

## INSPECTION REPORT

### **MARY EXTON JUNIOR MIXED AND INFANT SCHOOL**

Hitchin

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117329

Headteacher: Mrs K Ireland

Lead inspector: Mr T Neat

Dates of inspection: 23 - 26 May 2005

Inspection number: 267292

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:	5 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	220
School address:	St Michael's Road Hitchin Hertfordshire
Postcode:	SG4 0QA
Telephone number:	01462 456997
Fax number:	01462 451756
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Sean Bamford
Date of previous inspection:	17 May 1999

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Mary Exton Junior Mixed and Infants is an average sized school, situated in a residential area on the south eastern edge of Hitchin. The school enjoys a good reputation and is oversubscribed. It draws most of its pupils from areas near to the school. About 20 per cent come from other parts of the town and a few from Stevenage and Letchworth. There is a mixture of private and social housing, but overall the socio-economic circumstances of pupils are above average. The older Reception children are taught in the same class as the younger pupils in Year 1. The remaining pupils in Year 1 are taught with Year 2 pupils in two mixed ability classes. The attainment of children joining the school varies, but is above average overall. The percentage of pupils joining and leaving the school part way through their schooling is broadly similar to most schools.

The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs is also below average. Most of these pupils have specific or moderate learning difficulties. The percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs is below average. The proportion of pupils whose first language is believed not to be English is higher than in most schools. A small number receive help in learning English, but none is at an early stage of acquiring the language. About three quarters of pupils are of White British in origin. The rest come from a wide variety of racial heritages.

The school was given an Achievement Award in 2001 in recognition of its performance in the national tests. It also has the Investors in People award.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
20007	Mr T Neat	Lead inspector	Science Information and communication technology Art and design Design and technology Physical education
11414	Mrs A Bennett	Lay inspector	
14732	Mrs E Korn	Team inspector	Mathematics Religious education The Foundation Stage <sup>1</sup>
2759	Mr D Sleightholme	Team inspector	English Geography History Music

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<sup>1</sup> The Foundation Stage is the period of education for children aged three to the end of the Reception year.

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

Mary Exton is a **good** school with some very good features. It is regularly oversubscribed because pupils achieve well and parents are very happy with the work of the school. The good achievement of pupils is due in large part to the good teaching and the very positive ethos, which result in pupils learning well. The school is led and managed well. The school gives **good value for the money invested in it**. The new headteacher has only been at the school for a few weeks, but has made a very good start. More work is needed to bring pupils' achievement in mathematics in line with that in English by the end of Year 2, to improve the balance of the curriculum and to make the provision for children in the Foundation Stage more effective.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- overall, pupils make good progress in relation to their capabilities, thanks to good teaching;
- the very good leadership of the headteacher and the commitment and talents of staff give the school a very good capacity to improve standards and provision;
- generally, pupils attain high standards in the national tests;
- pupils' very good attitudes, behaviour and attendance enhance their learning and reflect the very good relationships and the very good care the school takes of them;
- parents are very supportive of the school and the school's partnership with them is good;
- by the end of Year 2, achievement in mathematics lags behind that in English;
- the time allocated to different elements of the curriculum is not appropriately balanced and this detracts from the quality of provision in some subjects;
- a few aspects of the provision for children in the Foundation Stage<sup>2</sup> are unsatisfactory.

The previous inspection was carried out in May 1999. Since then the school has had successive changes in leadership of relatively short duration. In this context, the inspection team judges that satisfactory improvement has happened since that time. The high standards attained by the time pupils leave have been maintained, overall. However, the balance of time allocated to different subjects has deteriorated and this is having an adverse effect on achievement in some subjects. Overall the areas for improvement identified in the last report have been addressed successfully.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*Key: A\* - these results were in the top five per cent in the country; 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 achieve well** overall. The achievement of boys and girls is broadly similar. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is very good. Pupils for whom English is an additional language and those identified as gifted and talented achieve well. Children achieve satisfactorily in the Reception year. Most are on course to attain above average standards in all areas of learning except physical development, where standards are average. The unsatisfactory accommodation and lack of sufficient teaching assistants in the Foundation Stage reduce the progress made in this area. The relatively low number of adults and the inadequacy of planning for constructive play also detract from children's overall achievement. Pupils achieve well in Years 1 and 2, especially in reading and writing. Achievement in mathematics in Years 1 and 2, although satisfactory, is reduced because the lesson time given to it is too short. In Years 3 to 6, achievement is good overall. Good

<sup>2</sup> The Foundation Stage is the period of education for children aged three to the end of the reception year.

teaching and very good relationships between teachers and their classes create a very supportive environment which helps pupils to learn well. In addition, the pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour have a very positive effect on their achievement. Standards in Year 2 are well above average in reading and writing compared with all schools and above average judged against similar schools. Year 2 mathematics standards are average compared with all schools, but well below average in relation to similar schools. Pupils in Year 6 attain standards that are well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science. In information and communication technology standards are above average by the time pupils leave. Standards in other subjects are average, except in music where they are above average. Pupils' attendance and their punctuality are very good. Pupils' attitudes to school, their behaviour and **their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good.**

