

INSPECTION REPORT

THE WILLOWS FIRST SCHOOL

Milton Keynes

LEA area: Milton Keynes

Unique reference number: 110379

Headteacher: Mrs Pauline Pickard

Lead inspector: Mr Chris Rhodes

Dates of inspection: 07 - 09 June 2004

Inspection number: 264202

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	First School
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3-8
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	155
School address:	Fishermead Boulevard Fishermead Milton Keynes Buckinghamshire
Postcode	MK6 2LP
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Liz Hardwick
Date of previous inspection:	20 October 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The Willows First School is in Milton Keynes. There are 155 pupils aged between 3 and 8 on roll, which is small for a first school. Pupils come from a variety of social backgrounds, but the school's overall economic context is significantly less advantageous than the average, and has become more so since the previous inspection. Pupil mobility is very high. A well above average proportion of pupils are known to be entitled to free school meals. Three-quarters of the pupils are of white British origins. Many of the other pupils are believed to have a first language other than English. The number of pupils with special educational needs, usually social, emotional and behavioural, or who find spoken communication difficult, is above average. Attainment on entry is well below nationally expected levels.

A decision to close the school was reversed two years ago. The school will become an infant rather than a first school in September 2005.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
16408	Chris Rhodes	Lead inspector	English History Religious Education English as an additional language
9391	Norma Ball	Lay inspector	
18524	Ann Shaw	Team inspector	Mathematics Art and design Design and technology Physical education Foundation stage
32620	Olson Davis	Team inspector	Science Information and communication technology Geography Music Special educational needs

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good and improving school. Standards on entry are very low. Standards are average in reading and writing in Year 2, and below average in mathematics and science. Standards in Year 3 are below expected levels. Pupils in all classes make good progress and results are improving. The quality of teaching and learning, and of leadership and management, is good. **The school gives good value for money.**

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The headteacher is a very good leader.
- The provision for children in the nursery and reception classes is very good.
- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics, but standards in mathematics and science are held back by pupils' limited language skills.
- Pupils' speaking skills are not developed in a consistent way.
- Support staff make an important contribution to the quality of pupils' learning.
- Levels of attendance are well below average and affect the progress pupils make.

There have been many significant changes since the school was previously inspected in 1998. The current headteacher, the third in six years, was appointed to shut the school and many staff left before the decision to close was changed. The area around the school has altered: many more families are in very challenging circumstances and the number of pupils with English as an additional language has increased considerably. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been good, with many significant changes for the better in the past two years. All the issues in the previous report have been addressed successfully. The considerable dip in standards that occurred in the years following the last inspection has been reversed. Provision in the nursery and reception classes is now very good, and the quality of leadership, management, and teaching and learning has improved.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*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 pupils eligible for free school meals*

Overall achievement is good. The results in last year's tests were well below average in writing and mathematics. Results in reading were in the lowest 5% nationally. Attainment in reading and writing was below average in comparison with schools receiving pupils from similar backgrounds. Initial indications are that the current Year 2 has done much better than last year's class, especially in reading and writing, and that current standards are the highest for four years.

The inspection found that standards in English in Year 2 are in line with the national average, but are below average in mathematics and science. Pupils have made good progress but standards are held back by weak language skills. Standards in Year 3 are below average, but have improved during the year. Standards in other subjects are in line with expected levels. There was insufficient inspection evidence to make a judgement about music, or physical education in Year 2. Children in the reception year make good progress. They are likely to reach the expected standard for physical development, but less than half will achieve the other targets for their age.

Pupils' personal qualities are **good**. Attendance is unsatisfactory, despite the school's best efforts. Behaviour and attitudes are good. There have been no exclusions. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is **good**. The quality of teaching is good. Planning is thorough and tasks are set at the correct level of difficulty. Many teachers' ideas are imaginative and catch the pupils' interest. Teachers do not insist on high standards of spoken communication and older pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their oral skills. Support staff are very effective. Their skilled help for pupils with special educational needs or English as an additional language makes sure that pupils make good progress and take a full part in all the school's activities. The overall quality of learning is good. High quality marking helps pupils to improve.

The curriculum is good, with particularly good provision for the many pupils with special educational needs. The level of care is very high, and links with parents and the community are already good and are improving.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall leadership and management of the school is **good**. The headteacher is outstanding in her dedication and commitment to the school and the community. She has recruited a strong leadership team to work with her. The quality of management is good. The governing body is effective and meets all statutory requirements.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and pupils feel positive about the school. Parents find the staff very approachable. The Friends of the Willows Association plays an important part in enriching the curriculum through practical help and fundraising. Pupils particularly welcome the ready access they have to an adult if they feel worried.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Extend pupils' speaking skills in all lessons
- Continue to improve standards in mathematics and science
- Raise levels of attendance

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Standards in English are average in Year 2, and below expected levels in Year 3. Standards in mathematics and science are below average in both year groups. Pupils in both classes have made good progress in comparison with their previous attainment and overall achievement is good. Boys and girls achieve similar standards. Pupils with special educational needs or English as an additional language have made good progress because their individual needs are recognised and they receive very good additional help from the skilled support assistants.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has reversed the downward trend in its results.
- Standards have risen considerably in Year 2, especially in reading.
- Pupils have a limited spoken vocabulary. This affects standards in all subjects.
- Pupils' overall progress over time is good.

