

INSPECTION REPORT

LUTON INFANT SCHOOL

Chatham

LEA area: The Medway Towns

Unique reference number: 118319

Headteacher: Mrs S Lythgoe

Lead inspector: Mr J Evans

Dates of inspection: 15 – 18 September 2003

Inspection number: 260586

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant
School category:	Community
Age range of children:	4 – 7 years
Gender of children:	Mixed
Number on roll:	286
School address:	Alexandra Road Chatham
Postcode:	ME4 5AP
Telephone number:	01634 843019
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs B Garratt
Date of previous inspection:	24 May 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- The school has received the following awards:

Basic Skills Quality Mark	2003.
Healthy Schools	2002.
- The school provides a breakfast club.
- Family literacy and numeracy projects have been run in the recent past.
- Children's levels of attainment when they start school in Reception have declined in recent years. They are now below average overall, and are well below average in communication, language and literacy. There is no nursery provision.
- The area attracts regeneration funding from central government.
- The percentage of children eligible for free school meals is above average.
- The percentage of children joining and leaving the school other than in Reception and at the end of Year 2 is above average. At the end of 2003, 25 per cent of the children then in Year 2 had not started in the school's Reception classes but had come from elsewhere.
- Most children are of white British origin. About 25 per cent are from a mixture of other ethnic groups. About six per cent speak a language other than English at home.
- The percentage of children on the school's register for special educational needs is broadly average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
20297	J Evans	Lead inspector	Special educational needs English as an additional language Science Information and communication technology Design and technology Music Physical education Personal, social and health education
9519	S Pritchard	Lay inspector	
12997	C Cheong	Team inspector	Foundation stage Mathematics Art
21059	C Power	Team inspector	English History Geography Religious education

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good school and it gives very good value for money. It is very well led and managed. Children start school with relatively poor language skills and this holds them back, making it harder for them to reach higher standards. However, by the time they leave school at age seven they do reach standards that are in line with those expected for their age. Teaching and learning are good and children achieve well in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- ❑ Leadership and management are very effective.
- ❑ There is a very good atmosphere for learning.
- ❑ Children's personal development is very good, in particular their sense of responsibility for their own behaviour.
- ❑ In many lessons there are too few opportunities for children to use and improve their language and communication skills, though there are some very good examples of this on which to build.
- ❑ In some lessons teachers are very good at continually assessing children's learning and showing them how to improve, but in others this is not done as effectively.
- ❑ The development of the curriculum is very good.
- ❑ Staff work together as a very effective team.
- ❑ The level of involvement of parents in their children's education is very good. Parents are very satisfied with the work of the school.

In recent years, the children's general level of attainment when they start school has fallen, meaning that they have more ground to make up before they reach the expected standards for their age. The school is at least as effective as it was at the last inspection in 1999, because standards at the end of Year 2 have been largely maintained despite the decline in what children know when they start school. Since the last inspection, children's attitudes to work have improved, the accommodation and outdoor facilities are better, and there are improved links with parents and the community. The effectiveness of the staff team has improved and is now very good.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 2	compared with all schools			Compared with similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
Reading	D	D	D	B
Writing	D	D	D	B
Mathematics	D	E	D	B

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
Similar schools are those with similar percentages of children eligible for free school meals*

Achievement is good overall, mainly as a result of good teaching and a good quality curriculum.

The table above shows that, although overall results are below the national average, these results are good compared to other schools in similar social contexts.

In Reception, many children start from a level that is clearly below average but they do make sound progress. Despite this, by the time they start in Year 1 many have not fully met the expected learning goals for children of their age. During Years 1 and 2 they make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics, achieve well and reach the expected standards for their age by the end of Year 2, but relatively few reach higher levels. The exception is in design and technology where standards are higher than those commonly found elsewhere as a result of the very good quality curriculum that is taught.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided is good. There are no unsatisfactory lessons. **Teaching is good.** Combined with the good innovative curriculum, this results in good learning enjoyed by children.

At the time of the inspection, the Reception children had only just started school (part-time) and were still very much settling in. The Reception lessons seen were all at least satisfactory and some were good. Lessons in Years 1 and 2 are always at least satisfactory, and there are many very good and some excellent lessons.

The quality of education is enhanced by the very good partnership with parents and the community and the very good standards of care and guidance for children.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The head and deputy lead a highly effective team of very committed staff who are passionate about school improvement and continually strive for excellence. The governors are very supportive, actively involved and provide effective governance.

PARENTS' AND CHILDREN'S VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very satisfied with the school. They support the school very well, often in very practical ways. They appreciate the commitment and hard work of the staff.

The children love coming to school. They feel happy and secure and enjoy lessons.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve further, are to build on the best practice found in many lessons and:

1. Provide more opportunities in all subjects for children to develop their language and communication skills so that they are able to express themselves more clearly and share their thinking in lessons.
2. Further develop teachers' skills for assessing how well children are doing during lessons so that they can help them to make continuous improvement in their work.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY CHILDREN

Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects

Achievement is good in the school overall. By the end of Year 2 standards in the core subjects are at the expected level.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in core subjects have been maintained in recent years, despite a decline in what children know when they start school.
- Children's good achievement is a result of the good provision made by the school.
- Children's relatively weak communication skills inhibit learning to some extent in most parts of the curriculum, so relatively few children exceed the expected standards for seven-year-olds.
- In Reception, children develop very good attitudes to work.
- Achievement in reading is particularly good.
- Standards in design and technology are above the expected level.

