

INSPECTION REPORT

COBBS BROW PRIMARY SCHOOL

Skelmersdale

LEA area: Lancashire

Unique reference number: 119329

Headteacher: Robert Owens

Lead inspector: Peter Sandall

Dates of inspection: 18th-20th October 2004

Inspection number: 266644

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Primary
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll;	278
School address:	Manfield Ashurst Skelmersdale Lancashire
Postcode:	WN8 6SU
Telephone number:	01695 720632
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Sian Jay
Date of previous inspection:	16 th November 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Cobbs Brow is slightly larger than the average primary school and serves a residential area of Skelmersdale. Virtually all the pupils in the school come from the surrounding district and parents and governors regard the school as being important to the community. There are a similar number of boys and girls on the school's roll of 278 pupils, virtually all of whom are of white, British descent. There are no pupils with English as an additional language. The school serves areas of both private and local government housing, and pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds. The percentage of pupils entitled to a free school meal is similar to that found nationally. Children's attainment on entry to the reception class, while encompassing a wide range of ability, is below average overall. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is above average, and the percentage with a statement of special educational needs is more than double the national average. The majority have specific learning difficulties or speech and communication problems. Most pupils joining the school remain in it until it is time to transfer to another school. The school is currently benefiting from considerable new building which will markedly improve its cramped accommodation. In 2002 it received a Schools Achievement Award and also achieved 'Investors in People' status.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
25771	Peter Sandall	Lead inspector	Mathematics, art and design, music, physical education
13395	Joanna Illingworth	Lay inspector	
21245	William Lowe	Team inspector	English, information and communication technology, design and technology, citizenship. special educational needs
20846	Alan Wilson	Team inspector	Foundation Stage, science, religious education, history, geography

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Cobbs Brow is a **very effective** school which offers its pupils a very good education and gives very good value for money. There is a very strong collective ethos which values everyone connected to the school. Teaching and learning are very good. The very good leadership of the headteacher and senior teachers is supported by an effective group of governors and a dedicated staff. Pupils achieve very well overall from what is for most a below average starting point, attaining average standards in English and above average standards in mathematics and science by Year 6.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The headteacher and senior staff provide very good leadership and management.
- Pupils of all abilities achieve very well and standards are above average and improving.
- More able pupils in Year 6 do not achieve as well in English as in mathematics and science.
- Teaching is very good overall, with examples of excellent practice.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to learning and behave very well.
- Pupils with special educational needs are very well provided for.
- Guidance and assessment systems support pupils very effectively.
- The governing body is effective, being both well informed and supportive.
- Whilst provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is satisfactory overall, not enough use is made of ICT to support learning in other subjects.

The school has improved overall standards since the previous inspection in English, mathematics and science. It has effectively met the key issues of improving the achievement of more able pupils overall, although less successfully for Year 6 pupils in English, and has gained a clearer picture of the work of the school. The quality of teaching, already good, is now better. The school's current priorities for improvement are appropriate and progress towards them is carefully evaluated. The school has made very good improvement overall.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2002	2003	2004	2004
English	D	C	D	C
mathematics	C	B	A	A
science	C	A	B	B

*Key: A - well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average
Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 2.*

Pupils' achievement is **very good** overall. The majority of children enter the foundation stage with below average attainment but achieve well, with most being on course to attain the goals children are expected to reach by the end of reception. Pupils achieve very well in Years 1 and 2, attaining above average standards in reading and writing and average standards in

mathematics by the end of Year 2, with the percentage attaining the higher level 3 being above the national average in all three subjects. This good achievement continues in Years 3 to 6 in mathematics and science, as is shown by the results of the Year 6 tests, and in recent years pupils have achieved very well in comparison with similar schools. While more Year 6 pupils attained the expected level 4 in English in the last two years than did pupils nationally, fewer reached the higher level 5, despite this being a focus for the school. The high quality of teaching for pupils in Year 6 means the school is well placed to address this, but currently achievement in English in Years 3 to 6 is satisfactory, as the good achievement by Year 2 has yet to influence attainment at Year 6.

Pupils display **very good** personal qualities, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. They have very good attitudes to each other, as well as very good relationships with adults in the school. This, together with very good behaviour by the great majority, contributes to a very positive ethos. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a **very good** standard of education and teaching and learning are **very good** overall. Teaching is predominantly and consistently good, with a high proportion of very good and excellent lessons. It is particularly strong for the older pupils, but good teaching takes place in all classes. Combined with pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour this creates a very positive learning atmosphere. Very good teaching in the key subjects of English and mathematics is very well supported by the use of involved and motivated teaching assistants. Teachers have high expectations of pupils of all abilities and challenge them effectively. The school's very good procedures for assessment and the tracking of individual pupils' progress ensure that work is pitched at an appropriate level, and teachers continuously evaluate the effectiveness of their lessons. The increasing involvement, particularly of older pupils, in understanding what they are trying to learn contributes to their overall achievement.

Excellent arrangements for introducing children to the school ensure they have a good start. The school works hard to provide a broad and interesting curriculum, well supported by visits and visitors, although the constraints of the current accommodation have an impact on the use of ICT. Pupils are very well supported both personally and academically. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. The school works hard to involve parents in their children's education, although not all respond. There are good links with the community and with the schools to which pupils transfer.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **very good**. The headteacher has a very clear vision of how the school can improve and is very well supported by a very effective deputy and senior staff. There is a culture of high expectation underpinned by well focused support, and this leads to excellent teamwork and the involvement of all staff, both teaching and non-teaching. Management is very effective, with clear roles and responsibilities. The key issue from the previous inspection on developing the role of subject coordinators has been addressed very well. Excellent performance management contributes to the development of all staff and is very well linked to development planning, which in turn is directed at improving pupils' achievement in all aspects of their education. The governing body has a good understanding of the school's needs and the direction it needs to take, and is kept well informed of current issues. Governors are well organised and self-evaluative. Statutory requirements are met. Financial management is very good and is closely linked to the school's priorities.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Both parents and pupils are very satisfied with the school. The parents attending the parents' meeting or returning questionnaires, as well as those spoken to during the course of the inspection, were full of praise, feeling they were made welcome and kept well informed. They believe, and inspectors agree, that their children are receiving a very good education. The pupils who gave their views, both formally and informally, enjoyed their lessons, thought they were well taught and that the staff of the school cared for them very well. This is also supported by inspection evidence.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Raise standards in English for more able pupils in Years 3 to 6.
- Develop the use of ICT across the range of subjects.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects

Achievement is very good. It is good in the foundation stage, and very good by Year 2, where pupils attain above average standards in reading and writing and average standards in mathematics. Achievement continues to be very good by Year 6. Standards in the core subjects of mathematics and science are above average, as they are for pupils attaining level 4 in English. However, more able pupils do not attain as well in English as they do in mathematics and science. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys or girls.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The great majority of pupils achieve very well over their time in school.
- Standards are better than those in similar schools at Year 2 and Year 6.
- The trend in standards in results in tests at the end of Year 2 is above the national trend.
- Higher attaining pupils in Year 6 have not achieved as well in English as those in similar schools in the past.
- Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress due to the support they are given.
- Achievement in ICT, while satisfactory, is limited by a lack of both space and resources.