### **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

The quality of education is **good**. Teaching, learning and assessment are **good**. The good quality of teaching and learning is one of the main reasons why pupils achieve well. It has improved since the last inspection; the unsatisfactory teaching seen at that time has been eliminated. Over three-quarters of the lessons seen were good or better. The very good climate for learning created by the teachers helps pupils work together very well. Insistence on good conduct results in pupils focusing well on what is taught. In the Foundation Stage, there is good teaching of reading, writing and numeracy, but not enough is done to promote constructive play. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very effective. Overall, the curriculum is good and meets statutory requirements. However, a lack of balance in the time allocated to different subjects detracts from the overall strength of the curriculum and from achievement, especially in mathematics in Years 1 and 2. There is a good enrichment programme. Accommodation, staffing and resources are satisfactory, except that insufficient assistance for teachers and inadequate outdoor facilities for the Foundation Stage detract from children's progress in some areas of learning.

### **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**The leadership and management of the school are good.** The quality of leadership by the headteacher is very good and she has made a very effective start in assessing the school's strengths and areas in need of development. The leadership of the other key staff is good. The linking together of different elements of leadership strategy, including the management of staff performance and the objectives of the school development plan, works very effectively. The quality of governance is good and the governing body fulfils its statutory duties well. Governors have a very well developed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision and are closely involved in moving things forward. Management has many strong features, including the very good procedures that help staff to settle in quickly. However, the recording and analysis of pupils' attainment and progress is not fully effective. The management of finances is very good. Governors and staff work hard to see that every pupil has a fair chance to succeed.

### **PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Parents and pupils hold very positive views of the school. Parents are very appreciative of the school ethos and the standards children achieve. Pupils are confident that their teachers will show them how to improve their work. They feel their teachers listen to them and are fair.

### **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- raise achievement and attainment in mathematics in Years 1 and 2 to bring them closer to those in English;
- review the balance of time allocated to the subjects of the curriculum;
- improve provision in the Foundation Stage.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

#### **Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects**

Achievement is good, overall. The achievement of boys and girls is broadly similar. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is very good. Those for whom English is an additional language and pupils identified as gifted or talented achieve well. Standards in Year 2 are well above average in speaking and listening, reading, and writing, above average in science and average in mathematics. Standards in Year 6 are well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils attain high standards in English and mathematics by the time they leave.
- English continues to be a strong feature of pupils' attainment partly because of the generous amount of time given to teaching it.
- Achievement in mathematics in Years 1 and 2, although satisfactory, is reduced because the lesson time given to it is too short.
- Low levels of staffing and inadequate facilities detract from achievement in some areas of learning in the Foundation Stage.

#### **Commentary**

1. The attainment of children joining the Reception class varies from year to year, but taken overall is above the levels normally found. In relation to their capabilities pupils achieve well overall as they pass through the school, because the teaching is good and parents are supportive. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well thanks to the very good provision made for them. Pupils whose home language is not English and who also have special educational needs also benefit from the high quality provision and achieve very well.
2. The achievement of pupils in the Reception year is satisfactory. The majority attain standards above the levels expected for their age in personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy, mathematical development, knowledge and understanding of the world and creative development. Children attain average standards in physical development, where lack of teaching assistants and unsatisfactory accommodation reduce the progress made. The relatively low number of adults and the inadequacy of planning for constructive play also detract from children's achievement in most other areas of learning. The younger children who do not spend a full year in the Reception class make rapid progress and achieve the goals set for this age group because of the good, focused teaching they receive.
3. The high standards found at the time of the last inspection in Year 2 have broadly been maintained. Results in the national tests for pupils at the end of Year 2 are consistently well above average in reading and writing when compared with all schools and in two of the last three years they are well above average in relation to schools operating in similar circumstances. However, the results of the national tests for pupils in Year 2 taken last year show that standards in mathematics have fallen from their previous high levels. This decline is due largely to the relatively small amount of time given to teaching mathematics in Years 1 and 2.
4. Typically, pupils achieve well in Years 1 and 2, especially in reading and writing. Most of the pupils currently in Year 2 entered school with average abilities. Inspection findings and the information held by the school indicate that the outcomes of the national tests this year are likely to show that standards in reading and writing will once again be well above average, in

mathematics they are likely to be average and in science above average. Pupils' achievement in reading and writing is very good.

- The results of the national tests for pupils in Year 6 show that over the last four years standards have typically been well above average in English and mathematics. In comparison with similar schools standards have been well above average in English and at least above average in mathematics. The results dipped last year due to an increase in the number of pupils having special educational needs and the extent of their problems. Inspection evidence and the data held by the school indicate that standards will rise this year to be well above average and are broadly comparable to those reported at the time of the last inspection.