Commentary

3. Since the last inspection, standards in core subjects have largely been maintained, despite the fall in the level of attainment on entry. The school has achieved this by making good quality provision which is tailored to the carefully assessed needs of different individuals and groups of children. In particular, reading has improved recently as a result of the school's concerted efforts. However, the effect of children's weak language skills persists, and while they make up ground, it is nevertheless harder for them to succeed. This explains why relatively few children reach higher standards, despite receiving good quality teaching and a good curriculum. An example of this was seen in a Year 2 science lesson, where children had trouble explaining scientific ideas even though the lesson was of very good quality and had focused on teaching the vocabulary that was needed for the development of scientific understanding.
4. Compared to national figures, the school's results in Year 2 tests (English and mathematics) have been below average in recent years, but compared with results for schools in similar social contexts these results have been average up to last year, and are now better than that. In the recent past, the comparisons with similar schools reported in the Governor's Annual Report to Parents have given a less positive view of the school's performance. This was because results were compared to the wrong band of eligibility for free school meals. The correct picture is reported in the summary section of this report.
5. Children develop very positive attitudes to work and school during Reception, and this serves them very well when they begin Year 1. Achievement in the Foundation Stage is sound, with about ten per cent of children achieving well. Because overall levels of attainment when children start school are relatively low (especially in communication, language and literacy where standards on entry are very low), most do not reach the goals children are expected to reach by the end of Reception. Despite making sound progress, the majority are still below average when they start in Year 1.
6. An examination of the school's analysis of progress and attainment for individuals shows that children do at least as well as can be expected during their time in the school, and that the school adds value to children's learning. This is confirmed by the inspection findings and supports the judgement that achievement is good. There are no significant variations to this overall picture for the different ethnic and language groups within the school, or when the

achievement of girls is compared to that of boys. Children with special educational needs also achieve well.

7. Attainment in the other subjects of the curriculum by the end of Year 2:

Science: Attainment is at the expected level, though few children exceed this.

ICT: Attainment is at the expected level. There are signs that attainment is likely to rise given the recent improvements in provision and staff knowledge.

Art: Attainment is in line with expectations.

Design and technology: Attainment is above average; children achieve very well as a result of the enriched curriculum.

Religious education, geography, history, music and physical education: It was not possible to make overall judgements on attainment in these subjects. However, attainment in the lessons seen and in the written work inspected was at least average. Where it was possible to make more detailed observations on attainment these appear in the relevant subject sections in Part C of this report.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 2 – average point scores in 2002

Standards in:	School results	National results
Reading	14.9 (14.9)	15.8 (15.7)
Writing	13.9 (13.4)	14.4 (14.3)
Mathematics	15.5 (15.3)	16.5 (16.2)

There were 95 children in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

Children’s attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Children’s attitudes to school are **very good**. Children have **good** records of attendance and punctuality and their behaviour in school is **good**. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships between staff and children are highly effective and consequently children are happy and confident learners.
- The curriculum and the whole ethos of the school promote very good spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development.
- Parents agree that their children are always expected to do their best and that any misbehaviour is corrected promptly.
- The staff manage behaviour very well and this makes a significant contribution to the children’s very good moral and social development.

Commentary

8. Since the last inspection, the school’s focus on raising children’s self-esteem has resulted in their improved attitudes to learning. Children are keen to find out and do things for themselves. They are confident to experiment, to have a go and not worry too much about making mistakes. Over time, they gain in maturity and become relatively self-disciplined members of the school community. They know that they are responsible for their own behaviour. Children establish very good attitudes to learning in the Foundation Stage and this is of real value to them when they start Year 1. It helps them to achieve well.

9. Children with behavioural problems and complex personal difficulties are very well integrated into school life, which benefits all children. They are taught the difference between right and wrong and how they should behave. They learn how to share and negotiate. Staff intervene swiftly if there is a hint of aggressive behaviour. The children know this and understand that although some might find it difficult to behave well all the time, there are systems in place such as the 'worry-box' that help prevent minor disagreements from escalating. Although one pupil was excluded temporarily in the year before the inspection, the inclusive and caring approach taken by the school has successfully prevented any permanent exclusion from being made.
10. Children are taught to explore their feelings and appreciate success in all its forms. Their skills of co-operation are admirable. For example, in a Year 2 lesson on 'special places' every pupil had remembered to bring in a toy, photo or article from home that meant something special to them. Children enter into friendly conversation spontaneously and find much about themselves and their school to be proud of. The school has been successful in creating a harmonious community where children get along very well irrespective of their cultural differences or attainment. Very good community links allow children to build relationships with a wider range of people and add to their learning opportunities.
11. Parents are pleased that teachers are committed to making lessons interesting and enjoyable for their children. The attendance of children is good. It could be slightly better if fewer families took their children on holiday during term-time. However, the school takes effective steps to prevent the problem from escalating. Attendance procedures are strictly applied and parents promptly contact the school when their children are unwell.
12. The development of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness and understanding is very good. There is an emphasis on children learning to take responsibility for their own behaviour and this is very effective. The whole-school ethos reflects an atmosphere of mutual consideration and harmony.
13. Children's behaviour and relationships are good, both in school and in the playground. They show a genuine care for each other; all individuals are accepted and valued. Good moral values are demonstrated in the everyday life of the school. In some aspects of the curriculum, beliefs and customs are explored and discussed sensitively. The children are aware of different cultures and there are celebrations to mark major events in a variety of religions.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.7	School data	0.6
National data	5.4	National data	0.5

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

Exclusions

Ethnic background of children

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of children on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	209	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	2	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	4	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	64	0	0

