable knowledge and understanding of the needs of those pupils with PMLD; appropriate targets have been included in the school improvement plan to ensure that these pupils have access to switch devices which will enable them to control some aspects of their environment.

88. The subject is very well led and enthusiastically managed. Curriculum planning and monitoring ensures coverage of all aspects of ICT, while planning for individual needs and abilities has ensured pupils' achievement is at least good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

89. Information and communication technology is put to very good use in virtually all subjects, to motivate, engage and teach pupils. For example, in mathematics pupils construct databases and use their word processing skills as part of a literacy project. It is an integral part of most lessons, used by most staff with fluency and ease.

HUMANITIES

History and Geography

90. The provision for humanities is **good**. Staff work very hard to provide a wide range of role playing situations to make the subjects 'come alive' in number of sensory experiences.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is effective topic planning and work across other subjects.
- Teaching is good and sometimes excellent.
- Subject enrichment is very good through support staff and teamwork.
- Pupils have many opportunities to experience a very wide range of valuable activities.

Commentary

91. The quality of the subjects is dependent on the flexible and imaginative approaches to history and geography, blending them together in themes to provide interest and challenge. The school chooses to consider them together and the result is a strong delivery of important basic skills and opportunities. It was not possible to observe many lessons, but the planning of teachers and information from discussions with staff and pupils strongly indicate that pupils make good progress in their learning.

92. The attitudes of staff are positive and they work hard to find imaginative ways to involve all pupils. For example, the work on the French Revolution included every pupil, using their own sensory objects and then reinforced this with music and role play. Teachers and support staff work closely together to deliver aspects of the topics chosen to illustrate history and geography, such as differences in weather, islands, Victorian toys and local features. There are good examples of the use of local sources and sensory techniques in geography, for example, when the staff try an extensive range of schemes and plots to persuade pupils to drink from the coconut that they had just broken. Staff efforts were rewarded with the ecstatic reactions of the pupils.

93. Teaching and learning are good overall. There are examples of excellent teaching, particularly when staff take the opportunity to dress up to establish the topic and when pupils look and listen

carefully, for clues and join in when their part in the re-enactment arrives. This approach needs very careful planning and teamwork and staff use every sensory input possible to consolidate the messages, of for example, the French Revolution. The most effective teaching combines the elements of a range of subjects well. Very good use is made of the locality in sailing trips; these help to build confidence in pupils through the ranges of activities and experiences built around history and geography.

94. Staff use the targets within the individual education plans to build their lessons and this ensures that each pupil is able to take a part. In one lesson, signing was seen to be an important factor. Staff record details of progress, and it is clear that pupils are achieving as well as they can, especially in their social and personal skills.

Example of outstanding practice

Key Stage 3 pupils with PMLD in 'The French Revolution'

The staff team worked tirelessly to provide a wonderfully gory session, which everyone thoroughly enjoyed. The lesson was very well planned to meet each pupils' individual needs through a sensory experience. All pupils were able to increase their awareness of their immediate surroundings through their senses and through many subjects, including music.

Teaching was meticulously planned and every pupil was encouraged to take part through costumes and resources. The imaginative script was cleverly adapted and Baron D'Ofsted played his part. The lesson was underpinned by stirring music from Les Miserables and very careful preparation. Teamwork ensured there was an electric atmosphere ensuring every pupil was fully engaged using appropriately significant objects of reference. All staff understood every pupils' individual need and could identify and record even the slightest response. Pupils and staff all responded and celebrated with great glee. Exceptional teamwork contributed to the high quality resources that supported the lesson. For example, the site manager built the scary guillotine. A lesson which was rewarded by excited pupil responses.

95. Management continues to be good. There are some excellent opportunities to widen experiences and the planning to include themes and topics, is good. The subjects are well planned where the content of what has to be taught is well considered and the different approaches for age and ability are well highlighted.

Religious education

96. Provision for religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good and are enhanced by the school's good links with a Christian resource project.
- Pupils respond enthusiastically to their lessons and they achieve well.
- The broad and relevant curriculum gives pupils the opportunity to learn about several major world religions.

Commentary

97. The achievement of pupils of all ages is good. This is because lessons provide stimulating opportunities for pupils to learn about Christianity and other religions, including Islam and Hinduism, in ways that are meaningful to them, such as through drama. Pupils in Years 2 to 4 re-enacted the resurrection, showing deep respect as they laid 'Jesus' to rest in a cave. The awe on their faces as they rolled away the stone and found him missing was balanced by their genuine joy as he re-appeared to greet them from another entrance. As pupils move through the school they understand

that different religions have special books such as the Bible or Qur'an and that believers worship in different ways.