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

*Key: A\* - these results were in the top five per cent in the country; 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.*

- Achievement in Years 3 to 6 is good overall. In two of the last three years, the progress made by pupils between Year 2 and Year 6 has been well above average, indicating that achievement in Years 3 to 6 is at least good. Last year, as shown in the 'similar schools' column in the table above, despite a significant increase in the number of pupils having special educational needs, the progress made was satisfactory, overall. The pupils currently in Year 6 have achieved well despite disruption to their schooling in Years 3, 4 and 5.
- The school has worked hard to maintain high standards over many years. The rate of improvement in the standards of pupils in Year 2 has kept pace with the national trend over the last four years. The improvement in the standards attained by pupils in Year 6 over that time is better than in most schools.
- Standards in English are a strong feature of the school's performance. Consistently high results have been maintained since the last inspection. The table above shows that in 2002 and 2003 the results attained by pupils in Year 6 were in the top five per cent in the country. The main reasons for the high standards are good teaching, the relatively large amount of time given to the subject and pupils' very positive attitudes to learning.
- Science standards are above average at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. This represents good achievement for pupils in Year 2, since they entered school with average abilities. Standards have fallen in Year 6 since the last inspection, although they remain good. This is due in large part to the relatively low allocation of time it receives.
- In music standards are above average for pupils in Years 2 and 6, largely because of the good use made of the expertise of a specialist teacher. In information and communication technology standards are above average by the time pupils leave. Standards in the other non-core<sup>3</sup> subjects whilst satisfactory, overall, could be higher. Inspection evidence shows that a high proportion of time is given to English in Years 3 to 6 and that which is allocated to other subjects is sometimes below that found nationally. This reduces the potential for raising standards.

<sup>3</sup> Non-core subjects are information and communication technology; history; geography; art and design; design and technology; music; physical education.

## Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils really enjoy school, and show very good attitudes to learning. Attendance is very good and pupils arrive punctually in the mornings. They behave very well throughout the day and relationships across the school are very good. The school provides very well for all aspects of pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very well developed attitudes contribute strongly to the progress that pupils make.
- Pupils behave very well and get on with each other very effectively.
- Attendance and punctuality are very good.

### Commentary

11. Pupils have high levels of attendance, well above the national figure, and in the last reporting year there was no unauthorised absence. Punctuality is also very good. These levels have been sustained over a number of years, as a result of good monitoring in school and very good support from parents.

#### **Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)**

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	3.6	School data	0.0
National data	5.1	National data	0.4

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

12. Pupils are keen and enthusiastic about school, and show very good attitudes towards learning. Teachers capture this very well, developing in them both the desire and skills to be effective learners. Attitudes and behaviour are good in Years 1 and 2, and very good in Year 3 to 6. Pupils gain in confidence as they progress through the school; they quickly learn to co-operate with each other and to collaborate in small groups. By Year 4 they work industriously and independently. They expect to work hard, and have confidence that their teachers will show them how to improve their work. Relationships throughout the school are very good. Pupils feel their teachers listen to them and are fair and they enjoy their use of humour.
13. Strengths in this area of the school's work, noted in the previous inspection, have been maintained. Behaviour throughout the day is very good, and there have been no recent exclusions. Pupils play well with each other, mixing well, younger with older and those from differing backgrounds. Any incidents of anti-social behaviour are dealt with very quickly to pupils' satisfaction. The school ethos encourages their social development very well. Year 6 pupils have plenty of good opportunities to take responsibility, which they do reliably and with maturity, and Year 5 pupils are looking forward to their turn. School council members had the confidence to point out inconsistencies in discipline rulings made by different midday supervisors, but did so very politely.
14. School and class rules are clearly displayed, but more importantly known and lived out throughout the day. Pupils clearly know right from wrong. Teachers use opportunities to encourage pupils' moral and spiritual development very well. For example, infant pupils are reminded to show respect to living creatures at the school pond. Year 6 pupils develop the maturity to realise that different opinions can be equally valid. One pupil realised that to a Buddhist, killing an insect would be as great an act of evil as killing a human.
15. Assemblies make valuable contributions to pupils' personal development and these are valuable corporate occasions that encourage pupils to reflect on spiritual and moral themes.

These include celebration assemblies in which their achievements are valued through the presentation of headteacher's awards.

- Pupils' cultural awareness is promoted very well within the curriculum, through visits and visitors, and activities such as maypole dancing in Years 1 and 2. A strong feature of the provision is the way pupils are encouraged to talk about their friends' differing cultural experiences. There is openness in class about sharing things which matter, such as visits to pupils' country of origin, rites of passage and linguistic variations.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good. Teaching, learning and assessment are good. The curriculum is good. The care, support and guidance pupils receive are very good overall. The school's partnership with parents is good and links with the community and other schools and colleges are satisfactory.

### Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good, overall. The assessment of pupils' work is good.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils work very well together, thanks to the very good climate for learning generated by the teachers.
- The teachers' very good emphasis on the need for good conduct results in pupils paying close attention in lessons.
- In the Foundation Stage, the teaching of reading, writing and numeracy is good but not enough is done to promote constructive play.
- English is taught well.
- The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very effective.