The table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of children excluded.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a good quality education. Teaching is good. The curriculum is good.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children achieve well, mainly as a result of the good quality teaching.
- Teachers establish a very good atmosphere for learning.
- Teachers use an effective range of strategies to teach reading and writing.
- Children try hard and work productively as individuals and in groups.
- Teachers plan effectively together in year groups.
- In some lessons, teachers are very good at continually assessing and extending children's learning, but in others this is not done as effectively.
- In most lessons, there are too few opportunities for children to use and improve their language and communication skills, though there are some very good examples of this on which to build.
- Teaching assistants are well trained, well deployed and contribute effectively to learning.
- Homework is used very well to reinforce learning (reading in particular).
- Too little use is made of short-term individual targets in the Foundation Stage and in mathematics.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 41 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2 (5%)	6 (15%)	18 (44%)	15 (36%)	0	0	0

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

14. The overall impact of the good teaching is clear; children reach the expected standards at age seven, even though their attainment is below average when they start school. Teachers are very well led and focused by the senior management team who ensure that children's learning is always at the top of the agenda.
15. Throughout the school, teachers and teaching assistants successfully establish a very good ethos in lessons. Children respond well to this. They try hard to succeed and have positive attitudes to work and good self-esteem. They learn well independently and in pairs and as members of larger groups. This is an improvement since the last inspection where a lack of independent learning was identified as a weakness.
16. Teaching assistants make an important contribution to learning. They are well focused on the objectives of the lesson, know the children well, and in the best lessons provide very good models of language development, for example by using mathematical terms correctly when explaining ideas to children. They are clearly well trained and are deployed efficiently.
17. Teachers plan well together across the year groups. This works very well and ensures that there is a large degree of equality of provision for children. It also enables subject co-ordinators to monitor the curriculum more easily and to have input at the planning stage where needed.
18. Teachers use a range of methods for teaching reading and writing, recognising that different approaches suit different children. This is effective, and enables children to learn in the way that suits them best. Homework is effective, particularly for helping children to make progress in reading. This also helps to develop a productive partnership between home and school which promotes good learning.
19. The quality of the teaching overall for the Foundation Stage is satisfactory, with some teaching which is good (it should be borne in mind that the inspection took place when the youngest children had only just started school part-time). Early in the school year teachers create a calm, relaxed, yet work-centred ethos. Children are appropriately encouraged to be confident when leaving their parents, to take a full and equal part in activities and to talk about their learning. They develop very good attitudes to work. At the time of the last inspection, lack of opportunities for child-chosen tasks and the lack of independence was an issue. Now the teachers have a good balance between adult-led and child-chosen tasks and have put systems in place whereby children can work independently after planning with an adult, so good improvements have been made here. Methods used are satisfactory but, considering children's needs, too little emphasis is given to the area of communication, language and literacy. A good assessment system is in place. It is used from very early in the school year to identify children with special educational needs promptly and to record children's progress. Though target setting for children is well established, it is not currently being used to set small, short-term, achievable targets in key areas such as handwriting with individual children.
20. In Years 1 and 2, teaching varies between excellent and satisfactory and is judged to be good overall. The best lessons ensure that children have ample opportunity for language development, and teachers continuously engage with children to assess them, challenge them and help them to improve, for example by demonstrating how an idea can be expressed more clearly. In the less effective (but nonetheless satisfactory) lessons, these opportunities are not created often enough and children are given less guidance for improvement so their learning is not as good. This picture is found across all subjects to some degree.
21. Assessment procedures in Years 1 and 2 have recently been developed and modified. They appear to be thorough and effective but as they are still bedding in, it is too early to assess fully their impact. The assessment co-ordinator has a very thorough understanding of the issues involved and has effective monitoring strategies. Procedures are very detailed in the core subjects, but a good balance has been struck with the other subjects of the curriculum, allowing teachers to use their time most efficiently where it is needed.

The curriculum

The curriculum is good and meets the differing needs of children well. Accommodation is satisfactory. Resources are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good curriculum development and innovation has taken place since the last inspection.
- The school provides an enriched curriculum.
- Accommodation has been increased and improved since the last inspection, but some is still temporary in nature and many classrooms are relatively small.
- The staff make good use of the available space and resources are good.
- Children with special educational needs benefit from a well-modified curriculum.
- The school prepares children for the next stage of education well.
- The school provides effective personal, social and health education.

Commentary

22. The curriculum enables all groups and abilities of children to achieve well in all subjects. This includes children with special educational needs. All statutory requirements are met, including provision for religious education. At the time the school was last inspected the curriculum was judged to be good. This is still the case. Since the last inspection, staff have placed greater emphases on problem solving and independent learning, and these have been effective.
23. The curriculum for the Reception-aged children is good. Teachers plan a good range of activities across the six areas of learning for children of this age group. They are succeeding in developing a curriculum that is best suited to the children in their care by being innovative, such as with their use of techniques for planning and reviewing work with children each day.
24. Teachers in Years 1 and 2 constantly review and update their curriculum “map”, which is their master document, that lists all subjects and the steps that make up the children’s learning for that subject. This helps to ensure that children’s needs are met effectively. Also much good development and innovation has taken place since the last inspection to improve the curriculum of individual subjects. The impact of this is clear in design and technology. The school enriches the curriculum well, for example through weeks with a particular emphasis such as “Healthy School Week” or “Art and Book” week, and through projects involving outside agencies such as for art and design and technology. They also provide a very well-attended breakfast club.
25. The accommodation, while only satisfactory in size and amount, is used well by staff to deliver the curriculum. The outdoor space for the Foundation Stage is better than at the time of the last inspection. It now has a cover over much of it, enabling children to get more use from it. Resources are good. There is a good number of teaching and support staff to deliver the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

The school makes **good** provision for children’s care, welfare, health and safety. Children’s access to well-informed support, advice and guidance is **very good**. The school pays **very good** attention to seeking children’s’ views and acting on them.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children know that their views are valued and the school takes them into account.
- Children have very good trusting relationships with adults in the school.
- Induction arrangements are very good.