98. Visits, mainly to buildings of significance for Christians, help pupils understand that these are special places where important ceremonies such as baptisms take place. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 benefit, as do all pupils, from work which is linked to other subjects. For example, during science pupils investigated the difference of building a house on a foundation of sand or rock. The information and communication technology skills of pupils in Years 10 and 11 were reinforced as they researched the lives of Mother Theresa or Martin Luther King through the use of the Internet.

99. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are planned very well and are appropriate to the ages, interests and needs of pupils of all abilities. This is made possible by very good team working and the teachers' consistent use of effective communication that helps ensure pupils make very good progress. A class of more able Year 5 and 6 pupils maintained their concentration despite the repeated interruption of the fire alarm, because activities were interesting and the teacher's class management was excellent. Rules of Islam were played on a tape, dramatised, then passed from pupil to pupil like Chinese whispers, either by word of mouth, or by the use of symbols.

100. In lessons where the teaching was good, it was led by a highly proficient representative from a local Christian charity. Through the use of music, words, symbols and signing she told and helped pupils re-enact the Last Supper, which they did with reverence. This lesson could have been even better if the role of the class teacher had been more clearly established prior to the lesson. The lighting of candles and the playing of soft music often act as signals to pupils that it is time for calm and quiet before a collective act of worship. Those who wish, can reflect, lead or join in a short prayer. The high quality of teaching is the main reason why improvement in religious education since the previous inspection is good.

101. The leadership of religious education is good and management is satisfactory. The coordinator, a subject specialist, has ensured that teachers' planning is based on the locally agreed syllabus, but adapted to meet the needs of Mill Ford pupils. As yet, she has been unable to share her own very good practice or to monitor her colleagues' teaching, but is always available for support and advice. Although no areas for development have been identified, the coordinator has plans to formalise assessment.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

102. *Two lessons were seen in art and design, one lesson in design and technology, one lesson in music and eight lessons in physical education*

Art and design

103. It was not possible to make an overall judgement about provision as only two lessons were observed. However, it was possible from looking at pupils' work, photographic evidence, teachers' planning and through discussion with the co-ordinator to say that improvement in the provision in art has been good since the previous inspection. At that time it was observed that although pupils' progress was satisfactory, art lacked rigour in that its purpose seemed to be mainly decorative.

104. The achievement of pupils of all ages is good. It is clearly evident how ready pupils are, including those with complex needs, to experiment with a wide range of media to produce work of quality and interest. Linking work with other areas of the curriculum is motivating and helps pupils make sense of their world. For example, pupils in Years 1 and 2 collect waste materials and made a group junk collage after a visit to the re-cycling centre. Work on 'ourselves' and 'air and water' leads pupils in Years 3 to 6 to create life size bodies, and make mobiles and kites. More able pupils join with their mainstream peers to produce figure drawings using charcoal. Good information and communication technology resources are used creatively by pupils of all ages, but especially by older pupils. For example, they photograph people and places and then manipulate the images on screen until they achieve their desired effect.

105. Teaching and learning were good in the one lesson seen for pupils in Years 7 to 9. The very positive attitudes of cheerful staff motivated pupils to work hard on their 'Animated Art' project. This involved creating a short film using the puppets that had been made previously and demonstrated their very good information, communication and technology skills.

106. Leadership of the subject is good and management is satisfactory. The coordinator shares her enthusiasm and knowledge with the staff informally and ensures that they have the plans and resources to deliver a very good curriculum. However, she is not able to monitor teaching. The subject contributes well to pupils' cultural development, as was evident in the impressive whole school Dartmoor tapestry woven during the recent science week. However, pupils would benefit from experiencing the work of artists from a wider range of cultures. Assessment is good.

107. The school's effective and imaginative provision for individuals can be seen in the work of the art therapist. Careful selection procedures and very good liaison between staff, parents and therapist ensure that this is a positive and productive experience for pupils.