Commentary

1. The table below shows that standards in the national tests for pupils in Year 2 in the summer of 2003 were well below average in reading, writing and mathematics. This had been the pattern for some time, and had been getting worse. Standards were below average in reading and writing, and average in mathematics, in comparison with similar schools. The school's analysis of the results also indicated that not enough pupils were being successful at the higher levels. Many of the pupils who did not reach the nationally expected standard in reading were using English as an additional language and two were virtual non-speakers. Boys did less well than girls in reading and writing. The school tackled the causes of the poor standards rigorously. Considerable emphasis was given to developing boys' self-esteem by extending the opportunities for sport and the recruitment of male staff as role models. Reception class teaching methods were extended into older classes because pupils needed to gain a greater understanding of basic skills through practical experience. The strategy is proving successful, especially in reading and writing, and standards in the current Year 2 are much higher.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 2 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
Reading	12.5 (13.6)	15.7 (15.8)
writing	11.5 (12.9)	14.6 (14.4)
mathematics	14.4 (15.0)	16.3 (16.5)

There were 31 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. There was a considerable dip in performance in the period between the previous and current inspections. The reasons, including an increasing number of families in challenging circumstances, high mobility as families moved in and then away from the area, more children starting in the nursery and school with little or no English, many teacher changes before the decision to close the school was reversed, and a lower level of attainment when children started school, were identified by the local education authority and the new headteacher. Their positive actions included the attachment of specialist staff to work with pupils whose first language is not English, the recruitment of good teachers and support staff, a commitment to the creation of a high quality combined nursery and reception unit, and the extension of its teaching methods into Year 1 and beyond. This has been achieved very well. Standards have started to rise and pupils' progress in all classes is good. The school has set itself challenging targets and is working hard to achieve them.

3. The inspection found that less than half of the children in the reception class are likely to achieve the early learning goals expected of their age by the end of the foundation year. The exception is physical development where children are well on course to achieve the expected standard. However, their progress in all aspects of their work has been good since joining the nursery, and is a direct result of their keenness to learn, the skilled support for those with English as an additional language, and the overall very good quality of teaching.
4. Standards in reading and writing in Year 2 are currently in line with national expectations, a considerable improvement since the previous year, especially in reading. A comparison between pupils' individual performance now and two years earlier shows that over half have made good or better progress. A quarter have made very good progress. Standards in mathematics and science are below nationally expected levels but pupils have made good progress from a well below average start. Inspectors found no current evidence of any difference between boys' and girls' attainment and progress. Current standards are higher than they have been for three years.
5. Standards in Year 3 are below average in English, mathematics and science. Pupils have made good progress over the past twelve months in comparison with their well below average results when they were in Year 2. Nearly half the pupils have made good or better progress in writing, and a quarter have made very good progress. A third have made good or better progress in mathematics.
6. Current standards in Year 2 and Year 3 in information and control technology [ICT], art and design, design and technology, history and geography are in line with national expectations. Standards in religious education match those indicated in the locally agreed syllabus. There was insufficient inspection evidence to make a judgement about standards in music in either year group, or in physical education in Year 2.
7. Standards in all subjects are affected by the difficulty most pupils have in expressing themselves orally. They often find it very hard to find the right vocabulary to put their thoughts into words. This is not necessarily because they are using English as an additional language, but because their life experiences have not given them the range of vocabulary they need to develop or communicate ideas. They tend to answer questions in single words rather than sentences, and will occasionally use words they know are incorrect, just to make some sort of sense. This affects their attainment in all subjects because they find explaining ideas very hard.
8. Standards achieved by pupils with special educational needs are affected by the high level of mobility within the school. The number of pupils requiring extra support has risen considerably over the past three years. Lower attainers who remain in school for an appreciable length of time make good progress because they receive good support from well trained and experienced learning support assistants under the guidance of the class teacher. Pupils speaking English as an additional language also make good progress by following the plans designed by the specialist staff that work with them. Great care is taken, especially in the nursery and reception classes, to make sure that everyday vocabulary is understood and used correctly. A visit to the local shop to buy fruit to use in acting out a favourite story was used very effectively to make sure that all pupils learning English knew the correct vocabulary for the fruit, the various places they passed on their walk, and the range of language needed to make the purchases.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils have good attitudes to learning, their behaviour is good and there have been no exclusions this year. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. Attendance is unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have positive attitudes.
- An interesting range of playground games helps to promote good behaviour.
- The behaviour policy is used effectively to encourage good behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- The behaviour of some older boys is persistently challenging.
- Pupils' social, moral and cultural development is promoted effectively.
- The school encourages pupils to enjoy learning and to try to do their best.
- A small number of families do not make sure that their children attend school regularly.
- Attendance levels are unsatisfactory and are not monitored sufficiently closely by the school.

Commentary

9. Pupils enjoy school and take a very enthusiastic part in all its activities. Children work and play together well in the nursery and reception classes, helping each other, chattering happily, taking turns and having pride in their work. Pupils from Year 2 listened with great interest to stories read to them by a visiting librarian, answering her questions and sharing their ideas eagerly. They are interested in their work and respond well to the teachers' enthusiasm and expectation that they will work hard. Many pupils do not have as much confidence in their own abilities as might at first appear. The staff work with care and dedication to encourage them, and to help them feel valued so that they want to learn. Most work with good concentration and collaborate happily in pairs and small groups.
10. Some parents and pupils expressed concern about behaviour and bullying. The inspection found that behaviour had improved since the last inspection and was good overall. Pupils know and respect the behaviour code, and bullying and oppressive behaviour are rare. A small number of older boys can be very challenging, especially when they are not engaged in well paced or interesting lessons. This distracts the teacher and interferes with other pupils' learning. Pupils can be very lively at playtimes but enjoy the games and activities provided in the playground. The atmosphere at break time and during lunch is relaxed and sociable.
11. Pupils understand that what they do affects other people, which strengthens to the good relationships in the school. They understand the difference between right and wrong, and assemblies and class discussion times are used effectively to focus on important social and moral issues. Pupils enjoy raising money for charities, and recognising how they can help others. Older pupils show a good sense of responsibility for younger pupils and 'playground friends' is a valuable new initiative. Pupils know about their local community and understand that people come from different backgrounds, cultures and faiths. They show respect for others, especially within their own school community. Visitors to the school contribute strongly to pupils' personal development. During the inspection a story was read to pupils in both Somali and English by a parent and was greatly enjoyed in both languages. Pupils' spiritual development is less well developed but is nevertheless satisfactory. Pupils take great delight and wonder in the world around them, for example on a trip to the local park to look at pond life, as well as sharing quiet reflective moments in assembly.