- Not all staff are fully aware of the formal procedures for reporting child protection concerns.

Commentary

26. The school breaks down many barriers to learning by establishing trusting and caring relationships between adults and children. As a result, children feel cared for, safe, secure, settled and ready to learn.
27. Mealtimes are used effectively to develop independence and consideration for others. Children pass plates and beakers politely, take turns and enjoy each other's company. They are taught to take care of their own hygiene needs and use their own initiative, for example by checking their faces in a mirror before setting off back to class.
28. Good procedures are in place to meet the requirement placed on schools to assess their premises for potential health and safety risks and to improve access for children with disabilities. First aid is dealt with well by a sufficient number of trained personnel. All staff know what to do in an emergency and are aware of the extent and type of aid and treatment they can give. Attentive supervisors keep a close check on the children's welfare. However, not all staff are sufficiently familiar with the arrangements for reporting concerns over child protection issues.
29. Children are given very good opportunities to express their concerns and to seek help and advice by talking to an adult in school. They know that staff always have time to listen and that no adult in school would ever dismiss or ignore an issue brought to them. They develop a good sense of equality and fairness in their dealings with the school and with each other, helping them work and play collaboratively. The school has thorough and effective systems for monitoring children's achievements and personal development. The curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE) makes a valuable contribution to the school's provision in this area. This is looked at in detail in Part C of this report.
30. Children see the benefit of a calm and orderly school and work hard to keep it that way. Their views on school improvement are actively sought and regularly forwarded, through class representatives, to school council. Making a difference to the school is a great confidence booster. Children take delight in seeing their ideas put into practice.
31. The school's arrangements for the induction, care, welfare, health and safety of children in the Foundation Stage are good. Relationships with adults are good, with children happy to stay with their teachers and leave their main carer. The outdoor play area has been covered over since the last inspection to allow for greater use. Overall safety arrangements are good, with parents bringing and collecting children directly from the classrooms.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The partnership with parents, the community and other schools has improved since the last inspection and is now **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships with families are very good. Staff listen to their concerns and are keen to support them.
- Staff and governors have a very good understanding of what services the school community wants and needs and find ways to set them up. Staff are skilled at motivating parents to attend courses that will benefit their children.
- Staff liaise very effectively with parents to share information about their children but better use could be made of the governors' annual report to celebrate the school's achievements.

Commentary

32. The school makes every effort to reach out to parents, to inform and to involve them in their children's education. This is a high priority for the school's leaders and governors. Links with parents start on a secure footing. Home visits are made and children's first days in school are carefully planned with a gradual introduction into school life, paving the way for a confident and happy start. Very good links are forged with the local playgroup. Children start school finding they can relate easily to their teachers and, as a result, parents have trust and confidence in what the school provides. Carefully structured parenting courses offer friendly, open and honest opportunities for parents to gain knowledge of how to encourage their children's early reading skills. Family literacy and numeracy courses have been run during the last school year when funding was available. They were well attended and popular, and parents and staff report a very positive impact on children's learning. Links with parents and the community have continued to improve since the last inspection.
33. The school's links with Reception children's parents are good, with many parents stopping to talk to teachers and other staff when they deliver and collect children. Parents receive satisfactory written information about how to help their children at home.
34. Parents admire the way the school is led: *"I have great confidence in the headteacher; she is enthusiastic and supports staff and children very well"*, and the quality of the teaching: *"the school always does new things to stimulate the children; these are well prepared"*. High-quality liaison with parents, particularly with those whose children need extra support, underpins the good teaching.
35. The atmosphere as parents arrive with their children is warm, welcoming and stems from the cheerful and friendly approach of the staff. A breakfast club facility helps manage morning routines. This is well managed and has proved very popular with children and parents. Newsletters, noticeboards and simple record books support informal chats between parents and staff. Regular consultation evenings, target sheets and informative reports ensure that parents are made duly aware of the next steps their children need to take in their learning. The annual reports written by Reception teachers are particularly telling because they use phrases recorded from the children themselves. *'When using the 123 CD-ROM, she was heard to shout, "I've got it!" (counting objects from 1 to 7)'*. Quotes such as these illustrate to parents the pleasure their children get from learning and achieving.
36. There are very good links with the adjacent junior school. The two schools support each other, sharing resources and information. Governors are keen to promote the school and its successes. Although their annual report covers most of the information it has to, more use could be made of it to tell parents how and why some things in school are better than they were. A strong desire to 'give something back' has resulted in a number of parents of former pupils continuing to support the school as governors and other equally willing volunteers. Staff and governors are very good at identifying and enticing into school those in the community who have the necessary skills and expertise to enhance their work.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management are **very good**. The leadership of the headteacher and other key staff is **very good**. Management is **very effective**. Governance is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is reflective and finds creative approaches to maximise children's achievement.
- Management is confident and well informed; senior managers are perceptive and responsive.
- The school is committed to the personal development of everyone.
- The whole staff team are highly motivated and are actively involved in planning for school improvement based on a sound understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Governors are very well informed and provide strong support.