Design and technology

108. As only one lesson was observed during the course of the inspection no overall judgments were made. In a post-16 food technology lesson, students successfully prepared and made a variety of pizzas which they ate later that afternoon. Scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers lesson planning indicates that pupils undertake a range of activities with soft materials and in food technology and achieve well. Currently, pupils have few opportunities to undertake work with resistant materials due to lack of staff expertise and no appropriate teaching area; the design and technology area is currently out of use and is in close proximity to a room used for music therapy. Therefore, at the moment, statutory requirements are not being met.

Music

109. It was not possible to make an overall judgement about provision as only one lesson was observed. However, it was possible from looking at pupils' work, photographic evidence, teachers' planning and through discussion with the coordinator to say that very good practice has been sustained in music since the previous inspection.

110. Music is a strong, popular aspect of school life, many lessons begin and end with music to set themes and reinforce the atmosphere. Cross-curricular music, such as the songs of the day in circle time, enriches every lesson. Evidence presented over the last year, shows music to be strong in many aspects. These combine to provide some excellent public performances which increase the quality of music and they set very high expectations.

111. Pupils have accessed practical opportunities in Jazz and Junk bands and dance. These performances receive excellent reviews. One performance led to pupils meeting the Queen. Lessons and topics blend well together: the school actively plots excitement and challenge and the mixture of local, distinctive features really does promote learning in an active way. For example the blend of music, humanities and personal development when pupils travel on the Golden Vanity, work a traditional sailing vessel, learn about themselves and their environment, and learn to sign shanties. When asked about it, pupils enthuse and their recall is excellent.

112. Music enriches the life of the school and pupils really enjoy having the chance to perform. The school has developed a wonderful range of opportunities and pupils, staff and parents are delighted with the performances. Older pupils remember their sea songs; others join in beating time for group work, matching the teacher and helpers. Many opportunities are created each day and music is highly regarded by everyone.

113. The subject is well led and the range of curriculum opportunities is very good. The subject maintains a high profile and provides inspiration and opportunities for reflection. A number of pupils benefit from receiving music therapy, which is a well established provision.

Physical education

114. Provision for physical education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Activities are presented in imaginative ways that make good links to other areas of learning.
- Teachers and support staff have high expectations.
- All pupils are fully included and are encouraged to make choices.
- Activities positively contribute to pupils' personal development; pupils display confidence, have high self-esteem and work hard with sustained concentration.

115. Pupils make very good progress in physical education. The subject has continued to develop an exciting range of opportunities since the last inspection and it plays an important part in every pupils' programme of personal and physical development. Basic physical abilities and body management, such as running, jumping, climbing and balancing are reinforced through physical development sessions and gymnastic activities. Younger pupils move rhythmically to music, learn body part names, run, walk and learn to appreciate direction and space. They make very good progress because, thorough lesson planning is directly linked to the learning intentions for creative and physical development. Importantly, from this very early age they are encouraged to make choices and to take an active part in their own learning. Very good use is made of the PECS system of symbols and pictures to reinforce communication and pupil choice.

Example of outstanding practice

Year 1 pupils with complex learning difficulties and 'The Mexican Hat Dance'.

Conga music is heard coming from a classroom. Small children are seen wearing authentic Mexican hats; they are holding hands and with the teacher and support staff are moving to the music and singing along. This is the start of a 'bridge building' activity to help a class with a high proportion of young autistic pupils to anticipate their physical education session in the hall. The classroom door opens and the class start their slow single file conga along the corridor of the school, still moving and singing to the music, occasionally halting to acknowledge a passer-by. The conga passes through the school office, much to the delight of the office staff and through the headteacher's office. He is sitting in the corner of the room under a very large umbrella. The pupils seem not to notice and pass through and into the hall for their lesson which is equally imaginative, stimulating and thoroughly appropriate and enjoyable for the pupils. The activity has successfully communicated to the pupils that a physical education lesson is about to commence and they are fully prepared for appropriate participation.

116. Pupils continue to increase their skills in jumping, climbing, sliding and balancing all under the safe supervision of enthusiastic and supportive staff. Good use is made of the school hall in the mainstream infant school where two classes of pupils undertake their lessons. These pupils, along with others in the school, demonstrate good progression in their gymnastic skills and begin to successfully link their movements into sequences which they take great pleasure in performing to the group for assessment. For a number of pupils, physical education may include and involve therapeutic interventions. For example, very effective physiotherapy and/or hydrotherapy that meets an individual's need.