Attendance

Attendance is below the national average. Despite the continued efforts of the school to encourage regular attendance, a significant number of families do not make sure their children attend school as often as they should. There is a high degree of movement of families in and out of the area. This affects attendance statistics as parents do not always inform the school of the move and children remain on the register for some time although attending another school. There is no current system of rapid contact with families when pupils have not come to school, but plans are in place to improve 'first day follow up'. Similarly, the importance given to close monitoring of absences and identifying problem areas is to be reviewed and improved. Most pupils arrive at school on time but a few families find prompt arrival difficult. The Education Welfare Officer is very helpful and supportive of the school's efforts to improve attendance and punctuality.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	7.3
National data	5.4

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.3
National data	0.4

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

Exclusions

There have been no exclusions during the current year. This is a considerable improvement since the school was last inspected.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education is good. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The curriculum is broad, balanced and enriched. The overall level of resources and accommodation is satisfactory. The degree of care is very high. There is a strong and developing partnership with parents and the community.

Teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching in the nursery and reception classes is very good.
- Support staff are invaluable members of the teaching team.
- Teachers do not insist on high standards of spoken communication.
- Planning is thorough and is carefully matched to pupils' needs.
- All pupils are equally involved in all the school's activities.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 20 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
1	6	6	7	0	0	0

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

12. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection. The amount of good or better teaching has increased and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. The best teaching was seen in the nursery, reception and Year 1 classes. Teaching in English and mathematics is good. The good progress pupils have made during the year indicates that the overall quality of teaching in older classes is stronger than that seen in some lessons during the inspection.
13. Teachers plan carefully, their materials are well prepared and most lessons proceed at a brisk pace. Pupils' interest is maintained without them being too rushed. This is especially evident in the younger classes where children have a variety of stimulating opportunities to learn and develop their skills. The pace of some lessons in older classes is not so effective when too much time is given to explanations or the lesson has to stop while a few difficult pupils are resettled. Every session starts with a very clear explanation of what the pupils will have learned by the end. This gives purpose to the lesson and makes it easier for the pupils and teachers to measure how well they have understood the new work. Careful planning also means that work is set at different levels of difficulty and matches the needs of individual pupils. Teachers measure pupils' progress systematically. Books are marked very carefully, and contain helpful developmental comments that show pupils how to improve.

14. The teaching of basic literacy and numeracy skills is good. Although there is an increasing emphasis on speaking and listening, with many discussions and opportunities for oral work, teachers do not insist on a high quality of spoken communication or actively encourage a wider oral vocabulary. Many accept single word answers to questions, make no attempt to 'model' improved answers when pupils struggle to find the words they need, or actively encourage pupils to extend the range of words they use in everyday classroom conversations. This has a direct effect on standards in all subjects.
15. Support and specialist staff play a key role throughout the lessons, either by encouraging individual pupils in whole-class teaching, or by working very effectively with small groups. The work of staff responsible for English as an additional language is particularly valuable, and pupils' good progress over a relatively short time enables them to play a full part in lessons and learn effectively. The two reception-aged children who use English as their third language have progressed in two terms from being virtual non-English speakers to being able to hold long conversations with staff. The school uses its skilled learning support assistants as the main support for pupils with special educational needs. This ensures that they are included in the general work of the class and achieve as well as other pupils. Most pupils are aware of their targets and what they need to learn next to improve.

The Curriculum

The range of curricular opportunities is good. The quality of the accommodation and resources for learning is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The transition from the reception class to Year 1 is planned very well.
- The school's provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- A wide range of additional activities, visits and visitors enriches the curriculum.

Commentary

16. The curriculum is good. It meets all statutory requirements and those of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. Although the school places a strong emphasis on teaching of literacy and numeracy, other areas of the curriculum are covered in sufficient depth. This is an improvement since the last inspection. There is an effective curriculum for personal, social, and health education, including appropriate arrangements for the ages of the pupils for sex education and awareness of the dangers of drugs misuse.
17. The curriculum provides effectively for different groups regardless of age, gender, background or attainment. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. There are good procedures for the early identification of any needs, including those of pupils who arrive mid-year from other schools or from overseas, and those who have English as an additional language. The school provides effectively for these pupils through a mixture of work matched to their needs by class teachers, specialist teaching staff and learning support assistants. Individual Education Plans place proper emphasis on improvements in English and numeracy, and some relate to improvements in behaviour.
18. The curriculum in the nursery and reception classes is particularly well planned, an important improvement since the previous inspection. It takes full account of national guidance and, because many children do not achieve the early learning goals expected for the age, has been extended into Year 1. This has proved especially effective and is a special feature of the school. Year 1 pupils learn through a more practical 'small steps' approach, and standards have started to rise in older classes because pupils have a better understanding of the early stages of their education.