Commentary

37. The headteacher makes a considerable contribution to the education of all children in the school. She gives clear direction and has a strong sense of purpose. Every adult and child is valued and given opportunity for personal development. This is reflected in the life and work of the school. The headteacher has a very effective partnership with the deputy headteacher. They have established a climate in which innovation is encouraged and all adults and children look for creative ways to achieve excellence. The staff team strive continuously to improve what they are already doing. They are analytical and self-critical and readily make adjustments to ensure that all children are independent learners and enjoy themselves. The overall effectiveness of the staff team has improved since the last inspection to the currently very good levels.
38. The school's leadership team undertakes a detailed analysis of the data that the school holds on individual children's attainment and progress. As a result of this, individuals and groups of children are taught specific programmes that will enable them to improve. The analysis also leads to whole-school activity that will raise achievement levels. The school has developed similarly effective strategies for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. This has resulted in, for example, an increased emphasis on practical tasks that allow children to use and apply previously learned skills in different situations. The overall impact of this very effective leadership and management is that the school has maintained standards in recent years, even though there has been a marked decline in what children know when they start school.
39. The school places great emphasis on developing the skills and knowledge of its community. Opportunities are extended beyond school-based personnel and are offered to parents, governors, student teachers and young people on work experience placements. It makes very good use of all adults' and children's expertise, interest and flair. This intense level of investment results in high team morale and enhances children's experiences as they move through school.
40. The governing body is fully involved in the work of the school. A strong sense of collaboration is growing in the school's team approach to strategic planning and agreeing policy. There is an ongoing review of progress towards set targets and standards achieved. Governors are well informed and use their information well to challenge and support the senior managers. They have a strong sense of purpose as they strive to meet the needs of the community.

41. The school uses its budget well to support learning and ensures that purchases are cost-effective and based on the principles of best value. The school provides very good value for money.
42. The leadership of the Foundation Stage is very good, and management of it is good. The co-ordinator is very strongly committed to the improvement of early years education in the school. The importance of this, especially considering the low attainment of children when they start school and the lack of nursery provision, is well understood. She and her team are very keen to learn from best practice elsewhere. The steps she has taken since the time of the last inspection have helped to improve the department considerably. There is a strong sense of direction and will to improve among the close team of staff. The management of the Foundation Stage is good, with teachers co-operating well to plan jointly.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	688,842.00	Balance from previous year*	97,400.00
Total expenditure	696,739.43	Balance carried forward to the next (includes £16,109.00 from capital fund)	105,611.57
Expenditure per pupil	2345.92		

** The school originally budgeted for the full cost of improvements to the accommodation, but this was ultimately paid for by the local authority, leaving the school with more funds at the end of the year than anticipated. This explains the large balance carried forward.*

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

The school provides a sound education for children at the Foundation Stage in all areas of learning. The children start school with standards below the average found nationally and with communication skills very low. They make sound progress and about ten per cent do better than this, but when they start in Year 1 the majority of children have not achieved the Early Learning Goals (the targets for children nationally for the end of their Reception year).

Since the last inspection the school has made good improvements to the education that the first classes in the school provide.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children develop very good attitudes to work.
 - Children develop good self-esteem and confidence in themselves as learners.
 - Although progress is sound, children do not make enough progress in communication, language and literacy to compensate for their low standards when they start school.
 - Better use could be made of precise targets for individual children in key areas of their learning.
 - Methods to introduce parents and children to school and classroom life are good.
 - Leadership of the Foundation Stage is very good.
 - Classrooms are colourful and welcoming and good use is made of the available space.
 - A good balance is achieved between adult-led and child-initiated activities, within a good curriculum.
43. At the time of the inspection the Reception children had only just started school part-time and were still settling in. Two of the four Reception classrooms were in use with children attending school for half-day sessions during the inspection. In addition to the inspection of the current Reception classes, the overall judgements on attainment and progress for this stage were informed by observing the standards and achievement of the new Year 1 children who were in Reception classes last year (2002-2003). Judgements on attainment and progress are supported by the school's own assessments and monitoring of children.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

44. The personal, social and emotional development of the children is taught satisfactorily. Staff work hard to make the children's early days in school calm, happy and purposeful. As a result, children are keen to come to school, and enjoy choosing challenges from a selection provided for them. Teachers use time wisely to explain class rules and routines carefully, and answer children's questions appropriately. Staff provide a good range of activities that encourage children to play and work together and form good relationships. Occasionally, newly arrived children lack awareness of how to behave in the classrooms and a too narrow range of strategies is used by staff to correct this. Children starting in Year 1 show that, during the previous year, they have developed good levels of confidence and self-esteem and very good attitudes to work as a result of the good quality curriculum in this area.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

45. Children's achievement is satisfactory over time. However, the very low starting point for this area of the curriculum means that by the time children transfer to the Year 1 classes too few are able to form letters correctly, such as in their names, or communicate in writing to an acceptable level. As a result, most children currently starting in Year 1 have relatively few skills in reading, writing, handwriting and spelling of key words and understanding of phonics. These

children also lack skills in talking and vocabulary. The Foundation Stage staff use some effective methods. They encourage speaking and listening in small groups and at reporting back times. However, this area of the curriculum needs to be given more constant attention and be a greater priority over the whole year.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

46. Children make satisfactory progress in their mathematical development from a lower than average starting point. When they move to the Year 1 classes, however, many have not achieved the standard expected nationally. Early in the Reception year, most are starting to show an interest in numbers and are beginning to count small groups of objects and join in with number rhymes. Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers provide suitable activities such as counting as they clap, or counting objects, as well as developing their mathematical concepts through child-chosen tasks, such as filling containers or counting numbers of toys that land in a hoop. Teachers and teaching assistants often check children's understanding well by observation and questioning. They have a good system for recording these small steps of progress.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