Commentary

1. The school's results in national tests in reading and writing for pupils in Year 2 indicate standards which are above those in similar schools and which are improving. Results in mathematics are in line with those in similar schools. Test results in Year 6 are also better than those in similar schools in mathematics and science. In English, average and lower attaining pupils do better than their counterparts in similar schools, but higher attaining pupils do not, and results overall are average when compared to similar schools. Inspection evidence supports these findings. As a majority of pupils enter school with below average attainment and are leaving with above average standards, their achievement over time is very good. This is particularly the case for pupils with special educational needs, the percentage in the school being above the national average. The school's results at the expected level 2 at the end of Year 2 and level 4 at the end of Year 6 indicate that many of these pupils are achieving as well as their peers.
2. The quality of education the school provides is clearly linked to the intentions of the leadership of the school and the quality of management. The school aims include a commitment to both high standards and the best possible achievement by all pupils, and recognition that this will only be achieved through a high quality teaching and non-teaching staff with clearly defined roles. The clear focus on teaching and learning is very well supported by procedures such as performance management which are directly related to giving all pupils the opportunity to succeed.
3. The relatively weak attainment of more able pupils in English by Year 6 is recognised by the school, Despite a focus on writing last year some higher attaining pupils did not meet

their targets although the school received support of local authority advisors. However, the school's targets for pupils attaining the higher level 5 were close to being met. Recent improvements in writing in the tests at Year 2, where pupils achieved exceptional standards in 2003 and well above average standards in 2004, have not yet had time to feed through to Year 6. The inspection was unable to pinpoint any specific areas for improvement, although some Year 6 pupils are not very enthusiastic readers. Also, while pupils have opportunities to write in other subjects and there is some overall planning to link these to recently acquired writing styles from their literacy lessons, this is not consistent across the school. However, the current quality of English teaching, particularly for pupils in Year 6, is very high, and the good achievement in lessons seen during the inspection is likely to lead to all pupils achieving to the best of their ability.

4. Children in the foundation stage enter school with a range of ability, but the majority have below average attainment. Most children make good progress, and achieve the expected goals in the six areas of learning by the end of the reception class. A minority exceed these goals, due to good quality teaching and the careful assessment of children's progress, which leads to children being suitably challenged.
5. Pupils achieve very well in Years 1 and 2. The organisation of six teaching groups from four classes for literacy and numeracy lessons makes a strong contribution to this success, as do the quality of teaching and the use of support staff. Pupils in the current Year 2 class are not on course to attain similar standards to those in the recent past, due to a very high proportion having special educational needs, but their achievement in lessons remains good, and often very good.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
reading	16.2 (16.7)	16.0 (15.7)
writing	16.1 (17.3)	14.8 (14.6)
mathematics	16.3 (16.7)	16.4 (16.3)

There were 43 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

6. The proportion of pupils in Year 6 attaining the expected level 4 in English was just above the figure for similar schools in 2003, having improved from 2002. It increased further in 2004, indicating that the great majority of pupils are making at least the expected progress, with some doing better than this. Again, these results need to be looked at in the light of the school's percentage of pupils with special educational needs, and the attainment of pupils on entry to the school. The school's tracking systems show that many average and lower attaining pupils make good and very good progress over time. Higher attaining pupils, however, do less well than might be expected in English, especially considering their very good achievement in mathematics and science.
7. In mathematics, attainment has been above that in similar schools for three years, and improved again in 2004, for pupils attaining both level 4 and level 5, being well above the national average. In science, standards have been better than those in similar schools for three of the last four years, and were above average again last year; in 2003 they were well above average. Again, a strong feature is the very high proportion of pupils who attain the expected level 4 in both these subjects, as well as the good percentage attaining level 5, especially in science.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 6 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	26.5 (26.7)	26.8 (27.0)
mathematics	28.8 (27.9)	26.8 (26.7)
science	29.4 (30.5)	28.6 (28.3)

There were 37 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

8. A very good level of support is given to pupils with special educational needs and in consequence they achieve very well overall. In line with their peers, they make very good overall progress in their learning. There are no pupils with English as an additional language and no gifted and talented pupils have as yet been identified by the school.
9. Standards in ICT are average at both Year 2 and Year 6. The extremely cramped accommodation has restricted the school's ability to provide sufficient hardware, and as a result there are relatively limited opportunities for pupils to put their skills into practice, particularly in other subjects. Despite this, skills are effectively taught and pupils cover the expected range of knowledge. The very recent introduction of interactive whiteboards, where space permits, is already making a difference to provision in the subject: the new building will provide both space and opportunities which are already being planned for.
10. While other subjects were not a focus for the inspection, evidence indicates that standards are similar to those found nationally. The exceptions are music and dance at Year 6, where standards in lessons were above average, due to the quality of teaching pupils receive. While no art lessons were seen, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussion with pupils indicates that above average standards are being attained throughout the school, with skills being built on progressively.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' very good attitudes to school enhance their learning and progress. Their behaviour is very good and their personal development is good. Their attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils enjoy school and are keen to learn.
- Older pupils have particularly positive attitudes to learning.
- The school is a very orderly community where pupils are free from bullying and harassment.
- Pupils have very good relationships with adults in the school and with one another.
- The school has very high expectations regarding conduct and strongly promotes pupils' moral development.
- Very good opportunities are provided for cultural development.
- The school successfully encourages its pupils to grow in confidence and maturity.
- The number of pupils who are absent because of family holidays is increasing.

Commentary

11. Pupils' attitudes to school make a significant contribution to their very good achievement. The school makes very good provision in this area from the start of pupils' education, and as a result children in the foundation stage are well on track to achieve the early learning goals in personal and social development. Pupils come to school prepared to work hard and expecting to learn something new. The vast majority of them find their lessons interesting and fun. When in class they settle quickly to task, sustain their concentration and work productively, and this enhances their learning. Pupils like playing an active part in lessons; for example, they are very keen to answer questions and they enjoy expressing their own ideas. They appreciate good teaching and respond very positively to it.
12. Attitudes are invariably very good in lessons that have good pace and contain interesting and challenging tasks. As these are the majority, pupils' attitudes have a very positive effect on their achievement. In general pupils remain focused even if on rare occasions the teaching is relatively undemanding and lacks variety. Some of the younger pupils in the school have short attention spans, and at times are reluctant to sit quietly and listen to their teachers, although teachers work hard and generally effectively to counteract this by giving pupils plenty of practical tasks. Attitudes to learning, although generally very good, are strongest in the junior classes. Older pupils are very well motivated and keen to learn in lessons. They also enjoy participating in extra-curricular activities. During the inspection large groups of pupils were observed attending a lunchtime recorder class and an after-school science club. Many also learn to play a musical instrument.
13. The quality of behaviour is very good, as the absence of any exclusion last year indicates. Pupils respect the code of conduct and are polite and co-operative in lessons. They are quiet and orderly when moving around the site and when eating lunch in the hall. The youngest children, although well behaved overall, take a little time to settle into school routines. Sometimes they fidget and chat at inappropriate times in lessons. Standards of behaviour improve as pupils get older, thanks to a combination of high expectations, effective policies and strong reinforcement of positive conduct. There is a commendable absence of disruptive and oppressive behaviour. Pupils and parents say that instances of bullying and harassment are very rare and are resolved quickly and effectively.
14. There is a strong sense of community in the school. This is enhanced by the very good relationships that pupils have with their peers and with adults. They are open and friendly with members of staff, while showing them due respect. Pupils are mutually supportive of each other. They help one another and work successfully in pairs and groups in lessons. They play well together in the playground. Pupils regard the school as a very friendly place where everyone gets on well with everyone else, and in their eyes this is one of its greatest strengths.
15. The school is effective in helping its pupils to become more mature and responsible. Overall, it makes very good provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Spirituality is well promoted in religious education lessons and acts of collective worship. Pupils, who are almost exclusively from white European backgrounds, acquire a good understanding of non-Christian, non-European faiths via assemblies and through the curriculum for music, art and religious education. However, more visits to places of worship, or visitors from other faiths, would make spiritual development more meaningful to pupils.
16. Cultural development is very good, being well supported by a wide range of visits with cultural significance, as well as visitors to the school. These include folk dancers, African and Asian drummers, multi-cultural story tellers and authors, as well as visits to historical sites and craft centres. Pupils are fully involved, as when helping to construct a giant Chinese 'dragon' which was then taken round and displayed in local centres. The

curriculum in both music and art offers very good opportunities to understand other cultures, both through the appreciation of different styles and by attempting to work in a similar way.