### Commentary

- Strong leadership and management have helped to increase the effectiveness of teaching through the systematic observation of lessons by senior staff and subject coordinators. As a result, teaching has improved since the last inspection. At that time eight per cent of lessons were unsatisfactory. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen during this inspection. The proportion of teaching that is good or better has increased significantly.

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 43 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0 (0%)	8 (19%)	26 (60%)	9 (21%)	0 (0%)	0 (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.*

- The teaching in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory overall, leading to satisfactory achievement. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are taught well and the teachers have high expectations in these areas of the curriculum. There are many very good aspects to the teaching of reading. The younger Reception children receive good and frequently very good teaching when the teacher is leading a group and at these times they achieve well. However, the planning of activities which the children choose for themselves is not effective enough and the adults do not involve themselves sufficiently with this constructive play.

19. In Years 1 to 6 good teaching enables pupils to achieve well overall. The quality of teaching and learning is strongest in Years 3 to 6 because of the wealth of experience of the teachers in those classes. Nearly all the lessons observed were good or better in Years 3 to 6.
20. Pupils in Years 1 to 6 show a very good capacity to work collaboratively and teachers develop and use these skills well in group activities. This high quality cooperative working is due largely to the creation by teachers of a very good working atmosphere. Teachers' insistence on good conduct, coupled with pupils' very good attitudes to learning, results in good levels of engagement. Although newly installed, good use of electronic whiteboards linked to a computer is helping in the teaching of key ideas. For example, in Year 2 the teacher had prepared the interactive whiteboard so that pupils could learn about suffixes through an appealing visual game. Pupils' enjoyment of this considerably enhanced their learning. Occasionally, teachers mask the whiteboard, making it difficult for some pupils to see. There are some examples of teachers marking pupils' work well by showing them how to improve. However, in some subjects teachers do not provide enough guidance in their marking to facilitate this. Sometimes adults do too much for the pupils, giving instructions rather than asking them to provide answers or suggest how to proceed.
21. The teaching of English is strong. This is the main reason why standards are consistently high. Teachers have high expectations of the standards that most pupils can reach. Teaching methods are very effective in raising standards. Assessment in English is good. Teachers keep comprehensive records of pupils' progress including attainment in reading and writing.
22. Pupils who have special educational needs benefit in literacy and numeracy from the opportunity to access very good specialist teaching by the coordinator who has considerable expertise in helping pupils with learning difficulties. The coordinator provides specialist teaching to individual pupils, to small groups and to a group of higher attaining infant pupils.
23. The coordinator for special educational needs is an excellent role model for other staff in assessment practice. As a result, overall, assessment by teachers is good and the assessment of pupils who have special educational needs has some excellent features. The coordinator produces comprehensive individual assessments of each pupil on the special educational needs register that include pictorial and statistical analysis of individual data and very clear recommendations for the next steps in the learning of each pupil.

## **The curriculum**

The school provides a good curriculum for pupils of all levels of ability that meets statutory requirements. There is a good enrichment programme. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory overall.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- An imbalance in the time given to subjects detracts from the overall strength of the curriculum and from achievement, especially in mathematics in Years 1 and 2.
- The school promotes equality of opportunity well with very good provision for pupils who have special educational needs.
- Good opportunities for learning enrich the curriculum significantly.
- Insufficient assistance for teachers and inadequate outdoor facilities for the Foundation Stage detract from children's progress in some areas of learning.

## **Commentary**

24. Overall, the curriculum for the Foundation Stage is satisfactory and there are significant strengths in the planning for developing children's language and number skills. However, opportunities for play are not planned carefully enough or supported sufficiently by the adults.

As a result, the breadth of the curriculum and the richness of the learning experiences are diminished and this restricts children's achievement.

25. The curriculum for Years 1 to 6 contributes well, overall, to pupils' achievements. Strong features include the use of specialist teaching in music and physical education. Standards in music have improved since the last inspection as a result of this. However, the curriculum is not as effective as it was at the time of the last inspection because it is not appropriately balanced. The school timetables show that some subjects, such as English, are provided with considerable time whereas others, such as the humanities are given less time than in most other schools. The high standards in English reflect the significant time allocated to this subject. The standards in mathematics in Years 1 and 2 are adversely affected by the relatively short amount of time allocated. The recently appointed headteacher is already aware of the situation and is reviewing subject time allocation in readiness for the next academic year.
26. The curriculum provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. These pupils follow the same topics taught to their peers, but these are very carefully planned to match the individuals' prior attainment. These pupils benefit in core subjects through the opportunity to access very good specialist teaching by the coordinator who has considerable expertise in special educational needs. Specific additional literacy programmes delivered by teaching assistants help lower attaining pupils make progress in gaining basic skills.
27. There is some additional provision for higher attaining pupils. The recent history of attainment in both Years 2 and 6 confirms that more able pupils, including those whose first language is believed not to be English, are supported well. The arrangements for helping gifted and talented pupils include provision for infant pupils with high reading skills. These pupils access the specialist teaching of the special educational needs coordinator who challenges them to reach high standards in reading competency. During the inspection six pupils from Years 1 and 2 learned how to rapidly skim and scan text to find out information from a topic book.
28. There is a good variety of extra-curricular clubs. Inspectors sampled three extra-curricular activities covering netball, ceramics and art and design using information and communication technology skills. All three clubs were well attended and in all settings pupils were enthusiastic club members. The good range of sports activities available includes football coaching skills, lacrosse, rounders and cricket. Pupils also reported that the drama club is very popular. The school provides opportunities for pupils to learn to play an instrument taught by a visiting specialist. The headteacher has already taken steps to begin an audit of parent skills with a view to further extension of the good provision currently made.
29. The accommodation allows most aspects of the curriculum to be taught effectively. Overall, outdoor facilities are a strong feature, with many opportunities for learning and a good grassed area for sports. However, the outdoor facilities for the Foundation Stage are unsatisfactory, with too little space available and no covered area to allow children outside when it is raining. Plans have already been drawn up to improve the provision. The school is adequately staffed overall, but too little assistance in the Foundation Stage detracts from children's progress in some areas of learning. Resources for learning are good overall, including those specifically to support pupils who have special educational needs.