19. The range of visits and other activities to enrich and support the curriculum is good. There is a wide range of unusual extra-curricular and sporting activities. As well as football and cricket coaching, these include gym clubs, cheer-leading, ice skating and street dance. Visits and visitors extend pupils' understanding in many subjects. For example, the Year 2 science visit to the Hanson Nature Centre helped pupils develop their observational skills and deepened their interest in the environment. Visits to art galleries, music festivals, the theatre and cinema, and visitors such as music groups and an artist, add to pupils' cultural development.
20. The headteacher, deputy headteacher, and several key staff have changed since the previous inspection. Their combined strengths have been very influential in turning the school round and in creating its positive atmosphere. The male teacher in the reception class provides a good role model for pupils, especially the boys. The learning support assistants give very good support to pupils throughout the school. A recent programme of redecoration and refurbishment has improved the accommodation. However, many classrooms and specialist areas, such as the new computer room, are cramped.

Care, guidance and support

The provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is very good. Pupils are provided with good guidance and support, and are positively involved in the development of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school provides a very caring environment in which all pupils are valued.
- A wide range of agencies and support services are used effectively to support the care provided by the school.
- Good support and monitoring ensures that pupils are helped to develop and improve their work.
- The induction arrangements for children starting school in the nursery and reception classes are very good.
- Pupils' views are regularly sought and valued.

Commentary

21. All staff give a high priority to the care of pupils, a particularly strong feature of the school. There are very sensible procedures for the care of pupils who are unwell, and any special health and dietary needs are well known to staff and are recorded with care. The school provides a very safe environment for all its pupils. Child protection arrangements are well organised. All staff have had recent training. The school works in close and very effective partnership with a range of local agencies and specialist staff.
22. A systematic assessment procedure has been developed so that pupils' work is regularly reviewed and their improvement is recorded carefully in their individual 'progress books'. These are a very useful record of pupils' development in English, mathematics and science from their earliest written work in the reception class until they leave at the end of Year 3. Teachers tell pupils how well they are doing and what they can do to improve. The discussions are carefully translated into simple targets for each pupil. Although personal development is not monitored in a formal way, all staff know the pupils well. The school complies with the Code of Practice for special educational needs. The monitoring and recording process for pupils with special educational needs is good and the review process meets requirements effectively.
23. Pupils respond positively to the care provided by staff, and share their concerns and feelings in the confidence that they will receive support and understanding. A very good feature of the nursery and reception classes is the careful and well planned induction arrangements which include home visits to all families. This ensures that children and their parents are relaxed and comfortable about their start in school, and that the staff have a clear picture of the needs and special requirements for each child. The high rate of mobility in the area means that pupils join the school at all ages and their sensitive integration into the school is good, well planned and equally supportive.

24. Pupils have a keen sense of belonging to their school. Their views are sought on a regular basis in class discussions and small questionnaires, and are valued by the school. For example the recent planning for the development of the playground with new lunchtime play equipment and organised activities was fully discussed with pupils and their ideas were built into the planning. 'Playground friends' are part of the new strategy for happy and productive playtimes. Older pupils regard this responsibility as important and show a mature approach to their care of younger pupils. As well as being involved in setting their own targets for improved work, they also work with their teachers to formulate their own sets of rules for good behaviour in the class. Pupils are very clear that their views are valued, that staff care about them and that they are treated fairly. Parents value the fair way in which pupils are treated and that their children are encouraged to become mature and independent.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Good links have been forged with parents and the community. Links with other schools are sound.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Links with parents have improved markedly and are good.
- Parents' views are sought on a very regular basis.
- The school works consistently hard to meet and engage with parents and deals very effectively with their queries and concerns.
- The existing good community links are still improving and place the school at the heart of the community.

Commentary

25. The school has worked very hard since the last inspection to forge and achieve good links with parents, many of whom have a cautious approach to their children's schooling. Parents now have a very positive attitude to school and are grateful that their children like being there and are expected to work hard. The open door policy and encouragement of the headteacher and staff has ensured that parents feel comfortable coming into school with concerns and queries, and that they have a prompt and fair response. A few parents help in school on a regular basis. Help with work at home, although variable, is sound overall. The school is rightly proud of the development of the Friends of the Willows Association which provides valuable support in a variety of practical ways, for example helping to plant and develop the garden areas following the recent building works. The Friends also play an important role in developing links with other parents by organising fairs and social functions to bring them into school.
26. The termly parents' consultation evenings are well attended and ensure that parents have a clear understanding of how well their children are doing. Other meetings, for example 'How to help your child learn to read,' were attended by over half the parents. Class assemblies enable parents to share their children's success. The annual reports on pupils' achievement are clear and provide a good picture of what pupils have done in class. Reports have improved since the last inspection although there are some inconsistencies in the reporting of targets for improvement. All the material prepared for parents, including regular newsletters, the prospectus and annual report of governors to parents, are clear, interesting, informative and of good quality. The school does not circulate copies or summaries in languages other than English, which makes it harder for some families to be fully informed. Parents' views are sought regularly through questionnaire surveys and are taken fully into account by the school. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are kept informed about their child's progress and have good opportunities to discuss targets and attend reviews of Individual Education Plans with teachers, learning support assistants, and the headteacher.