117. Students with mobility difficulties are not excluded from some very imaginative experiences.

Example of outstanding practice

Key stage 1 and 2 pupils with mobility difficulties. Wheelchair country dancing

English country dance music and the occasional vocal 'whoop' is heard coming from a classroom. This is the start of a truly wonderful experience for a class of seven wheelchair bound youngsters and their enthusiastic and energetic teacher and support staff. The next 45 minutes is a whirl of non-stop music, patterned movements, turns, stops, starts, increasing to more complex patterns and a real feel of being in a traditional barn dance. Pupils are given the opportunity of beating rhythms on musical instruments, brushing their faces against scented ribbons and practicing 'good looking' and colour recognition. This was a full sensory experience ending with a peppermint scented white parachute activity to calm the senses before returning to the normality of the classroom. Hugely enjoyable for the pupils (and adults) evidenced by the joint smiles, laughter and giggles.

118. Older pupils have the opportunity of attending circus skills sessions at a near-by secondary school. Here they learn and practice along side mainstream pupils. Activities include juggling, tight rope walking, uni-cycling, plate spinning and ribbon twirling. Pupils make progress in these activities during their practice and one particular pupil was extremely successful and skilled at plate spinning. These sessions positively support pupils' personal and social development and their confidence and self-esteem.

119. Pupils' achievements and progress in swimming are very good and for a number they are in line with national expectations. Their achievements are accredited by the Swimming Teachers' Association (STA). Very good support is given to less able pupils by teachers and support staff who go into the hydrotherapy pool and provide close assistance, inspire confidence, help pupils to relax, to experience buoyancy and begin to move independently. All health and safety matters are rigorously met and appropriate attention is given to aspects of personal and social education in terms of dressing and undressing.

120. There are wide range of outdoor education, residential adventures and leisure activities offered to all pupils and they play an important part in their overall personal and social development. A number of pupils are currently getting 'fit' to take part in the forthcoming Ten Tors trip. One pupil successfully plays for the city's disabled girls football team.

121. Teaching and learning are good overall. Occasionally teaching is very good or excellent. Planning is thorough, pupil outcomes clear and lessons successfully meet a wide range of pupils' needs. Relationships are excellent with excellent communication which is often supported by signing. Activities are challenging and expectations are high. Class management is excellent and teachers and support staff work effectively as a team. Pupils' behaviour is very good and they demonstrate their commitment to improvement and thoroughly enjoy their sessions.

122. The subject is very well managed. Pupil progress is effectively recorded by photographs, videos, certificates of achievement and review reports. The school is part of a sports cluster of five special schools and eight local feeder schools and is involved in a variety of sporting projects that often include an emphasis on team building and social development. There are also good links with local professional basketball and football teams.

123. A wide range of appropriate resources, including multi-sensory resources, are extremely well used to support learning. The school hall is inadequate for large numbers or for older pupils, but is effectively utilised. Overall, physical education is a great strength of the school.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

124. Provision overall is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are many opportunities throughout the school day which are designed to promote pupils' personal and social skills and which help pupils to make very good progress against the targets in their individual education plans.
- Teaching in discrete personal, social and health education lessons is good, with some very good features; as a result pupils make good and sometimes very good progress.
- The subject coordinator is clear about the improvements required in the subject, in particular, further development of the curriculum.

Commentary

125. The school appropriately places great emphasis on pupils' personal and social development. This is evident in many of the activities carried out during the day. These activities are carefully planned to enable pupils' to meet their personal targets, for example, by making choices of activity or of food and by learning to take turns and listen to others. Visits out of school, both during the day and for residential visits, enable pupils to learn how to behave in a variety of situations. For example, young pupils with complex needs were able to go to the supermarket restaurant, order food using symbols, and sit quietly to eat their food – a major achievement for many of these pupils. Adults give pupils as many opportunities as possible to develop independence, both within the context of lessons, and by giving them tasks to perform around the school.

126. Lessons are well planned to give pupils further opportunities to develop personal skills by, for example, thinking about feelings. Pupils are enabled to make good progress in these lessons because adults work well together to ensure that all are involved. The good use of assessment allows teachers to be clear about the progress which pupils are making and the next steps which are needed in their development. Where necessary, adults make very good use of signing and symbols to help pupils to express their views and feelings.