47. Children are making satisfactory progress in this area of the curriculum from a lower than average starting point. So, by the time they start in Year 1 their knowledge and understanding of the world around them is still below average. Staff provide suitable opportunities such as toy cars, a garage and a road mat. Adults sometimes join in and extend children's play and understanding well, such as by helping children to unpack big bricks from a "lorry" or accepting an invitation to have "gravy" for dinner in the playhouse. Information and communication technology is very well used.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

48. Since the last inspection some good improvements have been put in place to aid physical development, such as the addition of a cover over the outdoor play space, enabling it to be used for more days in the year. Better equipment and toys have been purchased to develop physical skills. Also, formal playground playtimes have been changed to allow children to be able to use the toys and equipment daily.
49. Satisfactory teaching is leading to satisfactory achievement for the full range of ability. Children start with levels of physical development in line with most children for activities such as running and moving safely round the playground on bikes. In contrast to this, their starting point at the beginning of the year and their standards at the end of the year in fine movements, such as those needed for drawing and writing, are below average. Teachers appropriately help children to handle tools carefully and give due attention to health and safety.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

50. The teaching of creative development is satisfactory. They enter school with standards below those generally found. By the time they enter the Year 1 classes, many children are likely not to reach fully the expectations of the Early Learning Goals for this area of learning. They achieve satisfactorily. The philosophy adopted by the school to improve independence provides well for this area of the curriculum as it gives children easy access to materials for activities such as painting and dressing up. As a result, children are quickly learning to choose activities and equipment for themselves and use them to develop their creative skills. They are encouraged to sing simple songs, experiment with musical instruments, to keep to a rhythm and try hard to mix colours for themselves.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGE 1

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good, especially in reading. Children enjoy learning, which is fun; opportunities for active involvement are plentiful.
- The systematic approach to teaching phonics as well as a range of other teaching strategies has helped to raise standards in reading and writing.
- In many lessons there are too few opportunities for children to talk in ways that enable their language and communication skills to be extended and developed.
- Individual and groups of children work through a variety of additional programmes specifically designed to meet their needs. These are effective.
- There is insufficient challenge for more capable children in a few lessons.
- Leadership and management of the English curriculum are very good.

Commentary

51. Teaching and learning in English has benefited from considerable recent development and as a result achievement is good and standards at the end of Year 2 have reached the expected level. From a level that is below average when they start Year1, all children make good progress in reading and writing; the least able children make very good progress. Children's speaking, listening and handwriting skills are less well developed but overall standards are sound.
52. Literacy and language development are an appropriate key focus for improvement across the school because when children enter the school they have relatively poor language and communication skills. The school has extended and enhanced provision to include activities and programmes such as spelling investigations, precision teaching that supports the immediate needs of individual children, 'Write Dance' and 'Phono-Graphix'. These programmes are offered so that children can learn in a way that suits them best and are in addition to the range of intervention and support programmes provided by the National Literacy Strategy already effectively implemented by the school. Children enjoy this variety of approach and more readily apply their newly found skills to help them read and write unfamiliar words.
53. All key staff members have been trained in teaching the phonics programme so that there is consistency for the children. This systematic approach takes children forward in their learning in manageable steps and is impacting well on standards in reading and writing. Standards in reading have risen significantly. The subject manager is continually monitoring gains in learning and has plans to evaluate the success of the programme by reviewing the rate of progress made by different groups of children. This structured approach to teaching phonics is a major improvement since the last inspection.
54. Lessons seen were of variable quality ranging from satisfactory to very good. In the better lessons, teachers effectively used a range of strategies to model reading and writing for children. They demonstrated how to create and rehearse sentences before writing them down and how to check that sentences made sense. Children were then able to construct a simple sentence and independently record it, selecting the writing tool and paper. Classroom assistants analysed texts with children, asking probing questions and modelling the reasoning process whilst at the same time checking children's understanding. This interaction aided learning and developed skills that children can use when next reading a new piece of text. Adult assistants contributed very well in the independent activity sessions within the lesson, keeping children well focused and involved.
55. The less effective lessons were primarily when handwriting skills were being taught and when groups of children were being guided in their reading. In these lessons, the intended learning

was not always clear and tasks were repetitive, unstructured and at times dull. There was little to challenge and interest the more able child. In several lessons children made less than good progress because their understanding of key ideas and skills was not sufficiently checked throughout the lesson. However, there were no lessons that were less than satisfactory.

56. In many lessons, both in literacy and other subjects, children are given opportunities to talk. In lessons seen, they enjoyed talking in pairs and to a neighbour when working on a set task. However, in many cases there was not sufficient focus on learning which specifically develops and extends children's spoken language and communication skills. Teachers do not consistently model interesting and more complex vocabulary and sentence structure. For example, when taking comment and feedback from children at the end of the lesson, they do not always ask for clarification, exemplification or more detail, meaning that opportunities for language development are missed. However, children are given practical, oral activities that motivate them to compose in readiness for writing. For instance, a small group recorded their sentences in a tape recorder. Another group created a story together.
57. Leadership and management of English are very good and are clearly influencing improving standards. Monitoring and evaluation of what is offered to children and the eventual outcomes in learning are informing and shaping developments. Whole-school targets are set in writing and then layered for children of different abilities. This results in children working at a level that is appropriate to what they already know, can do and understand. The subject co-ordinators are knowledgeable about aspects of the subject and are very enthusiastic. They strive to maintain literacy and language as ongoing priorities.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

58. There is effective use of language and literacy in other subjects. When planning for learning, teachers consider how to provide relevant opportunities for children to practise and apply reading, writing, speaking and listening skills across the curriculum. In one lesson, children listened to a 'talking book' on a laptop computer. In another, children performed body movements to make letter shapes. In most parts of the curriculum, children's limited language and communication skills are a barrier to learning which prevents them from making the most of opportunities to engage in solving problems and expressing their views and ideas.