17. Provision for pupils' moral development is very good. Members of staff act as very good role models of courtesy and consideration for others, and assemblies have strong moral messages that draw clear distinctions between right and wrong. The effectiveness of the school's work in this area is evident from the high quality of pupils' behaviour. Provision for social development is good. Younger pupils are encouraged to be independent and responsible, as when teachers ask them to carry out small jobs and to get out and put away resources in lessons. Older pupils get many opportunities to exercise responsibility and to serve the school community. For example, they can become library assistants or playground "buddies". They can now also become representatives to the school council, if their peers choose to elect them to this post. This is a new development, and as yet the recently formed school council has not had time to make much impact on school life.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.7	School data	0.8
National data	5.4	National data	0.4

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

18. Pupils' attendance is satisfactory. The school's annual attendance rate is broadly in line with the national average, although lower in 2003/04 than 2003/02. The incidence of unauthorised absence is above average. The decline in actual attendance and the rise in unauthorised absence are explained by holiday leave. More and more parents take their children away for holidays during school time, and in some cases these pupils are absent for more days than the school will authorise. While teachers work hard and generally successfully to minimise the impact this has on overall achievement, it inevitably has an effect on the progress of some pupils. Procedures for promoting good attendance are satisfactory. Registers are closely monitored. Good attendance is rewarded and appropriate action is taken whenever a pupil is frequently away or late for school. However, the school does not automatically make first day contact with the families of children who are absent without explanation. It only does so when there are already concerns about the pupil's attendance record.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a very good education for all its pupils. The very good ethos supports learning, as does a shared commitment to improvement and very good leadership and management. Pupils are given a very good level of support and guidance, and there are good links with parents, other schools and the community.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are very good overall. They are good in the foundation stage and Years 1 and 2, and very good in Years 3 to 6. Assessment procedures are very good and are used very well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good overall, being strongest in Year 6.
- Several examples of excellent practice were seen.
- Good or very good teaching was observed in all classes and age groups.
- Assessment procedures are very effective and their use supports pupils' achievement very well.
- Teaching assistants make a very positive contribution to pupils' learning.
- Tracking systems ensure that progress is monitored very effectively.
- Pupils' involvement in their own learning targets is beginning to pay dividends, particularly for older pupils, but is not sufficiently referred to in teachers' marking.

Commentary

19. The very high quality of teaching observed during the inspection is testimony to the school's leadership and management and the strong emphasis placed on improving teaching and learning. The effect can be clearly seen in the very good achievement of all groups of pupils over time. There is a very strong ethos and clearly expressed expectations, which are understood by pupils and appreciated by parents. The school functions very well as a learning community.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 32 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4 (13%)	9 (28%)	13 (41%)	6 (19%)	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.

20. Teaching, good at the time of the previous inspection, has improved still further. As can be seen from the above table, teaching is now predominantly good or better, with a high proportion of both very good and excellent teaching. The good teaching takes place in all classes and year groups and therefore underwrites the consistent achievement the pupils make. While there were examples of both very good and excellent teaching for pupils in other classes, most is concentrated in the classes with Year 6 pupils, where all teaching observed was either very good or excellent. Even though the inspection took place early in the school year, it is evident that learning in these classes is being accelerated and that pupils are responding very positively to the opportunities offered.
21. Excellent teaching was seen in literacy (twice), science and music. The quality of the relationship between pupils and teacher was central to all these lessons, creating an atmosphere of mutual trust which ensured pupils of all abilities became enthusiastic and involved learners. Planning was very focused, with the learning intentions clearly shared with the pupils, and the work set was carefully prepared to offer an appropriate and achievable challenge. Teachers had secure knowledge of their subjects and were very clear about what the lesson was designed to achieve. The balance between discussion and activity, together with the quality of teachers' questioning, kept pupils on track and on task. The success was not just in what the pupils learned, but their involvement and excitement in the process of learning.

22. The school groups pupils by ability and age where possible for literacy and numeracy lessons, which works well and helps to ensure that pupils are taught at an appropriate level. It is particularly effective in the foundation stage and Years 1 and 2, where four mixed-age classes are divided into six teaching groups in the morning, enabling children in reception and pupils in Years 1 and 2 to be taught in relatively small, single-age groups. This organisation, supported by good teaching, contributes strongly to the sometimes exceptional results in writing attained by pupils in the tests at Year 2, as well as the good achievement of pupils of all abilities. It also supports the percentage of pupils attaining the higher level 3 in mathematics, which was above the national figure in 2003 and 2004. The school makes creative use of the very limited space available.
23. The school's planned decision to employ a good number of teaching assistants, subsidised from the school's budget, is working well. Not only are individuals and groups of pupils given additional support, but also the quality and skills of the teaching and special needs assistants and nursery staff are high and are well used by teachers. All non-teaching staff volunteer to take part in the school's performance management programme, and through this benefit from training which enhances and broadens their role. They are rightly regarded as a key component of the school's teaching and learning strategy, and make a very good contribution to the assessment and evaluation of pupils' progress. At times, however, during the inspection the learning of children in the foundation stage was less effective because the assistance in the afternoons was spread more thinly between greater numbers of children. However, the school has already employed extra support staff to rectify this.
24. The school provides very well for the pupils identified as having special educational needs. They are very well supported in the classroom and fully included in all activities. The tasks they are set are well matched to their ability levels and a very good level of adult help further supports them. Their work is planned with the help of well-formulated individual education plans that include targets based on assessment. Teachers and support staff work well together while seeking to ensure that pupils do not become too dependent on adult help. Very good records are kept, including daily reports on pupil progress written by the teaching assistants working with individual pupils.
25. There are very good assessment procedures which are used very effectively. Systems are thorough and very well organised and are embedded in the school's practice. Planning and assessment are very closely linked, and teachers evaluate the effect of their lessons, being therefore aware of what has worked well and where pupils or groups of pupils would benefit from further help. The school collects detailed evidence on the achievement of both individuals and groups of pupils, which it uses to set challenging targets which are regularly reviewed. Pupils' answers to tests are analysed to isolate and then reinforce weaker areas through future planning. A common planning format and co-operative planning between teachers both contribute to very effective assessment, as do the involvement and understanding of subject coordinators. Pupils' individual targets in English and mathematics are shared with pupils and parents and are beginning to be reflected in pupils' work, although more reference to them in teachers' marking would make them more effective still.

The curriculum

The school offers pupils a good curriculum which is broad and balanced and meets national requirements. The pupils are given good opportunities to participate in a range of different extra-curricular activities. Accommodation and resources are overall satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils with special educational needs are very well provided for.
- There is a good match of support staff to curriculum needs.
- Pupils are prepared well for the later stages of education.
- The use of ICT in other subjects is not yet fully developed.
- Extra-curricular provision and opportunities for enrichment are good.
- The accommodation is well maintained but lack of space affects teaching and learning in some subjects.

Commentary

26. There has been a good level of improvement in the curriculum since the last inspection. Curriculum planning is better organised and more carefully related to learning intentions, particularly for older pupils, a weakness previously. Within its curriculum the school provides a broad range of worthwhile experiences that fulfil the needs of the pupils and meet statutory requirements. However, the use of ICT across the curriculum remains limited. While the lack of space restricts opportunities, there is little evidence of planned opportunities in subjects such as science to make use of pupils' ICT skills. In mathematics, however, newly acquired programs are linked to practising skills learned as part of the numeracy strategy. The leadership and management of the school are very aware of curriculum issues and have worked hard and effectively to provide a curriculum which supports pupils' learning.
27. Pupils with special educational needs receive the full provision of the school's curriculum. They are fully included in all its activities and given the opportunity to assume responsibility where appropriate. The individual education plans provided for the pupils contain targets that are based on previous attainment and assessment; the strategies for achieving them are well formulated. Special needs support staff are well matched to the needs of the pupils and the curriculum they are following.
28. Children and pupils in the foundation stage and Year 2 are very well prepared for the next stages in their education. Very good records are kept of attainment and progress; these are realistic and therefore helpful to receiving teachers. The school ensures that there are good arrangements for transfer to receiving schools for older pupils; for example, the use of common record cards and good liaison procedures. Pupils are encouraged to form links with receiving schools by attending induction days and other special activities.
29. The resources available to teachers are satisfactory overall; those in English, science, art and music are good. The accommodation is well maintained but in some classrooms has a limiting effect on teaching and learning because of the restricted space available. It is satisfactory overall. The use of ICT is also compromised by the lack of space in classrooms. The school is looking forward to moving into its new buildings, now under construction, and future curricular needs have been carefully considered by the school and have contributed to the planning process.