### **Care, guidance and support**

There is very good provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety. Teachers provide pupils with very good support and guidance because they monitor both their academic progress and personal development. Pupils' views are sought and the new school council has plenty of scope for capitalising on their willingness and enthusiasm.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils are valued individually and cared for very well.
- Teachers know their pupils very well and keep good records.
- Arrangements for induction are very good.

## **Commentary**

30. Pupils are valued individually and are cared for very well, as they were at the time of the last inspection. Their welfare is a priority; the school keeps good records of pupils' medical conditions and members of staff take very good care of those who are injured or unwell. Good arrangements for child protection are in place. There are good procedures for monitoring health and safety. A few matters of concern were reported to the school during the inspection.
31. Teachers know their pupils very well, and keep good records of their academic and personal development. Relationships in class are very good and teachers offer good support and guidance to their pupils through discussion and the setting of targets. Pupils know how they are getting on and what they are working towards, even though these targets are not yet specific to an individual. Parents confirm that there are very good arrangements when their child starts school. Younger children come into school every morning with their parents to share a reading book, and this introduces them to the routines of school over a considerable period of time.
32. Pupils know that their views matter, and have often been consulted informally. The new headteacher has started a school council, which has had just two meetings. Pupils showed initiative and enthusiasm by arriving for their first school council meeting with notebooks already containing ideas. These showed a real sense of community, with concerns beyond their own interests. They have already liaised with the parents' association, which has devised a form for pupils to complete when applying for funds. The council has plenty of scope to capitalise on pupils' willingness and enthusiasm and is contributing well to their education in citizenship.

## **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

Parents are very supportive of the school, and links with them are good. Links with the community and with other schools are satisfactory.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents have very positive views of the school.
- Parents are keen to support their children's learning, but the school has yet to harness this fully.
- There is strong parental support for the daily reading programme.
- Pupils' annual reports do not always give parents enough useful information.

## **Commentary**

33. Parents are very appreciative of the school ethos and the standards it enables their children to achieve. They are committed to supporting their child's education. There was a very good response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, and a good number of considered comments, showing that parents have good ideas and want to communicate these to the school. Parents raised issues such as: having more trips and visits; not being invited into assemblies; the way the school deals with bullies; and the lack of curriculum information meetings. Many of these issues are already being addressed by the new headteacher.
34. The school is not yet making the most of parents' willingness to support their child and of opportunities to listen to what they have to say. Although they have been consulted in the

past, using a standard questionnaire, there is considerable scope to use parents' willingness to contribute to the development of the school.

35. Overall, written information provided for parents is satisfactory. The new headteacher has increased the frequency of newsletters to monthly and they now have more emphasis on pupils' successes. The end of year reports show that teachers know their pupils really well, but they do not always tell parents how their child is getting on in relation to expectations for their age or their ability. Some targets for improvement are offered, but these are rarely expressed in a way that shows parents how they can help.
36. Guidance for parents on reading with their child, and the daily parent and child reading sessions continue to encourage this aspect of co-operation. The sessions also give these parents valuable, easy access to their child's teacher. Working parents and those with older pupils would like more guidance on supporting their children. Class teachers provide parents with termly curriculum information; the best of these communicate clearly and usefully with parents.
37. Links with the community and with other schools are satisfactory. Pupils are prepared well academically for secondary school, because of the good work habits they have learned. Transfer arrangements are similar to those found in most schools nationally.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The leadership and management of the school are good. The quality of leadership by the headteacher is very good. The quality of governance is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The new headteacher's tenure of the post has begun very well.
- The linking together of different elements of leadership strategy works very effectively.
- The management of finances is very good.
- The recording and analysis of pupils' attainment and progress is not fully effective.