MATHEMATICS

Provision for mathematics is **good. Results are improving. Standards are better than similar schools.** Children achieve well. This is a better picture than at the time of the last inspection, where, although the standards were similar, the attainment of children on entry to the school was higher. Results are good when compared to schools in similar social contexts. When compared to schools nationally, the standards are similar for the number of children achieving the expected level but fewer achieve a higher level.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good. Some teaching is excellent.
- Management and leadership is strong.
- Staff undertake good analysis of strengths and weaknesses in the subject and use the information well to raise standards further.
- Good opportunities are given to children to solve problems and work independently. This was a key issue at the time of the last inspection and has now improved considerably.
- Children's knowledge and understanding of mathematical vocabulary in some classes is weak, so their ability to articulate their understanding and to develop concepts is restricted.
- In some lessons, not all children take part fully in whole-class teaching sessions.
- Children lack short-term individual targets that they understand.

Commentary

59. Standards for seven-year-olds are in line with national expectations. This shows that, over their time in the school, children make good progress from a lower than average starting point. This is due to the lively, good and sometimes excellent teaching that children receive. Children with special educational needs and English as an additional language are well supported and make progress at a similar rate to their peers. The excellent teaching seen is found in Years 1 and 2.
60. A key issue at the time of the last inspection was that children lacked the ability to work independently. This has been addressed very well in mathematics by a much greater emphasis on problem solving. This is both within lessons and by 'problem of the week', a weekly open-ended question that children work on for homework and then share and compare their results at the end of the week with the whole class.
61. In Year 2, children have a satisfactory knowledge of adding and subtracting numbers to 20, and many can recognise odd and even numbers. They enjoy playing games to reinforce their knowledge. By the end of Year 2 a very few are starting to understand multiplication. In other areas, such as shape, their understanding is more limited, with the younger children finding the identification and properties of two-dimensional shapes hard early in the school year. The current school-wide targets are to do with money, as their analyses show that children find money work hard.
62. Teaching overall is good, with some excellent teaching. This is better than last time the school was inspected. Where there is excellent teaching, children's mathematical understanding is developing very well indeed. Here children are fully engrossed in the lesson and are constantly kept working by very good methods to ensure that all children want to play a full part in the lesson all the time. Behaviour is very good then too. In a Year 2 class observed, a fast-paced game involved children having to work with a partner to suggest clues to a pupil wearing an unknown number on his hat. Here, because of the very strong teaching, constant reinforcement and reminders about vocabulary, children are using the correct words and are developing their mathematical understanding very well as a result. Also the teaching is tightly focused on the children's level of need by the way assessment is built in. In a few lessons children do not take part fully and teaching does not ensure that relevant vocabulary is close to hand, visible and understood. Some highly effective use is made of information and communication technology in lessons.
63. The mathematics curriculum is broad, balanced and is of good quality overall. Whole-group and sometimes individual targets are set, which is good, but children are not sufficiently reminded what their target is or what they need to learn for quick recall.

64. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The co-ordinator is given time to monitor teaching and gives feedback to other staff on a regular basis. The school has good systems in place for the monitoring of planning and test results. The co-ordinator uses the data from national assessments well to analyse overall weaknesses and trends and set targets for improvement. The school has a good assessment and record-keeping system and good resources for the subject.

Mathematics across the curriculum

65. Children use their mathematical skills well in other subjects, for example in design and technology when they use measuring skills.

SCIENCE

Provision for science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is well structured and very well planned.
- Achievement is good.
- ICT is used very well in some lessons.
- Children have difficulty articulating scientific ideas and explaining their thinking.

Commentary

66. Provision is effective. The good quality curriculum is taught well and this results in good achievement. Children make good progress from a below average start at the beginning of Year 1. By the time they finish in Year 2 nearly all reach standards that are in line with the expected levels for their age. Despite the sometimes very good teaching, few children reach higher levels of attainment because their language skills are limited and this is a barrier to learning. This was illustrated clearly in a very good Year 2 lesson, where, despite the teacher's clear focus on the correct use of scientific language and her skilful questioning, at the end of the lesson even the most capable children had trouble explaining the difference between natural and man-made materials. Although this is a challenging task for children of this age, it was clear that their lack of confidence in language made it harder for them to make progress in science. At the time of the last inspection overall attainment was judged to be above average, but since then, the standard of children's language development when they start school has fallen. This explains why fewer children now exceed the expected levels for their age.
67. ICT is used well to support learning. The school's new laptop computers are employed to good effect to challenge children and to extend their thinking. The resources for the subject are of good quality and have a direct impact on the quality of learning. The subject is managed well.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Provision in information and communication technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very effective.
- Standards are set to rise.
- Curriculum quality and planning are good.
- There are still slightly too few computers for the number of children in the school.