30. The school supports its pupils well with activities outside the school day. There is a good range of sporting opportunities on offer, including netball, football, judo and rounders. Pupils are given the opportunity to participate in activities such as a needlework club, science club and, in cooperation with a local high school, a technology club. The school provides a good range of opportunities for pupils to participate in the arts; there is, for example, a good range of music tuition for violins, keyboard, guitar and recorder. There are visits to the school by various performers. These have included Indian drummers, African dancers and English folk groups; the pupils are given the opportunity to perform with them.

Care, guidance and support

The school makes good arrangements to promote pupils' welfare health and safety. The quality of individual support and guidance is very good. The school has good procedures for involving pupils in its work by seeking out and acting on their views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are excellent arrangements for the induction of new pupils.
- Pupils have very good relations with members of staff and feel able to turn to them for help.
- Monitoring of pupils' progress is very thorough and ensures that they receive advice and guidance that meets their needs.
- The school has good procedures for ensuring pupils' health and safety and makes very good provision for first aid.

Commentary

31. Arrangements for ensuring pupils' welfare are good and benefit from a co-ordinated whole- school approach to health, safety, child protection and other pastoral matters. The school has good formal policies that are regularly reviewed and updated. They are well supported by good practical procedures. Provision for first aid is very good and all teaching staff, as well as some non-teaching staff, have at least the basic first aid qualification. The school has effective arrangements to safeguard pupils' welfare by eliminating unnecessary risks. The level of supervision at breaks and lunch times is good, and there are effective procedures for identifying and dealing with hazards on site. The school also carries out thorough risk assessments on all proposed trips and visits.
32. Healthy eating is strongly promoted. Pupils are given fresh fruit at break, free of charge, as a way of encouraging them to enjoy a healthy diet. The school's accommodation, although satisfactory, does not make a positive contribution to pupils' welfare. Because the playground areas are relatively small, there is insufficient space for designated "quiet areas" or for play equipment. This is the one area of school life that pupils would like to see improved; the school's plans for the new building are structured to accomplish this.
33. The school has excellent procedures for settling new pupils into the reception classes. The induction process is handled very sensitively. New pupils are gradually phased into school during the summer term, with the full involvement and support of their parents. This gives them an enjoyable and constructive start to their life in school.

34. Pupils of all ages get very good support and guidance. They have very trusting relationships with members of staff, who understand their needs and can give them appropriate advice. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to speak to their teachers during the school day about any worries and concerns. They receive very sympathetic support, which boosts their confidence and enhances their progress. The vast majority of pupils are very happy with the quality of the care and guidance. Nearly all of them say that there is an adult in school to whom they can turn for help and advice. There were a few negative responses to this question in the pupils' questionnaire, all from pupils in junior classes, but they may well have been affected by staff absences in the recent past. Inspectors' observations and conversations with pupils confirmed that pupils find members of staff very approachable and helpful. There was no evidence to substantiate the minority view.
35. The quality of support for pupils is enhanced by rigorous monitoring of their academic and personal progress. Some of this is done informally but very effectively through teachers' and teaching assistants' good knowledge of pupils as individuals. The school also has very good formal systems for assessing, monitoring and promoting progress. Each pupil has a comprehensive "record of achievement" containing information on his or her academic and personal successes, together with targets for improvement. Pupils are aware of what is in their records and make their own contributions to them. Overall, they have a good understanding of their own learning and personal development. They receive good guidance from their teachers through written comments on their work and through oral feedback in lessons. As a result, pupils know their strengths and weaknesses and know what they have to do to improve.
36. The school has good procedures for involving pupils in its work through seeking out and acting on their views. There is good provision for in-class discussion, where matters of concern can be raised and solutions sought. Pupils find this helpful, valuing the opportunity to talk about their feelings and problems. They believe that teachers listen to them, take note of what they say, and treat their ideas seriously. The school council is a recent initiative. Its members are enthusiastic and have a mature and responsible approach to their role. They act as a voice for their fellow pupils, but have yet to make a significant impact on the running of the school.
37. Pupils with special educational needs are given a very good level of support to enable them to reach their full potential. They are fully accepted by their peers. The help of outside agencies is well used by the school to strengthen its provision. The parents of pupils with special educational needs are kept well informed about the progress of their child. From discussions it is clear that the parents concerned are very happy with the service they are receiving.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has established a good partnership with parents, whose contribution has a positive effect of on pupils' learning and personal development. The school has also developed good links with the community and with other schools. It has good procedures for seeking parents' views and dealing with their concerns and complaints.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has the full confidence of parents and carers.

- Parents receive very good information about their children's progress and about the life of the school.
- The school encourages parents of new pupils to become closely involved in the induction of their children into the reception class.
- The school's good links with the local community and with partner organisations enhance pupils' opportunities for learning.
- Most parents give good support to the school and to their children's education.
- A significant number of parents take their children away for holidays in term time, and a minority attach little importance to punctuality.

Commentary

38. Parents are extremely satisfied with the school. They strongly approve of all aspects of its work, but are particularly happy with the quality of teaching and arrangements for the induction of new pupils. They also rate their partnership with the school very highly. Parents feel very comfortable about approaching members of staff to discuss queries and problems, and are very happy with the quality of information on pupils' progress. They think that they get good guidance on how best to help their children to learn at home. Very few parents express any concerns, and the number of negative responses to the inspection's survey of parental opinion was extremely small.
39. Inspectors agree with parents' positive views, including their views on the quality of the home/school partnership. The school values the support of pupils' families and has established very good links with them. It provides parents with very good information on their children's progress. The annual written reports are clear and precise, and provide plenty of information on what pupils have learned and can do. They are pleasantly personal, showing parents that the teacher knows and cares about their child as an individual. The reports do not include pupils' targets for improvement, but these are fully discussed at parents' evenings and are also set out in pupils' records of achievement. The latter provide a comprehensive profile of children's achievements, personal development and overall progress. Parents are encouraged to read them and record their comments if they wish. All this has a positive effect on pupils' attainment.
40. The quality of information on school routines and events is very good. The headteacher sends out regular newsletters, and notices on the "events board" at the parents' entrance to school give details of holiday dates and the parent teacher association's functions. There are good procedures for sounding out parents' views. This is done effectively through questionnaires and response slips on reports and letters, and the school takes action on the results. For example, the plans to open a breakfast club and an after-school club arose from parents' suggestions.
41. The school actively seeks to engage parents as partners in their children's learning, starting from the time that children join the reception classes. There are excellent procedures for involving them in the induction process. Parents receive detailed and helpful information on the curriculum and school routines and are encouraged to stay with their children during introductory sessions. This establishes a partnership which continues as pupils grow older.
42. The majority of parents support their children's learning well. They encourage them to complete homework and co-operate readily with members of staff if there are problems over progress or behaviour. Parents' attendance at consultation evenings is good. They

also give good support to school trips and extra-curricular activities, but their interest in workshops on the curriculum is patchy. In general parents make a positive contribution to pupils' learning and the life of the school. However, many of them take their children away for holidays in term time, which impairs the attainment and progress of a few, although teachers work hard and successfully to minimise the impact. A few parents do not value education and do not attach any importance to punctuality. They are unconcerned that their children are frequently late for school.

43. There are good links with the local community and partner organisations, and these have a positive impact on learning and progress. Visiting artists and musicians regularly present workshops in school. All pupils get the opportunity to take part in these and benefit greatly from the experience. Good relations with local services and agencies enhance the quality of pastoral care. For example, the school and the education welfare officer co-operate closely on measures to improve pupils' attendance and to support families who are experiencing difficulties.
44. Cobbs Brow has a good partnership with local secondary schools that goes beyond the normal co-operation over the transfer of Year 6 pupils to secondary education. It has effective curricular links with Lathom High School and is a sponsor of its bid for specialist college status. These contacts promote pupils' learning by giving them the opportunity to attend extra-curricular science and technology clubs. The school's partnerships with local organisations are mutually beneficial, as in the case of the link with Edge Hill College. The college's student teachers come to Cobbs Brow to gain practical experience and are helped and supported by the school's teachers. The latter are trained to act as mentors, and this updates and develops their teaching skills.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The school is very well led and managed by the headteacher, very well supported by an experienced deputy and by key staff. Governance is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher has a clear vision for the school, is committed to making it work and has developed very effective teams to support this.
- Energies are successfully focused on improving the pupils' learning opportunities.
- Very good management systems are effective in supporting all aspects of the school's work.
- Governors are fully involved and have a good understanding of the school.
- Very good use is made of the school's finances.
- Excellent performance management systems are closely linked to school improvement.