### **Commentary**

38. The headteacher had only been in post for five weeks when the inspection took place. Whilst it is too early to judge the impact of her work on standards, it is clear that she has made a very good start in identifying the strengths of the school and the areas needing further development. She is ably assisted by the deputy headteacher whose support has been invaluable in helping the new headteacher to settle in very quickly. The headteacher has already audited in some detail the standards that pupils attain and the quality of provision, and has formed a clear view of how she wants to take the school forward.
39. The very strong links that are forged between the arrangements for managing the performance of staff, the plans for improving the school and the professional development of teachers are an important feature of the leadership of the school. These links make it far more certain that the efforts to achieve the objectives of the school improvement plan are focused, concerted and successful.
40. The leadership of the other key staff is good. A very experienced, strong team of senior staff works well with their colleagues to help achieve the objectives for development and helps to steer the work of the school well in most respects. The extent to which the leadership of subjects is helping to increase pupils' achievement varies but is good overall. The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning by the headteacher and the subject coordinators impacts well on classroom practice. This in turn has a positive effect on the standards that pupils attain.

41. The governing body is closely involved in moving things forward - one of its committees focuses specifically on school development. Governors have a very well developed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision, thanks to the visits by 'link' governors to the school. The governing body exerts a strong emphasis on achievement and recognises the need to maintain high standards. It is involved well in setting the budget and monitoring expenditure. However, governors' understanding of the principles of best value is at an early stage of development.
42. Governors and staff work hard to see that every pupil has a fair chance to succeed. The management of the provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good and the provision for pupils whose home language is not English is good. This has a positive impact on the achievement of the pupils concerned. The school recognises the need to improve the arrangements it makes to ensure that gifted and talented pupils achieve all that they can.
43. The overall management of the school is good. The performance of all staff is managed well and very effective procedures ensure that everyone joining the school settles in quickly and happily. However, the arrangements for tracking the progress made by pupils are not fully effective. The procedures are relatively new and do not facilitate the earliest identification of pupils at risk of underachieving. The analysis of data concerning the standards that pupils attain gives an adequate picture of the achievement of pupils in Years 2 and 6, but does not show how well different groups such as more able pupils are performing. The headteacher has already planned improvements to these areas.
44. The very effective financial management noted in the last report continues. The last auditors' report praises the school for its budgetary control procedures, describing them as 'of a very high standard'. The very good work of the office staff and the school's finance officer has helped to maintain this very good provision. The large surplus shown in the table below has already been committed to increasing staffing and to improving the provision for the Foundation Stage.

**Financial information for the year April 2004 to March 2005**

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	603, 595	Balance from previous year	142,590
Total expenditure	623, 104	Balance carried forward to the next	123,081
Expenditure per pupil	2721		

45. The school's ability to evaluate all aspects of its performance is good. Procedures for self-review are well established and there is a good deal of agreement between the judgements of the inspection team and the school's views of its work.
46. The good teaching, leadership and management, the very good personal development of pupils and the support given by parents are all contributors to pupils' achievements. The inadequacies of provision in the Foundation Stage and the imbalance in the time allocated to different subjects impede further improvements in standards. Nevertheless, the schools' strengths by far outweigh its weaknesses and the overall provision has a positive impact on pupils' academic and personal development.

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

### AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

47. The provision for the Foundation Stage is **satisfactory** overall. There are some significant strengths and there are also weaknesses, many of which the school has plans to address.
48. There are many very good aspects to the teaching of reading. The younger children who do not spend a full year in the Reception class make rapid progress and achieve the goals set for this age group due to the good focused teaching that they receive. Opportunities for play are not planned rigorously enough or supported by an adult. As a result, the breadth of the curriculum and the richness of the learning experiences with which the children are provided are diminished and this restricts their achievement. The outdoor accommodation is unsatisfactory. The current quantity and deployment of support staff is unsatisfactory.
49. There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. The provision was judged to have been very good at the last inspection but national expectations have been raised. The school has adjusted its planning and practice and is now following the new curriculum guidance. The nationally agreed procedures for recording how the children are progressing have been successfully implemented. However, the rate of change has not been as rapid as in many schools, due largely to the coordinator acting as the headteacher for most of this year. As yet, an appropriate balance between planned opportunities for play and teacher directed learning has not been fully achieved.
50. There are 34 children in the Reception year of the Foundation Stage. The children enter in the term before their fifth birthday and there are three intakes during the year. The youngest children have one term in the Reception year and at the time of the inspection they had been in the school for half a term. The children are organised into two small classes, one that is composed of the older Reception children together with the younger Year 1 children and the other that is composed of the younger Reception children.
51. The accommodation comprises a large classroom with two small quiet rooms off and a small outdoor quadrangle leading from the classroom. The teachers use the small quiet rooms as their main teaching area and this leads to too little use being made of the large shared classroom for substantial parts of the day. The lack of full time support staff in the Foundation Stage contributes to the under utilisation of this large classroom area. The outdoor quadrangle is too small for wheeled toys or for activities that require running and, even though the teachers use the larger infant playground for some specific sessions, their work in this area of the curriculum is restricted. However, there are good plans to fence off some additional space for the Foundation Stage children's specific use. Good use is made of the school hall and of specialist teachers to develop musical skills and physical development.
52. Although teaching in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory overall, the younger children receive good and frequently very good teaching in the group sessions led by the teacher and at these times they achieve well. The teachers have high expectations that are reflected in the above average standards in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. However, much of this teaching lacks opportunities for the children to participate actively in the learning. Play activities are not planned with clearly defined outcomes; the adults tend to leave the children alone as they work at these activities rather than becoming involved in order to extend the children's play and move their learning forward. In the classroom, the majority of the self-selected activity is constructive, but outdoors the majority of the children are engaged in activities that lack purpose and are overly boisterous for much of the time.
53. The leadership of the Foundation Stage is satisfactory overall. Staff members are motivated and work as a team. However, there are weaknesses in the deployment of staff which result,