Commentary

68. Achievement is good. Standards of attainment at the time of the inspection were in line with those expected for the age of the children. It is likely that they are set to improve further, considering the recently revised good quality curriculum and the recently enhanced level of staff skills in ICT. Standards are similar to those reported at the last inspection, but since that time there have been major changes to the curriculum requirements. The school has responded well to these changes and has maintained standards despite a decline in what children know when they start school.
69. This success has been as a result of well-informed and clearly focused leadership and management and successful staff training. Despite recent purchases there are still slightly too few computers to the number of children (government targets are currently for a ratio of one computer to every eight children and the school has about one to every ten). Equipment is used very well by teachers. In particular, the new portable computers are deployed well.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

70. ICT is used well to support learning in other subjects, especially in English, mathematics and science.

HUMANITIES

Insufficient work was seen during the inspection to form overall judgements about provision, standards, teaching and learning in history and geography.

71. The quality of the history curriculum is good. Children report that they enjoy lessons in history and talk happily about key events and the ways in which people's lives were different in the past. The school makes good use of the immediate locality to enhance and enliven the curriculum, for example when studying homes and houses.
72. In the one Year 2 history lesson observed, children were beginning to identify people from the past who are famous. They showed empathy with people who are blind. The activities were of an exploratory nature and captivated children's interest and imagination. Standards were in line with those expected at this stage.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A practical approach secures children's understanding.
- The subject contributes well to children's spiritual development.

Commentary

73. The school teaches the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Because of the limitations of the scope of the inspection it was not possible to make an overall judgement on standards. However, two lessons were seen in Year 2 in which standards were at least satisfactory and were very good for some children. Children achieved well because teachers have good subject knowledge and focus learning effectively on the planned objectives for the lesson.

74. Year 2 children worked together as they learnt about the Hindu faith, each child offering something that was special to them to the class "shrine". Quiet reflection and spontaneous talk enriched the experience for everyone. The opportunities provided enabled all children to engage, and to develop spiritual awareness as they began to understand the nature of worship.
75. The quality of the religious education curriculum is good. Learning has been mapped out to ensure that all aspects are appropriately taught and in a way that makes connections to other areas of learning. Strong links exist with Christchurch Church in Luton and children visit the church for talks and tours. Varied and interesting resources aid children's appreciation of ceremony and celebration.
76. The leadership and management of religious education are very good. The co-ordinator has a good knowledge of and empathy with the subject. She effectively supports colleagues to deliver an interesting and relevant curriculum. Resources and artefacts develop children's knowledge and aid understanding. Achievement is monitored against the level descriptors in the Medway Syllabus and evaluations are used well to guide teachers' planning.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

77. No lessons were observed, but completed work from the previous school year was inspected, as was planning. Children's work shows that, by the end of Year 2, overall achievement is very good. Many reach higher standards than those expected for their age because they benefit from a very good quality curriculum which is enhanced in interesting and innovative ways. For example, the school took part in a local competition promoted by the Medway Education Business Partnership in June 2003. The children designed and made wheeled vehicles which won them an engineering and technology award. The subject is very well led by the co-ordinator who has great enthusiasm for it. Her involvement of the children in outside challenges has clearly brought benefits.

MUSIC

78. Only one Year 2 lesson was seen during the inspection, so overall judgements have not been made. However, in the lesson seen, children made good progress from a low start as a result of well-planned teaching and the very good management of the lesson. Their achievement was good and the standards reached by the end of the lesson matched those commonly found for their age. The curriculum is of good quality and is enriched by a recorder club and children's participation in the Medway Towns Music Festival.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

79. Too few lessons were seen to make overall judgements. Dance lessons were seen in Years 1 and 2 and a games lesson was seen in Year 2. Children achieved well in all three as a result of good teaching and learning featuring the common threads of good planning and clear focus on lesson objectives. In some instances, teachers gave children scope to use and improve their language skills in the context of the lesson but, overall, these opportunities were too few. Standards were in line with those commonly found for children of their age, with some Year 2 children showing good standards of ball control for their age. Children behaved very well in all three lessons and showed interest and enthusiasm.

ART

Provision in art is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Curriculum quality and planning is good.
- Children's achievement is good.
- Leadership and management is effective.
- There is good enrichment of the curriculum.
- Currently too little focus is given to observational drawing in some classes. The school has plans in hand to correct this over the coming year.

Commentary

80. By the age of seven, children are likely to achieve well as a result of good teaching, very good planning and a good curriculum which is enriched by an art week each year, visiting artists and other whole-school art projects. Standards of attainment in art and design are in line with national expectation for seven-year-olds. This is the same as the last time the school was inspected. This represents good achievement from a lower than average starting point. Planning for each year group identifies units of work and skills that will be developed as children undertake the work. The current whole-school system for assessment is straightforward and satisfactory. Children are given good choices of approaches and materials that they can use from a wide range provided. For example, in the one lesson seen children explored patterns and textures on the school building and chose whether to record it by rubbings, with toy bricks (for the brick patterns), or to help with a large collage. The subject is well managed. The co-ordinator is clear about what is needed to raise standards further and she has good plans for this coming year to address children's lack of observational skills in some classes. Resources are good.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (PSHE)

Provision in personal, social and health education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children are more confident learners as a result of the good provision because they develop very good levels of confidence and responsibility. This helps them to achieve well in all subjects.
- The curriculum is good.
- Teaching is regular and planned, but is also built in to the school's ethos.

Commentary

81. PSHE is a high priority for the school. The school's leaders and managers realise the importance of this area of the curriculum for their children and ensure that good provision is made. The most noticeable result is that children grow rapidly in self-esteem, accept responsibility for themselves and become confident learners. This has a direct and positive impact on their achievement in all subjects. The curriculum is well planned and enriched, for example by Healthy Schools Week, and the messages are continually reinforced in the daily life of the school. Requirements are met for drugs and sex education. There are regular PSHE sessions in the weekly timetable. Children respond well to these and enjoy them.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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