Commentary

45. The school's very good leadership stems from the way in which all staff are encouraged to have high aspirations and are given the opportunity to manage their responsibilities. While both the headteacher and deputy headteacher have been in post for a lengthy period, their enthusiasm and vision remain strong and are successfully communicated to all staff. Their ability to work together and make best use of their strengths is now

supported by an effective senior management team and enthusiastic and innovative subject coordinators, a development in which the deputy headteacher has played a leading role.

46. The expectation that everyone in the school has a role to play, and the way in which this is supported and encouraged, results in excellent teamwork and a staff united in their determination to provide a quality education in every sense. The school has addressed the key issues from the last inspection relating to senior management and subject coordination very well. In turn, this improved understanding and involvement of all staff has underpinned the raising of standards and of pupils' achievement. This is a school in which everyone is encouraged to play an important part, and where constructive discussion and dialogue leads to effective innovation in practice. An example is the way in which the school had already identified underachievement among the more able pupils in English in Year 6 and has put in place a programme to address this. While it has not yet proved successful, time will be required for the programme to have an impact on standards.
47. The discussion with the governing body showed a good knowledge and understanding of the school and its strengths, as well as where the next developments are needed. Governors are kept very well informed by the headteacher, and as a result are able to discuss and question from the basis of secure understanding. They are very mindful of the challenges and opportunities presented by the extensive new building, but are not letting the necessary focus on this deflect them from their primary role in ensuring a quality education for the pupils currently in the school. Statutory requirements are fully met.
48. The governors have appointed a responsible governor for special educational needs and the special needs co-ordinator has carried out training to ensure that all governors are fully briefed about the school's provision for special needs. The support provided by the school's management for pupils with special educational needs is very effective and helps them to work towards their individual targets.
49. The cramped accommodation affects specific subjects such as ICT and art, because of lack of space, as well as the outdoor provision for children in the foundation stage. It also impacts on teaching in all subjects in the main building because taught groups have to work in very confined spaces and within earshot of other lessons. The management of the school has done its best to overcome these difficulties, and has been successful, judging by the standards attained. The governors and staff are also having a lot of input into the planning of the new building to maximise its potential for supporting teaching and learning.
50. Very good systems support the professional development of all staff. Performance management is excellent. It involves both teaching and non-teaching staff and is clearly linked to both personal development as well as the school's needs through development planning. It has a very positive effect on staff attitudes and on the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Self-evaluation is part of the school's ethos, having been undertaken by the governing body, and is evident in subject coordinators' action plans as well as whole-school planning.
51. There are very good arrangements for the induction of staff, whether newly qualified or new to the school. As well as good systems, the ethos of the school, in which mutual support and teamwork are fundamental, plays a very effective part in ensuring that new additions are quickly assimilated. The strong commitment to employing a good number of

high quality support staff is fully justified by their contribution to pupils' learning. The school's links with colleges and training institutions are mutually beneficial.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	701,341	Balance from previous year	53,770
Total expenditure	700,515	Balance carried forward to the next	54,596
Expenditure per pupil	2,520		

52. The school has very good procedures for ensuring that the financial resources available, which are somewhat lower than those enjoyed by many similar schools nationally, properly support the educational needs of its pupils. This is similar to the findings of the previous inspection in 1998. Governors, especially those directly involved in the school's financial management, have a clear picture of where the school is and a good understanding of their responsibilities. While the carry forward figure is fairly high at around 8% of income, this is a conscious decision and is targeted at ensuring that all aspects of the new building will support pupils' learning, which is prudent and effective use of funds. A recent audit report found only minor procedural omissions, all of which have been rectified.
53. There is good awareness of the need to apply best value principles when balancing the needs of staffing, accommodation and resources. Governors play an effective role as critical friends, questioning the school's performance and comparing it with schools elsewhere. They know the importance of obtaining best value in purchasing services and resources and have good procedures to ensure this happens. School administration is quiet and efficient, making a significant contribution to the smooth running of the school. The fact that the school's finance officer is also a governor provides a useful link.

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

54. Provision for children in the foundation stage is good. Comparisons with provision at the time of the last inspection cannot be made because the foundation stage has since been established as a key stage in its own right. The school has responded well to the changes through careful and imaginative planning of the curriculum for children at this stage. The children enter the school with attainment that is below average overall. The atmosphere is exciting and welcoming and provided by a capable and very hard working team. The quality of teaching is good, so the children who have recently joined the school have made a positive start and are achieving well. The majority of children are on track to attain the early learning goals in all areas of learning during their first year. Children with special educational needs are well supported and make the same progress as their peers.
55. A major strength of the provision is the school's arrangement for the induction of children to the reception year, which is excellent. Because children come from a very wide range of pre-school providers, the school makes it possible for parents and children to visit the reception/Year 1 class on numerous occasions before children finally join the school on a staggered basis. The pre-school visits are used to best advantage by staff to establish very good relationships with parents, who value this smooth and well organised transitional phase, and to familiarise them with the foundation stage curriculum. In addition, the foundation stage team use these very early opportunities to begin keeping detailed records of children's development and this forms a solid basis for the very efficient systems for tracking their progress throughout the school.
56. The foundation stage is jointly led by one of the reception class teachers and the deputy headteacher, who between them provide good leadership. Their major strength is that they plan a curriculum which imaginatively links areas of learning and engages the children in exciting activities with a practical emphasis, preparing them very well for the transition to Year 1 and the National Curriculum.
57. Although good support is provided by teaching assistants and the nursery nurse during literacy and numeracy sessions, the bulk of the day-to-day teaching is carried out by the class teachers assisted by the nursery nurse. As a result, some lessons start off very well with lively and productive whole-class teaching and this quality continues for the groups of children who are supported by the teacher or nursery nurse. However, other children find it difficult to work independently or sustain their interest without the encouragement of an adult, particularly at this early stage in the term. This means that the team's hard work, very thorough planning, assessment and organisation of resources are not always matched by their impact on children's achievement. However, the school has already responded to this identified weakness by employing more support staff for the afternoon sessions.
58. While future planning to support an outdoor curriculum forms part of the new building development, this aspect of children's learning is currently constrained by limited facilities.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children enjoy a positive start due to an excellent programme of induction.
- Teachers' assessment and tracking of children's personal development are very good.
- The children are encouraged to take responsibility and think for themselves and their behaviour and relationships with others are good.
- Some children lose concentration and focus after a short while where they are not supported by an adult.

Commentary

59. Children are keen, interested and enjoy coming to school, having already had excellent experiences prior to starting their reception year. They behave well and are very clear about what is expected of them. Staff provide a warm welcome as children arrive with their parents, leading to a productive start to the day. As a result of good planning and teaching children are very aware of the routines and the majority work confidently and sensibly. Because relationships with staff and other children are good, the vast majority of children work together happily and feel very much part of a community.
60. Most children work sensibly in activities that are not led by an adult because the planning is well organised and teachers or the nursery nurse assess their progress throughout the day. In the 'shop' for example, they take the role of shopkeeper and customers and use the toys and coins cooperatively. They are polite and sociable when drinking their milk or eating their fruit and take responsibility for counting out, distributing and collecting in the milk cartons. During independent activities most children sustain concentration well, but others show initial interest which tails off quickly without support. As a result, the activity loses focus and the pace of learning slows. Overall, children achieve well and are on track to attain standards at the expected level by the end of the reception year.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well-planned activities supported by very good assessment successfully promote children's learning.
- Children's speaking and listening are developed well through good teaching.