for example, in all adults being involved in teaching a specific group with no one monitoring and supporting the majority of the children who are engaged in self-selected activities.

54. The children enter with standards above the average. They achieve satisfactorily overall and well in the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy. The younger children make rapid progress. By the time that they enter Year 1 they are meeting the learning goals and most of the older children are exceeding them.

## **PERSONAL SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The provision for personal social and emotional development is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The children benefit from the very good induction system and this provides a good basis for their personal social and emotional development.
- Children underachieve in some aspects of this area of learning because of the below average provision of support staff.

### **Commentary**

55. The children enter with above average ability. The teaching is satisfactory overall, the achievement of the children is satisfactory and most exceed the goals set in this area by the end of the Reception year. In some areas of the curriculum, such as developing self-care, a sense of community and forming relationships, the teaching is good and the children make good progress and exceed the expectations for their age. Adults do not have enough time to discuss and develop children's ideas as they work at the activities they have chosen and there is no member of staff who is with the children throughout the week to recognise how their play develops over time. This hinders the development of children's confidence in trying new things and initiating ideas. By the end of the year, many children are under-achieving in these aspects of their development.
56. In their direct teaching, the adults use praise effectively to raise the children's self esteem and to establish the good standards of behaviour they expect. Activities to develop the children's ability to follow instructions and to work together co-operatively are numerous and effective. However, these high expectations are not maintained when the children are outside and, at these times, the behaviour and self control of the children deteriorates. In the taught sessions, the adults expect the children to sit still and listen, sometimes for too lengthy a period without the children's active participation and this decreases their motivation.

## **COMMUNICATION LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**

The provision for communication language and literacy is **satisfactory** overall. However the provision for the development of reading skills is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are above the average on entry. By the end of the Reception year, all the children are meeting the goals set for this age group and most of the older children, who have been in the school since September, are exceeding them.
- There is consistently good teaching of reading. The children achieve well and the standards of many are well above the average.

### **Commentary**

57. The teaching for developing spoken language is satisfactory and the children achieve satisfactorily. The vast majority of the children speak with confidence and control, showing

awareness of the listener. The teachers and support assistants provide a good model of spoken language. Some have good questioning skills, asking the children to use language to explain and to clarify their thinking. The teaching of the older children is less demanding and opportunities are missed to develop the children's ability to clarify and to explain their ideas. The teachers provide facilities for the children to imagine and to create roles, such as the 'giant's castle' from Jack and the Beanstalk. However, the relatively small amount of support staff time means that adults are not involved sufficiently in these activities and are not often available to extend children's use of language.

58. The teaching of reading and writing is good and, in these areas of the curriculum, the children achieve well. Teachers have high expectations. The teaching for the younger children is very good, helping each child to understand the text and to read for meaning. Older children are encouraged to find rhyming words in the texts and to read a range of challenging books. The daily early morning reading session with the parents is of a very high quality, improving the children's reading skills as well as establishing very good attitudes to reading. The initial stages of reading and writing are taught in combination so that the children learn letter and sound recognition as they learn to form the letters correctly. This system leads to good standards in spelling and handwriting by the end of the year. The older high ability children copy texts accurately with good standards of letter formation. In comparison, there are few opportunities for the children to write in their own words.

## **MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT**

The provision for mathematical development is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are above average.
- The children achieve well and the teaching is good.

### **Commentary**

59. The children enter with standards a little above those found nationally and they achieve well. The oldest children attain standards above those expected for this age group.
60. The younger children are given a secure start to their number work through the good teaching they receive. They learn to count and to develop an understanding of addition. Older, high attaining children record addition sums confidently and count with skills above those expected for their age. Teachers are starting to make some successful links with other areas of the curriculum to extend the children's learning. For example, younger children were encouraged to estimate the length of paper needed to make a crown and older children were guided to print repeating patterns. Teachers ensure that the children are introduced to everyday terminology to describe position. They instruct the children to experience these positions as they climb inside and around large cubes in the quadrangle, but as adults are not there to support them, the children do not gain sufficiently from this experience.