127. The subject coordinator has been in post for only two terms, but is clear of the developments needed to take the subject forward. The issues raised at the last inspection about the lack of health education and drugs awareness have been addressed, and the school is beginning the healthy schools initiative next term. The curriculum is to be further developed when the publication of the "Equals" scheme for pupils with severe and complex needs arrives and which will be used as the basis for the school's planning for the subject. There have been good developments in using the new assessment system to record pupils' progress, and the co-ordinator is looking carefully to ensure that progress both in lessons and in all other activities can be fully reflected in planning.

128. Citizenship forms part of the PSHE curriculum and is contributing positively to pupils' very good personal development. Planning identifies how and where units of work are to be taught within each key stage, depending on the needs of groups or individuals. Citizenship permeates all areas of school life with pupils from a young age becoming aware of what it means to be part of a community. They experience what it is like to be a member of a group, a class and a school. They are taught what behaviour is appropriate in public places and demonstrate it admirably on their many trips out of school, for example lunch in a local restaurant. They learn to take responsibility for their actions and increasingly to make decisions.

129. Although the school has no council, the views of pupils are sought formally through questionnaires and reviews and informally in many ways. Pupils in Years 7 to 11 gradually learn about earning and spending, banks and savings, looking after the environment, often putting the theory into practice, for example taking materials to the local re-cycling plant.

Post-16

130. Provision in post-16 education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students make good progress and achieve well in their accredited courses.
- Teaching is good overall and sometimes very good.
- Students show good signs of maturity and personal development.
- The arrangements for meeting the diverse needs of post-16 pupils are very good.

Commentary

131. Some students remain at school beyond statutory leaving age for one year as preparation for college. These students achieve well within their studies based around literacy, numeracy, ICT, personal development and vocational skills. Lessons were observed with these students while part of the senior class for students in years 11. These lessons, scrutiny of student's work and teachers planning and college arrangements indicate that they achieve well against the targets set for them. As part of this class they receive good, sometimes very good, teaching and fit in well with the younger pupils who have not yet reached statutory school leaving age.

132. The majority of those students who remain at the school until 18 or 19 years of age have profound and multiple learning difficulties and are based in two classes dedicated to their needs, (many are non- ambulant or have sensory impairments). These students make good progress and achieve well in the 'Moving On ' curriculum focusing on World Studies (i.e. science, design and technology, religious education and foreign cultures); life skills and vocational studies.

133. Students enjoy their programme of work and make good efforts to achieve well and please their teachers and support staff, for example as part of their work on foreign cultures, students were making a pizza. They had good understanding of the processes involved; they prepared the base and with help, chopped and sliced the vegetables and sausage for the topping. Because the teaching, (by a learning support assistant), was good they produced an attractive looking dish which was to be eaten at snack time. In another class, students as part of their topic on recycling working towards the 'Accreditation for Life and Living Skills' award, used photographs and fetched items from around the class room to identify recyclable items and place them in appropriate containers. As a result of the good teaching, the students have an understanding of the recycling process and showed they were proud to be involved in an adult activity.

134. They used signs and symbols effectively which gave them some opportunity to work independently. In this lesson and the lesson on the same project with a different group of students there was evidence of progress in their ability to match photographs and select the correct word from a list for example 'sort'. However, an opportunity was lost to challenge pupils more by for example, requiring them to do more than stick the symbol or word into books which had already been prepared for them. In a very good art lesson, students were working with a ceramics lecturer from the College of Art and Design (the parent of a pupil in the school) to develop their understanding of concepts such as touch and hold. Activities were purposeful and well planned. Students were able to feel the clay and were able to stack small pieces on their tray or table. They showed great pleasure in their achievements. The ceramics lecturer has been providing modular short courses to secondary age pupils at the school for a number of years.

135. Many opportunities are taken to use the local environment to develop students' skills and understanding in a variety of areas. For example, a group of six profoundly disabled students undertaking an ongoing project on electricity (which had previously involved visiting electrical departments in stores) visited the Virgin Megastore and sampled headphones, (which the majority of students found too loud) looked at DVD screens and computer games. Lunch was followed by Ten

Pin bowling in a public bowling alley. The activity was supported by two students from the local community college.

136. Staff working with the post-16 students are very caring and well organised and as a result the students are very relaxed and show pleasure in being at the school. The ongoing replacement of the 'Accreditation for Life and Living Skills' curriculum by the 'Moving On' accredited award would go some way to providing students with more challenging, but still appropriate activities.

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	1
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2
Value for money provided by the school	2
Overall standards achieved	2
Pupils' achievement	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	2
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	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	1
The quality of the school's links with the community	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2
The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	1
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	2

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