27. Links with the community have developed strongly and the school is increasingly regarded as the heart of the local area. The Neighbourhood Nursery, a separately managed and funded facility for very young children, shares the site and is very much part of the school community. Pupils are introduced carefully to their local area through a series of outings to look at nearby shops, the park and to attend the art gallery and other facilities in the nearby town centre. These foster a community feeling which is extended by visitors and community representatives joining in school activities. The Parish Council are supportive in practical ways and local clergy lead school assemblies and contribute to religious education lessons. Clubs, a venue for meetings and a good range of after-school activities make the school open and available to the community. This is recognised and valued by parents and other local residents. The planned development of a Children's Centre on the site will further extend and enrich the already good community links. Less well developed but nevertheless satisfactory are the links with the local schools to which pupils transfer at the end of Year 3. The induction arrangements are sensibly organised to ensure pupils meet their new teachers and explore their new school before they transfer.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management is good, and has improved since the previous inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher is a very good leader and manager.
- The governors have a very good understanding of the strengths of the school and work closely with the headteacher to develop areas that require improvement.
- Senior staff work very well together and strive constantly to provide excellence in the quality of provision for the pupils and the community.
- The school manages its finances very well.

Commentary

28. The quality of governance is good. The governing body plays an important part in shaping the school's direction. Governors visit the school regularly, fulfil their statutory duties and have a very good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. There is a close relationship, based on respect, between them and the staff. They feel comfortable and confident in their roles. The very good relationship that exists between the chair of governors and the headteacher ensures that their regular discussions are relevant and analytical. The headteacher and staff welcome the governors' very strong support and the ways they are called to account for the success of their actions.
29. The headteacher is outstanding in her dedication and commitment to the school and the community. She has a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. In the two years since her appointment she has been instrumental in renewing the faith of the parents and local people in the work and life of the school. All aspects of school are improving as a direct result and standards are rising. The key issues from the previous inspection have been addressed successfully. The headteacher has high expectations of the staff and delegates responsibility wisely, resulting in a motivated work force able to lead and manage their individual areas very well. Teacher recruitment is difficult, and the recent successful appointment of two key senior managers reflects the headteacher's and governors' tenacity in seeking the best people to serve the needs of the pupils. The appointment of a deputy headteacher with considerable experience with Year 1 and Year 2 pupils was a very astute management decision as it strengthened the overall quality of leadership and complemented the headteacher's own recent professional experience with younger children.
30. The school is managed and organised efficiently. The school development plan is very well structured and is focused firmly on tackling the school's priorities for improvement. The office staff cover essential management functions in a friendly and well organised way, and are

regarded by parents as sensitive and welcoming. School systems are not unduly bureaucratic. The recent building project to house a separate Neighbourhood Nursery has been very well managed with the minimum of disruption.

31. The dedication of the 'early-years' co-ordinator, and her very good leadership and management, is apparent in all aspects of the work in the nursery and reception classes. She leads a very strong team of teachers and learning support assistants very well. The headteacher, in her role as the special educational needs co-ordinator, has a clear overview of the pupils' needs and is committed to the continued development of a school where **all** pupils can thrive. The school has a designated special educational needs governor who meets regularly with her and monitors the quality of provision on behalf of the governing body. This is a good example of the way in which governors keep themselves fully informed. The leadership and management of the various subjects is good overall, with particular strengths in English and mathematics. All the key staff are very good role models and are equally committed to meeting the full needs of every pupil. Co-ordinators have opportunities to monitor teaching and learning in their subject and written feedback is provided. This is having a positive effect on standards as teachers know more about how they can improve.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	486,395	Balance from previous year	44,760
Total expenditure	437,960	Balance carried forward to the next	48,435
Expenditure per pupil	3,343.13		

32. Financial management is very good. The carry forward is above recommended levels but is part of the governing body's financial strategy for the continued development of the outdoor area once the current building programme is complete and for re-equipping the ICT suite. Accounting systems are very well organised and all expenditure is closely monitored. The funding supporting pupils with special needs and English as an additional language is spent very effectively. The governing body applies the 'best value' principles of challenge, comparison, consultation and competition rigorously. The school gives good value for money.

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

The provision in the nursery and reception classes is **very good**, a considerable improvement since the last inspection. The unit is very well led and managed.

The quality of teaching is very good. Teamwork is very strong, with each member of staff enjoying and understanding their role. Their detailed knowledge of individual children means that the activities suit their needs and abilities, and results in good progress. This includes those with special needs or English as an additional language. A high number of pupils enter and leave the classes during the year, which affects the overall progress they make. Attainment on entry is well below average and is lower than at the time of the previous inspection.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff are actively involved with every child and encourage their very good attitudes and behaviour.
- Staff have a thorough knowledge and understanding of children's needs.
- The imaginative organisation of the activities encourages children to develop their independence.

Commentary

33. Children are given many opportunities to develop their personal and social skills. They make good progress as they learn to share, work collaboratively and to move about independently selecting tasks in the shared and outside areas. Teaching is very good. All the adults take every opportunity to engage each pupil, observing their progress, whilst steering their interests and developing their thinking. The very good organisation of the various and interesting activities encourages co-operative and independent learning. Just under half of the children in the reception year are on course to reach the expected learning goals in their personal and social development.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The standard of speaking and listening of the majority of children is well below expected levels. A high proportion use English as an additional language.
- Children make good progress because many stimulating activities are planned for each day.

Commentary

34. Language development is the teachers' first priority. They work hard to extend children's vocabulary through talk, play and directed activities. The quality of teaching is very good. Children with special needs and those with English as an additional language make very good progress with the support of learning support assistants and specialist staff. Children in the reception class learn to read and all enjoy listening to stories. The school library is well used by the children and visitors are welcomed into class to read stories. Children enjoyed making an English 'translation' as a mother read them a story in Somali. A realistic travel agency

gave the children opportunities to act out booking a holiday while extending their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. Children achieve well but less than a third are on course to attain the expected standard by the end of the reception year.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children's narrow vocabulary limits their mathematical understanding.