Commentary

61. The varied and thoughtfully linked curriculum for the foundation stage provides children with many opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills, to become familiar with books and to practise and improve writing. In one session on designing a playground, for example, children played with model playground furniture and confidently named features such as 'see-saw,' 'roundabout' and 'flower pots'. In another, where they talked about the autumnal pictures they had made in the style of the artist Goldworthy, children were encouraged to look for and write the names of the colours that they had used. A few more

able children hold a pen correctly and are able to write their own names. Children achieve well and are on track to achieve the expected standards by the end of the reception year.

62. Teaching is good. Teachers make very good use of imaginative whole-class games to develop children's vocabulary and their recognition of initial sounds, so that most children recognise the names of toy animals and some say which letter they begin with. During most activities, staff use the very good assessment systems that are in place to record children's progress and use the information to pitch the next day's work at the right level for individuals and groups.
63. Teachers successfully encourage children to learn, say and enact popular nursery rhymes. Well-planned activities in which children share books together and point to words and pictures which they recognise are having a positive impact on both their understanding and their enjoyment of books.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in mathematical development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Imaginative planning and organisation of resources have a positive impact on teaching and learning.
- There is good emphasis placed on the use of mathematical language.

Commentary

64. Children achieve well in their mathematical development. Teaching is good and many children are on track to reach the early learning goals by the end of the reception year. The appropriate emphasis placed on the building of mathematical experiences before the introduction of more formal recording is a reflection of the knowledge and expertise of the staff. Good understanding is built through the use of practical activities and everyday materials.
65. Mathematical language is encouraged. For example, counting skills are developed by activities such as lining up and counting the number of cars in a car park and children are encouraged to use expressions such as 'more than' or 'less than.' Children's work on display in the classroom shows that they look for and use the names of common geometric shapes such as triangle, square and circle when making pictures of real life objects.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are very good curriculum links between different aspects and these make a positive contribution to children's overall achievement.
- Children's investigative skills are developed well through good planning which places emphasis on practical activity.

Commentary

66. The most significant strength of the curriculum for knowledge and understanding of the world lies in the planning of logical links between the different aspects. The main impact of this strategy is that it helps to consolidate and reinforce teaching and learning, supported by good teaching. For example, what children learn about the importance of water in the life cycle of a frog has relevance to their understanding of how water helps a runner bean to grow or that water plays an important part in baptism. Another strong feature is that most activities have a practical emphasis which successfully harnesses children's natural curiosity and has a positive impact on achievement. For example, their understanding of seasonal changes is reinforced by collecting and sorting autumn fruits and seeds, from which they make pictures. Similarly, their understanding of 'now and then' is developed by interviewing an older visitor to the school or by discussing their old toys or photos of themselves as babies.
67. This practical emphasis prepares children very well for their transition to the school's investigative approach in subjects like science and geography. The development of the appropriate technical skills is also evident in children's plans of the school building or in the use of computers to design equipment for a playground. Religious education forms a strong element of the curriculum, with an initial focus on children's awareness of themselves, developing to an appreciation of care and respect for others exemplified through Christian and Jewish stories and celebrations. Because teaching is good most children are securely on track to achieve the early learning goals in this area and are achieving well.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

68. No overall judgement could be reached as to the quality of provision for physical development because it was not possible to see the children using apparatus or taking part in dance or games activities. The school has worked hard to build up a store of large wheeled toys and construction equipment and these are in regular use. Because of a lack of space, or of a secure or covered area, opportunities to develop skills on apparatus are very limited but plans for the imminent expansion of the school show that this will soon be remedied. Children are encouraged to develop their dexterity and manual control through using tools such as cutters, scissors and pencils and crayons.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Provision in creative development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children's artistic skills are developed effectively.
- Children have good opportunities to use their imagination through music and role-play.

Commentary

69. Individually and collectively, the foundation stage team makes good use of available space and resources to provide opportunities for creative development. Teaching is good, activities well planned and are often closely linked to other areas of the curriculum so that most children are well on course to achieve the early learning goals and are

achieving well. There are role-play areas in each of the three teaching spaces and these are in regular use. Most children use these areas with a sense of purpose and enjoyment and successfully cooperate with one or more classmates, sustaining an imaginary role for several minutes at a time. However, a minority at this stage run out of ideas very quickly without support from an adult.

70. Teachers provide regular and enjoyable opportunities for children to listen to and play music, to develop a sense of rhythm and to learn and perform songs. The nursery nurse provides good opportunities for children to express themselves and develop skills through painting, drawing and printing and she also ensures that children use equipment sensibly. Collectively, these activities make a positive contribution to the development of children's self-confidence and imagination. Children's creative work is celebrated through attractive displays in the foundation stage area.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 and 2

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good overall and sometimes excellent.
- The pupils achieve well overall; for pupils with special educational needs achievement is very good.
- More able pupils in Year 6 do not achieve as well as other groups.
- The assessment and tracking of pupils' progress is very good.
- The subject is very well managed by the co-ordinators.
- The use of ICT within the subject is not fully developed.

Commentary

71. Results of the national tests in 2004 at Year 2 show average attainment in reading and well above average attainment in writing. Hearing readers from the present Year 2 class suggests that their reading skills are developing well and that they are in line to attain above average standards. This is commendable due to the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs in this year group. Writing skills are also improving, due to the quality of teaching and the organisation of pupils into smaller teaching groups for literacy lessons, and pupils are achieving very well. Overall, pupils in Year 2 are in line to attain above average standards, representing very good achievement for these pupils. The school has attained very high standards recently in national tests for writing, with results in 2003 being in the top 5 per cent nationally, a considerable achievement when pupils come into school with below average skills.
72. In the national tests in 2003 and 2004 for pupils in Year 6, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected level 4 was consistently better than the national figure, but fewer pupils attained the higher level 5. In 2004, this led to standards overall being below those in similar schools. From the evidence of lesson observations and assessment information provided by the school, current Year 6 pupils are on course to achieve standards that are broadly in line with national expectations. When the pupils' level of attainment on entering the school is taken into consideration, average and less able pupils achieve well over time. There has been good improvement in standards since the previous inspection.
73. The current quality of teaching and learning for higher attaining pupils in Year 6 is particularly strong, and the school is therefore well placed to improve the attainment of the most able in English in the national tests, an area which has proved relatively difficult despite the school's recognition and focus on this. The school's involvement in the national 'Excellence and Enjoyment' initiative is also a potential key to unlocking the ability of more able pupils in writing across different curriculum subjects.
74. The quality of teaching experienced by the pupils is very good overall and in a significant number of lessons, excellent. It is because of the high level of teaching skills demonstrated by the teachers within the subject that the pupils make such good, sometimes very good, progress; particularly those with special educational needs. There is an atmosphere in the classrooms of mutual trust and respect and pupils are given a

good level of opportunity to work independently and thus gain in confidence. Lessons are fully inclusive with a good, often very good level of support provided by teachers and other classroom assistance. Teachers ensure that as many pupils as possible take an active part in their lessons and use questioning well to assess the effectiveness of what they are doing. During lessons teachers ensure that the work set is well matched to the abilities of the pupils concerned.