Commentary

35. Teaching is very good and children make good progress. Teachers' effective questioning develops thinking skills and widens their mathematical vocabularies and understanding. All the adults keep ongoing, comprehensive records to record children's individual development and plan their next work. Many can recognise, combine and write numbers to ten, but find it very hard to discuss what they are doing. Several only talk in single words, and those with English as an additional language need extra support. Just under half of the children are on course to reach expected standards in mathematical development by the end of the year.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers plan interesting activities that encourage children to think and discover for themselves.

Commentary

36. The organisation of the activities in the central shared area allows the children free access to well selected activities that encourage learning and the development of language skills. For example, children investigated the life cycle of a frog as they looked at tadpoles and frogs, using books for reference. Teaching is very good. Children were encouraged, for example, to feel and touch ice as they learned about the animals in frozen lands, and then to contrast this with the feel of sand when talking about animals that live in the desert. All the children make good progress. Those with special needs and English as an additional language acquire a wider range of vocabulary, which they use to describe the world around them. Almost half the children are on course to reach the expected standard by the end of the reception year.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Although currently restricted, the outside provision allows children to experience a range of challenging physical tasks.

Commentary

37. Children make good progress as they use paints and pencils, scissors and glue in response to the very good teaching. Planned activities in the outside area develop their larger movements as they use the 'digging pits,' and the bikes. Children enjoy the physical education lessons in the hall where they balance and climb safely, and listen carefully to instructions. This is a very

good improvement since the last inspection. Although the space outside is limited because of the building work, there are exciting plans to restructure and improve it. The majority of children achieve well and many are on course to achieve the early learning goals in this area of learning.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well organised activities provide very good opportunities for creativity and language development.

Commentary

38. Children enjoy singing and dancing, and respond positively to the very good teaching. They learn many songs and rhymes that enrich their vocabulary and develop their mathematical and linguistic understanding, and adds to their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. One boy with English as an additional language made very good progress in controlling boxes and glue as he constructed a rocket with care and precision. His language skills were developed as the teacher asked him if the nose cone was 'stable' and what would be required for the rocket to fly into space. About half the children are on course to reach the expected standard for this area of learning.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 and 2

ENGLISH

Provision for English is good, and has improved since the previous inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make good progress in comparison with work completed in previous years.
- Standards in Year 2 are now higher than they have been for four years.
- Pupils do not have the speaking skills or vocabulary they need to communicate effectively.
- The subject is very well led and managed.

Commentary

39. Current standards in Year 2 are average in reading and writing, the highest for four years and an improvement since the previous inspection. Achievement is good because pupils have reached average standards from a well below average start in the nursery, and teachers' records demonstrate good progress by more than half the pupils when results from two years ago are compared with current standards. Standards in speaking and listening are below expected levels for pupils of this age. Their limited range of vocabulary affects standards in writing and in pupils' understanding of the books they read. This explains why the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels is smaller than that found in most schools. One pupil read 'Get me a basin. I'm going to be sick.' correctly, but had no idea what 'basin' meant and therefore missed the point of the sentence. Standards in Year 3 are below average, but pupils have made good progress overall and are catching up on the areas of weakness identified in last year's national tests.
40. Pupils with special educational needs, or English as an additional language, make good progress in all classes, especially when they are closely supported by specialist staff. A very good example of this was seen in Year 2 when the teacher used objects from home to teach the letter sounds at the beginning of each word but also to check whether all pupils knew the

English names for various items used in some but not all cultures. Boys and girls generally do equally well, although a few boys make satisfactory rather than good progress when they find being attentive difficult.

41. The good progress results from good teaching, the extension of the reception class curriculum into Year 1 where pupils need the extra time to learn the early basic skills of reading and writing, and the skilled work of the support staff. With very few exceptions, pupils are keen to be successful. They enjoy reading and have responded positively to the school's recent purchase of new books. They read teachers' written comments in their books carefully and understand how to improve. Teachers have a very good knowledge of how pupils are doing, and set targets that mean something to the pupils and are achievable if they try hard. Pupils welcome this.
42. The overall quality of teaching is good although some lessons seen during the inspection were satisfactory rather than better because too much time was used to explain the work rather than getting it done, or opportunities were missed to develop pupils' verbal skills before moving to more formal written work. One lesson was outstanding because the teaching was very stimulating and had the pupils bursting with ideas and enthusiasm. Relationships were very good. Frequent references to the purpose of the lesson, written on the board, and a brisk pace kept the pupils consistently on task and very highly motivated. There was a very good range of 'speaking' activities.
43. The subject is very well led and managed by a skilled co-ordinator. She has brought many fresh ideas to the school, has re-energised the approach to reading and sets a very good example to colleagues through her own teaching. Parents spoke enthusiastically about her well attended 'session' on helping their children with reading at home. They felt unthreatened and were keen to try out her ideas. She has introduced an exciting approach to the development of handwriting skills by starting with large hand movements in the air to music before moving to letter shapes on paper. Progress since the previous inspection has been good overall, although work remains to be done to raise standards of speaking and listening throughout the school, and standards generally in Year 3.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

44. Pupils use their literacy skills to the best of their ability in all parts of the curriculum. The absence of a wide spoken vocabulary makes it harder for them to be successful in planning, reading about and discussing work in all subjects. Pupils make satisfactory use of the ICT skills to present work in an attractive way.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving but attainment is still below average.
- Teaching is good overall and pupils make good progress.
- The leadership of the subject is very good and promotes good practice.
- The general language deprivation of many pupils hinders their knowledge and understanding of the subject.
- The learning support assistants provide very good support for pupils with special needs and English as an additional language.

Commentary

45. Standards of attainment in mathematics are below the national average in Year 2 and Year 3. Taking attainment upon entry into account, progress is good overall. Year 3 have made good progress in comparison with the standards they achieved in national tests a year earlier. Pupils with special educational needs and English as an additional language also make good progress, especially when they are supported by specialist staff. There was no inspection evidence of a difference between boys' and girls' performance.
46. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers' planning has improved since the previous inspection. The teaching seen during the inspection in older classes was satisfactory rather than good, but pupils' books and individual rates of progress indicated that teaching since September had been good overall. In one very good lesson seen in Year 1, pupils made very good progress in counting to twenty. They tackled counting backwards enthusiastically but many found it very difficult. Higher achieving pupils understood the concept of odd and even numbers and used the computer to count on in threes and to make a pattern on a hundred square. Higher attaining pupils in Year 3, as seen from the work sample, made good progress as they doubled numbers explaining the methods they used. The overuse of work sheets in Year 2 and Year 3 limits opportunities for developing written accuracy and improved presentation.
47. Many pupils start school with well below average language skills. Their limited understanding of basic mathematical language hinders their progress. The learning support assistants provide very good mathematical support, but there is not enough emphasis on developing pupils' use and understanding of English and a specialist mathematical vocabulary. An exception was seen in Year 2 when the learning support assistant worked very well with pupils using English as an additional language, ensuring that they understood the basic mathematical vocabulary of 'more than' and 'less than'. Pupils made greater progress as a result.
48. The recently appointed co-ordinator is already leading the subject very well. She has a firm grasp of the strategies required to raise standards, including broadening the links with ICT. The present good assessment procedures are to be fine-tuned by analysing individual pupil data more stringently and tracking progress against prior attainment in all aspects of the subject.

Mathematics across the curriculum

49. Pupils make appropriate use of their mathematical skills in subjects such as science, but the school recognises that this area of the subject has to be extended.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make good progress.
- There a strong emphasis on developing pupils' investigative skills through practical activities.

Commentary

50. Standards are below expected levels at the end of Year 2 and Year 3. However, pupils have made good progress from a very low start point. They achieve well and have covered a wide range of scientific topics during the year. The Year 2 investigation into the relationship between forces and movement showed that pupils knew about 'fair testing.' They made careful observations, measured accurately, presented their results in a table and drew a bar

graph of their results. The Year 3 practical investigation about 'Helping plants to grow' gave pupils opportunities to ask questions and plan their own group experiments to find the answers. They made careful observations and measurements, and drew conclusions from their results. However, many pupils in both classes find it difficult to explain their ideas. This limits the quality and depth of the discussions and pupils' ability to make even better progress. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language achieve as well as other pupils because of they are well supported in lessons by well-briefed and able learning support assistants.

51. Teaching is satisfactory. Proper emphasis is placed on developing pupils' investigative skills and on providing practical activities, enabling pupils to gain first-hand experience. The Year 1 curriculum is an appropriate extension of work covered in the reception class. Pupils are encouraged to use their senses, to observe closely, predict, carry out scientific experiments and draw conclusions from the evidence. Although worksheets provide a consistent approach to experimental work and recording, older pupils do not have enough opportunities to devise their own experiments and develop their own ways of recording their science work. The use of ICT is limited.
52. The subject is well led and managed. The co-ordinator monitors teaching and learning in all classes and has a clear vision for the development of the subject. Pupils' progress is assessed at the end of each unit. Visitors and visits to places of scientific interest, including the Parks Trust and the Hanson Nature Centre, extend pupils' opportunities for good learning and heighten their scientific awareness. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The scheme of work is much better and provides more opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of fair testing in their practical and investigative work. Assessment of pupils' achievements has improved and is now used as the basis for planning later work. Leadership and management has also improved.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Provision in ICT is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make good progress because teachers plan carefully and learning support assistants give good support.
- All aspects of the ICT curriculum are covered thoroughly, except e-mail for Year 3 pupils.
- Limited use is made of ICT in subjects other than English and mathematics.

Commentary

53. Standards are in line with national averages in Year 2 and in Year 3, and are similar to those reported in the last inspection. Pupils make good progress, including those with special educational needs and who speak English as an additional language. They achieve very well from a well below average attainment on entry to school. There is no noticeable difference between boys' and girls' attainment.
54. No direct teaching of ICT skills was observed during inspection. Groups of pupils were seen working on computers in other lessons. Those observed had sound basic skills. They used the keyboard and mouse confidently and knew how to enter, save and retrieve their work. The work displayed in the computer suite indicated that pupils in Year 2 could combine text and illustrations to produce picture books. Year 3 pupils have produced bar graphs using data that they have entered into a spreadsheet program. Pupils have opportunities to use the Internet safely, retrieve information from a CD ROM, and software has been ordered so that Year 3 pupils will be able to use e-mail.

55. An examination of pupils' work and discussions with pupils indicates that the quality of teaching is satisfactory. Learning support assistants have a good deal of knowledge and help pupils to improve what they do. The good lesson planning based on national guidance encourages the systematic development of ICT skills as pupils move up the school. Their skills are assessed and recorded carefully, and used as the basis for planning the next stages of work. Teachers set interesting tasks for pupils to do and they enjoy using ICT.
56. A new suite of computers will be installed in the computer room after the inspection. This improvement is likely to lead to a rise in standards as more direct whole class and large group teaching of ICT skills becomes possible. The newly appointed ICT co-ordinator is enthusiastic and provides sound leadership and management. She has monitored the quality of teaching and is arranging appropriate training for teachers and learning support assistants in preparation for using the new equipment.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

57. Pupils use laptop computers routinely in classrooms as part of the normal literacy and numeracy lessons. ICT is used in a more limited way in other subjects. Information has been downloaded from the Internet to support work in history, and commercial programs are used in science and geography.