75. The pupils often write well, due to the provision of a good range of opportunities to use different genres and the encouragement of their teachers. Pupils are learning to develop their own unique writing styles. For example, this extract from an interesting piece by an older pupil:
“..... doesn't stop her moaning at me and I'll not stop moaning at her – if we didn't moan at each other, we'd have precious little else to talk about.....”
In another good example of extended writing a Year 2 pupil wrote:
“Leaves are like a gorgeous rainbow
When they fall down it is like they
Have gone to the ball.”
76. Progress in writing in Years 3 to 6 is not as good as it is among the younger pupils in the school. The older pupils in particular have not had sufficient opportunities in the past to develop their skills, and the standards now being achieved in Years 1 and 2 have not had time to feed through to Years 5 and 6. However, literacy teaching for the older pupils is of high quality, and their achievement in lessons points to rapidly improving standards.
77. The speaking and listening skills of the pupils are on the whole good and they listen well to their teachers and to each other, although some examples of less advanced speaking skills were noted during the inspection. Pupils are able, for the most part, to explain what they are doing and respond well when spoken to. Teachers make good use of discussion partners in lessons in all subjects, and the pupils' response indicates that this is both expected and enjoyed. Teachers also make good use of open-ended questions and encourage pupils to make thoughtful and reasoned answers. Pupils are encouraged to use appropriate vocabulary and to extend and justify their answers where needed.
78. The reading skills of the pupils are developed effectively and pupils in the present Year 2 class are making good progress overall. They are attaining standards above those expected nationally. In Year 6, in discussion, most pupils demonstrated an interest in books and reading. However, there were a few who are not very interested in reading and whose higher order reading skills need to be developed further. They are conscientious readers who take books home every night, but who have little enthusiasm for literature. This limited interest impacts on the imagination and construction of their written work. School reading records and hearing pupils read during the inspection indicate that Year 6 pupils attain broadly average standards in reading.
79. The leadership and management of the subject are very effective in ensuring that subject development is a continuous process, a factor that has resulted in a very good level of improvement in provision since the last inspection. While the attainment of more able pupils in Year 6 remains a concern, this is not because of lack of analysis of areas of difficulty, nor of strategies designed to raise standards. The procedures for assessing and tracking the progress of the pupils are very good. The subject coordinators are aware of the need to develop the use of ICT within the subject when more equipment and space become available.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

80. Overall, there is satisfactory use of language and literacy skills across the curriculum. The pupils are given frequent opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills in other subjects; strong features of teaching being both the use of open-ended questions and the encouragement of pupils to discuss key points with each other. Good use is made of technical language in mathematics and science. Pupils use their writing skills in other subjects. For example, in history Year 3 and Year 4 pupils capture the life of a servant in Ancient Egypt. However, these opportunities are not always planned for so that they link to recently acquired techniques taught in literacy lessons. Where they are, as in producing suitably arresting wording for posters in art, this works well. New initiatives will support the planned use of writing skills in other areas of the curriculum

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average by Year 6 and improving throughout the school.
- Pupils of all abilities achieve very well.
- Mathematics is very well taught.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Commentary

81. Standards in mathematics by Year 2 are broadly in line with the national average. The results of national tests in 2003 and 2004 indicate average attainment, both when compared nationally and to similar schools, although an above average proportion of pupils attained the higher level 3. Pupils achieve well overall, and many achieve very well, because the attainment of the majority is below average when they enter school, and there is also an above average number of pupils identified as having special educational needs. The trend of improvement over time is similar to that found nationally.
82. By Year 6, attainment is above average. This is confirmed by the results of national tests over the last four years, when results have been consistently better than the national average. They were well above average in the 2004 tests. As well as almost all pupils attaining the expected level 4 in 2004, which is well above the national average, the proportion attaining the higher level 5 is similar to the national figure, as it was in 2003. Given the above average proportion of pupils with special educational needs, this indicates that all pupils are making very good progress over time, and that achievement is very good. Test results indicate a good and continuing trend of improvement in the subject.
83. Standards in mathematics have improved since the previous inspection in 1998, when they were judged to be average at Year 6, although progress slowed as pupils got older. The curriculum is now much better organised in Years 3 to 6, with good use being made of the national numeracy strategy, so that all aspects of mathematics are covered effectively. There is no longer a reliance on following a commercial scheme. Very good

assessment procedures ensure that pupils are taught at a suitable level. Pupils' progress is carefully and regularly tracked, so that teachers are aware of individual achievement and can intervene where necessary.

84. The greatest change, and the one which is driving this very good improvement, is the quality of teaching, particularly in Years 3 to 6. Of the seven lessons seen during the inspection, four were judged to be very good, with three of these occurring in Years 3 to 6. Scrutiny of pupils' work from the previous year showed effective teaching throughout the school, suggesting that improvements in teaching have been in place for some time. The school's focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning is working well in mathematics.
85. Teaching in mathematics is very good for a number of reasons. Very good relationships lead to very good attitudes and behaviour, particularly from older pupils, who feel valued and appreciated. This leads to a very productive working atmosphere where pupils are eager to learn. They listen well, discuss ideas with each other and settle to tasks quickly. Teachers are adept at both stretching more able pupils and encouraging those who find difficulty, suiting their style to pupils' needs. Teaching assistants and special needs support staff are used very well. They are fully involved and often extend their help to other pupils as needed, as well as monitoring the progress of their own charges and making written assessments.
86. Pupils enjoy mathematics because it is taught in an interesting way and because they are successful at their own level and are praised for this. This positive attitude could be further developed through giving mathematics a higher profile in the school, through, for example, displays, maths challenges or problems of the week. Pupils' books show plenty of evidence of solving specific problems through appropriate methods, which is good practice. However, there are few examples of pupils, particularly the more able, being given more open-ended challenges where they have to devise their own ideas and processes. The level of interest and the way in which many pupils are beginning to think mathematically would support this and help to raise standards still further.
87. Leadership and management are very good. The two coordinators are at different stages as coordination for Years 3 to 6 is a recent appointment, but there is evidence of very good work both in the past and currently. Most teachers have been on extended training courses for mathematics, and there has been a clear and very effective focus on key areas such as resources for problem solving and a written calculations policy to aid continuity in methods. ICT programs have been purchased to support aspects of learning, and are linked to overall planning. Where whiteboards are available they are being used effectively, even though a very recent acquisition.

Mathematics across the curriculum

88. Although there are examples of mathematical skills being used in other subjects, such as science, geography and design and technology, these are not necessarily specifically planned for, so that pupils have the chance to apply their newly acquired skills practically in a structured and coherent way. The school's new focus on 'Excellence and Enjoyment' is a good opportunity to ensure that these experiences are built into other subjects to make the application of mathematical skills as relevant as possible.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have improved significantly since the last inspection.
- The leadership and management of science are very good.
- The good emphasis on investigational and experimental activities across the school develops pupils' independent learning skills.
- Teaching and learning are very good and pupils achieve very well.
- The use of ICT is not included in science planning throughout the school.

Commentary

89. The results of the 2004 tests taken by pupils at the end of Year 6 were above the national average, showing a significant improvement since the last inspection, when they were judged to be in line with national expectations. In recent years results have been consistently above average, rising at a faster rate than the national trend. In 2003 and 2004 all but two pupils attained the expected level 4, and more achieved the higher level 5 than in schools nationally. The standards of work seen during the inspection are above national expectations even at this early stage in the year and confirm that pupils of all abilities are achieving very well. This is largely due to the very good leadership and management of the two coordinators and the action they have taken to raise standards. In recent years they have carefully analysed and evaluated test results, identifying areas of weakness, and have effectively addressed these. They have also successfully encouraged colleagues throughout the school to plan investigative and experimental activities which encourage and develop independent learning skills. As a result, the confidence of pupils is growing and they have an inquisitive approach to learning.
90. The most recent teacher assessment in science at Year 2 indicates that pupils are attaining above average standards, and this is borne out by inspection evidence, meaning that pupils are achieving well. Teacher assessment in 2003 judged standards to be average, both for pupils attaining level 2 and the higher level 3, suggesting that younger pupils are making good progress and achieving well.
91. Throughout the school pupils are taught the principles of fair testing. In Year 2, the vast majority of pupils have a firm grasp of whether or not a test is fair. Many more able pupils recognise and clearly explain, for instance, that when testing how far cars will run when released down ramps set at different heights, conditions such as the size of the car, the length of the ramp and the surface must be consistent. Pupils' previous work clearly shows that the majority make at least good progress in accurately recording the findings from their investigations. More able pupils write detailed explanations of results, reflecting standards consistently above national expectations, whilst the majority produce clearly labelled diagrams, with a small minority needing support from an adult.
92. In Year 6, most pupils are confident enough to set up, conduct and manage the recording of the results of investigations as part of a team. All pupils contribute fully to discussions, remain focused on the investigation in hand and have a clear understanding of why their work must be well structured to obtain consistent results. More able pupils are skilled at predicting outcomes, take the lead in organising investigations and produce their own graphs and charts to display results.