HUMANITIES

58. As only one religious education and two geography lessons were sampled during the inspection, it was not possible to make judgements about the quality of teaching and learning, or of the overall provision. Evidence was gathered from an examination of pupils' past and present work, by talking to them and by looking at work on display.
59. In **history**, standards are in line with national expectations and have been maintained since the previous inspection. Progress is satisfactory. Pupils enjoy the 'story' aspect of their work. Year 2 pupils recalled the events of the Great Fire of London enthusiastically, knew why it had started and why the fire had spread so quickly. They made sensible comparisons between the building techniques and fire prevention methods used 250 years ago and the present day. Good links are made between subjects, and Year 3 pupils' work on the Second World War linked effectively to a video used in English lessons that had a theme based on evacuees. Leadership and management is sound.
60. In **geography**, standards are in line with national expectations and pupils achieve well. They enjoy their lessons and are keen to discover more about the world through following the travels of Barnaby Bear. Year 2 pupils named the geographical features that Barnaby passed over as he travelled by plane from London to Mexico. They also used travel brochures to find out what the local climate was like when he arrived. A learning support assistant helped pupils make good use of a computer program to plan a further journey. The teaching in the two lessons observed was satisfactory in one lesson and good in the other. Teachers make lessons interesting using video, ICT, and other resources to capture pupils' interest and to help them develop their geographical knowledge and skills. Leadership and management is sound.
61. In **religious education**, standards are in line with those set out in the locally agreed syllabus, and have been maintained since the last inspection. Progress is satisfactory. Year 2 pupils have a sound understanding of the basic facts of Judaism and Christianity. They understood the importance of Easter, and could remember the principal events of the life of Jesus. They had enjoyed learning about the Jewish festival of Passover. Their detailed recall of the Passover meal and correct use of words like 'Torah' indicated good teaching and learning. A good example of religious tolerance occurred when a Moslem pupil in Year 3 supported her friend's description of Jesus as the 'Son of God' with her own statement "and a prophet to us." Leadership and management is sound.

62. Teaching was good in the one lesson observed. A 'partnership' lesson taught by the local Vicar and the class teacher gave the pupils an insight into the reasons why Jesus chose to wash His disciples feet. The pupils' interest was captured and held by the practical methods they used, including actual feet washing. The teacher's skilful use of questions gave the pupils opportunities to develop their understanding and to ask questions that touched on deeper issues.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

63. As only one lesson in physical education, one in art and design, and none in music or design and technology, was sampled during the inspection, there was insufficient evidence to make overall judgements about provision. Inspectors looked at a representative sample of pupils' past work and talked them about what they had learned, but no judgement was possible about standards in music in Year 2 or Year 3.
64. In **art and design**, standards are in line with national expectations. Displays of work around the school show a good range of work and are very well mounted. Pupils use a variety of media, making satisfactory progress in their control of brushes and paint. They learn to mix colours and observe shading. In the one good lesson seen, Year 3 pupils discussed photographs of familiar local sculptures in Milton Keynes and then sketched the parts of the playground that would be improved with a piece of sculpture of their design. They made good progress in controlling and shading with pencil, worked with interest and paid attention to detail. Pupils in Years 1, 2 and 3 use the computer graphics program to design patterns. Resources are satisfactory, and have improved last inspection.
65. In **design and technology** discussion with pupils showed that they are familiar with materials and techniques to design, plan and make a puppet. They evaluated their results and were pleased with their work. Standards are in line with national expectations. Good links are made to other subjects, for instance literature and geography as the pupils also made cars to use on maps of an imaginary island. This project enabled them to learn about axles. Resources have improved since the last inspection. Leadership and management is sound.
66. In **music**, pupils sang enthusiastically and tunefully in assemblies. Younger pupils sang rhythmic patterns accurately in the celebration assembly, 'reading' the symbols on large cards that set out the lengths of the notes. They also sang in two parts. Two Year 3 pupils sang confidently by themselves. Visitors, including a string quartet and a group of trumpeters, extend the music curriculum by involving pupils in listening to and appraising live music. Visits are made to the theatre and classes are regularly involved in musical presentations to parents and the school. Leadership and management is sound.
67. In **physical education**, standards are in line with national expectations in Year 3. No judgement was possible about Year 2. The school is consolidating and extending the physical education programme through a number of new initiatives outside the school day. For instance pupils from Year 1 to Year 3 can play football and take part in gymnastics and dance. During the one lesson observed, pupils in Year 3 made satisfactory progress in learning how to sprint start from a standing position. They understand the health benefits of exercise, noting the change in their pulse rates when standing still and after exercise. The resources for the subject are now satisfactory, an improvement upon the last inspection. The co-ordinator is enthusiastic and knowledgeable. There is no formal systematic monitoring and assessment of pupils' progress, which limits their opportunities for improvement.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

68. Pupils' personal development is given a high priority within the school, and has been an important part of the school's successful strategy to establish pupils' self-esteem and give them the coping skills they need in their every day lives. Pupils are given a wide range of opportunities to discuss ideas, feelings and matters of importance in class discussions. Good collaborative work and positive relationships are features of most lessons. Pupils are made fully aware of social and moral issues appropriate to their ages and levels of understanding, and are encouraged to develop a healthy lifestyle. Their views are sought on a regular basis, giving them a practical introduction to the idea of citizenship.

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

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