93. The quality of teaching overall is very good. A significant strength of teaching throughout the school is that all teachers plan exciting activities which challenge pupils' thinking and encourage them to take responsibility for managing their investigations. In an excellent lesson seen in Year 6, the teacher inspired his class by his own enthusiasm and knowledge in the subject. He also made the best possible use of paired and group discussion by asking sharply focused questions of groups of different abilities. All pupils were totally engaged and a buzz of constructive conversation followed every question asked.
94. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the standards of attainment at the various levels in the National Curriculum and this enables them to assess how well pupils are achieving. The lack of space in the main part of the school occasionally interrupts and slows the pace of teaching and learning. This is because investigations have to be set up in a separate rooms and the movement from room to room sometimes leads to a lack of concentration and effort on the part of a small minority of pupils.
95. The two subject coordinators have worked hard and successfully to establish an ethos for learning in which both pupils and teachers have very positive attitudes to scientific enquiry, and leadership and management are very good. They have achieved a consistency in teachers' approach to planning science work which is having a significant impact on standards throughout the school. There is room for improvement in the use of ICT for science work. Some teachers make good use of technology such as interactive whiteboards as a tool for teaching and in some lessons, pupils use data handling programs to create graphs of their results, but the use of ICT is not included in the long-term planning for all classes.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overhead computer projections (interactive whiteboards) are used effectively in lessons.
- The school does not make enough use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning in other subjects.
- A programme of training has developed the expertise and confidence of the staff.

Commentary

96. Due to time restraints it was only possible to see two lessons, one in Year 2 and the other in Year 4. However, from this evidence and from discussion with the subject co-ordinator, the pupils are attaining at a level broadly in line with national expectations at both Year 2 and Year 6, and are covering all aspects of the curriculum. Their achievement is satisfactory overall, representing satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection when standards were judged to be broadly average.
97. A new scheme of work is being evaluated but as yet there is no consistent assessment and recording of the progress of pupils within the subject. The subject co-ordinator has undertaken some classroom monitoring with a focus on usage. The planning of ICT into other areas of learning so that pupils can develop their skills varies from subject to subject, but is not integrated as well as it might be.

98. Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to support their lessons. This in itself is an indication of their determination to develop the use of ICT as a teaching aid, in that the boards have only very recently been installed. For example, in a Year 6 numeracy lesson the teacher used the whiteboard to good effect in a lesson on data handling. There are some classrooms where the lack of space has made the fitting of whiteboards difficult, if not impossible. This will be rectified when the new building is completed, and all the teachers are keen to make use of the opportunities offered by this new technology.
99. Teaching is good and the pupils make good progress in their ability to use ICT and their understanding of its general application. For example, pupils use e-mail to transmit work from one classroom to another. There are too few resources in terms of the hardware available, although this is due mainly to the lack of space in the accommodation. Teachers work hard to combat these difficulties and as a result of this and the high expectations of behaviour which are consistently applied, pupils achieved well in the lessons seen.
100. Digital cameras are used extensively in the school and another one has just been purchased. A strength of the school's provision is that pupils are encouraged to look on ICT as a tool to be used to enhance their learning, an example being the use of the Internet. The school is aware of the potential dangers inherent in this and has formulated policies for Internet access and general subject use.
101. The subject is managed satisfactorily and the co-ordinator is working hard to develop it further. There is an on-going staff training programme that has resulted in a good level of staff subject development.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

102. The school recognises that the planned use of ICT across the curriculum is still an area for development. However, a number of good examples of ICT in different subject areas were observed during the inspection, an example being mathematics, where both teachers and pupils are involved in using the technology to enhance learning. Plans are well advanced to improve the provision of resources in the new building for both teachers and pupils. The school's focus on the 'Excellence and Enjoyment' initiative will support the integration of ICT skills into other areas of the curriculum.

HUMANITIES

History and geography were sampled. Insufficient teaching could be seen to form an overall judgement on provision in religious education.

103. There is an appropriate scheme of work in place for **geography**, which provides opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge of their immediate environment and increase their understanding of the wider world as they grow older. The samples of pupils' work seen suggest that teachers are devoting sufficient time to the teaching of geography skills such as map making and to the development of technical knowledge through a study of rivers. In their planning they include good opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills and create imaginative links with other subjects.

104. There is a very similar picture in **history**. Planning for the subject provides enjoyable and imaginative lessons to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of historical events, through reflection on their own childhood and the lives of famous people to more detailed study of the Aztecs and changes over time in Skelmersdale.
105. Sampling of pupils' previous work in **religious education** and discussion with the two subject coordinators give a clear indication that provision meets the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. Teaching throughout the school provides opportunities for pupils to compare beliefs and traditions of various religions and to develop a respect for the beliefs embraced by people of different faiths. There are good links with local churches and the school has a reasonable collection of artefacts to help to give pupils a flavour of other religions. However, the coordinators acknowledge a need to enable pupils to gain more first hand knowledge of the various faiths through visits to a variety of places of worship and by inviting representatives of different religions into school.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

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

106. In **art and design**, samples of pupils' work throughout the school, as well as the work on display, indicate that skills are developed effectively, pupils are given the chance to enjoy all aspects of the art curriculum and that standards are above average. Discussions with pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 support this, with both enthusiasm and knowledge apparent. The thoughtful approach, in which pupils are encouraged to reflect on art as well as produce it, is encapsulated in a comment from a Year 6 girl. When asked what, if anything, made artists different from photographers, she responded, 'Artists manipulate images', going on to use Picasso as an example.
107. In **design and technology**, limited evidence indicates that pupils are developing their ability to plan and make articles to an above average standard. For example, younger pupils have made some well-produced carts using plastic wheels. In Year 5, pupils show a good level of design drawing through producing instructions for making a pair of slippers. In work on making musical instruments, pupils have produced designs showing the materials needed and processes to be used, combined with an evaluation of their own work. In cooperation with a local high school, pupils in Year 6 have produced some very well made and attractive vases in paper.
108. In **music**, two lessons were seen, one in Year 3/4, and one in Year 5/6. The former, while well planned, was compromised by recording equipment failing to work and by the very limited space for pupils to work practically. In the latter, excellent teaching enabled pupils to make excellent achievement within the lesson and reach above average standards. The planning of the lesson, its organisation, the use of resources and the teacher's expectations were all of the highest class, but above all the teacher's enthusiasm and energy carried all the pupils along, maintaining a very high level of interest and enjoyment.
109. Discussions with pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 indicate that all aspects of music are covered and that pupils have sound knowledge and understanding. There are good opportunities for pupils to play musical instruments, including recorders and guitars, taught by both school staff and visiting teachers. Music from various genres is played and discussed in assemblies, and is used very effectively in physical education, both for dance and for pupils to warm up and cool down.

110. In **physical education**, one lesson was seen in gymnastics with Year 1/2 pupils and two dance lessons in Year 5/6. Pupils in Year 1/2 attained appropriately in their ability to control and link movements, but achievement in the lesson, while satisfactory, was limited by insufficient emphasis on aiming at high standards in specific areas. In the two dance lessons, very good teaching led to very good achievement by all pupils and above average standards. Warm-ups and cool-downs were performed to well-chosen music which encouraged pupils to move and stretch appropriately. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils ensured the time was used very productively, and the pupils interpreted the music with thought and sensitivity in their movement, linking actions and combining well with others. Teachers achieved a very good balance between instruction and encouraging pupils to develop ideas independently.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

This area of the curriculum was sampled.

111. The school seeks to develop PSHE and citizenship in most areas of its curriculum. Topics such as sex education and substance abuse are covered as pupils move up through the school. Healthy eating is taught and was part of a theme of a science lesson for Year 6 pupils. In the one full lesson seen, a 'circle time', very young children were being helped to develop friendships and understand the importance of the 'golden rule' about listening to each other. They were also given the opportunity to discuss what they had achieved and why they were proud of those achievements. The ability to feel empathy for others was being well developed in a short session for pupils within the same age group. The school council, while newly formed, provides a good opportunity to develop the concept of citizenship. Good relationships are actively and very successfully encouraged in all aspects of the school's work.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