## **KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD**

The provision for knowledge and understanding of the world is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The children enter with standards above the average and they achieve satisfactorily. They leave the Reception year having exceeded the goals set for their age group

## Commentary

61. The teaching observed was satisfactory overall. The teachers plan the use of adult time so that they give considerable support to the children learning an activity directed by a member of staff but do not allow time to support children who are engaged in a task they have devised for themselves. The teachers provide some interesting activities, covering a range of experiences. Children learn technological skills, such as how to handle tools and to join two surfaces together. During the inspection they made paper crowns, models with boxes and sandwiches for a picnic. Most of the youngest children, newly into the class, were able to achieve their tasks without adult support and for those that asked for help it was provided. One example of good teaching was when the teacher and her assistant each helped younger children to identify household objects from the past. At this time, the children were encouraged to observe carefully and to look for similarities and differences. However, no adults were available to encourage children to develop their skills of observation as they worked with sand and water. Computers are always available for the children to select, but no children did so and these expensive resources were under-used.

## PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

The provision for physical development is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The children achieve satisfactorily. Standards are around those expected for their age.
- The children's ability to control a pencil and to write clearly formed letters is good.
- The small outdoor area restricts the way in which teachers and children are able to work.

## Commentary

62. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers place considerable emphasis upon the children holding a pencil correctly and because this skill is taught well the children have good pencil control. The adults help to develop manual dexterity through many activities such as those that involve rolling dough and manipulating construction kits.
63. The outdoor area is too small for many types of physical activity. At times, teachers use the infant playground as they did when using a large parachute. This very teacher-directed activity developed the children's upper body strength well. Children were able to work together, to control their body, negotiate the space and to keep their balance. The provision includes two music and movement sessions in the hall each week. Both of these are very adult directed. One is taken by a visiting teacher and is good, developing the children's body control, co-ordination and balance well and helping them to recognise the impact of exercise upon heart rate.

## CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

The provision for creative development is **satisfactory** overall.

The children enter with standards above the average. They achieve satisfactorily and exceed the goals set for this age group.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teachers provide a suitable range of activities for the children to participate in and the standards of many are above average.
- The majority of the creative activities are child selected and the children receive little or no adult intervention as they work to move their learning forward.

## Commentary

64. Limited evidence indicates that teaching is satisfactory overall. Children have access to paint and they produce pictures that are recognisable and well executed. They create simple repeating patterns using printing sponges, but the teaching for this activity was very adult directed and did not help the children to observe and explore the changes in colour or the patterns being formed. In music lessons, with a visiting teacher, the children respond well to the good teaching, sing simple songs and play percussion instruments as they explore changing sounds both louder and softer and quicker and slower. Children use their imaginations satisfactorily to participate in imaginative role play that the teachers provide and they dress up and use the props provided.

## SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 and 2

### ENGLISH

Provision in English is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in Years 2 and 6.
- Pupils' achievement is good.
- Teaching is good.
- Parental involvement in reading is very good.
- Subject leadership is good.

## Commentary

65. The big picture is one of pupils in both Years 2 and 6 reaching high standards in English over several years. This was confirmed in the well above average results for reading and writing attained by pupils at the end of Year 2 in 2004. However, the results in English tests for pupils in Year 6 the same year, although still above average, were slightly down compared to those gained in 2003. This was due to an increased proportion of pupils having special educational needs.
66. This inspection has found that the pupils currently in Years 2 and 6 reach well above average standards in all aspects of English. This is an improvement on the findings of the previous inspection. Inspection findings also confirm that, whereas there are no overall significant differences in boys' and girls' attainment, more girls in Year 6 are reaching Level 5 (above average) than boys. This is similar to the national picture at this age.
67. Assessment of pupils currently in Year 2 shows that when they were first admitted into the Reception year the spread of attainment in the cohort was broadly average. They have achieved very well to reach well above average standards by Year 2. Pupils currently in Year 6 were from a well above average cohort when in Year 2 and they have made the expected rate of progress during the last four years. Lesson evidence, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with them show that most achieve well, making clear gains in the acquisition of basic skills and becoming confident and mature in speaking, listening, reading and writing. This is because teachers have high expectations of the standards that pupils can reach. Teaching methods are very effective in raising standards. Pupils are very well behaved in lessons. Teachers plan carefully so that pupils' needs, across all levels of attainment, are met very well. Parents make a regular and significant contribution to pupils' reading progress.
68. In Year 2, pupils listen very well as they follow their teacher's instructions. Pupils have learned to speak clearly and hold short conversations, talking with assurance. By Year 6 most pupils use a wide range of vocabulary. They use specialist terminology appropriately when

providing factual information for each other. Higher attaining pupils hold mature conversations with their teacher in which they express their points of view coherently.

69. Reading standards at age seven are well above average with similar numbers of boys and girls reaching the higher levels. Pupils use expression well and are confident when reading to the whole class. By Year 6 most pupils select storybooks carefully using the blurb to sample the contents and their knowledge of the author's other books. Standards are well above average with pupils reading fluently as they tackle more challenging text.
70. Writing standards are well above average. Typically, in Year 2, pupils write their own stories, construct a letter and write instructions for a task such as making a sandwich. More able pupils are using punctuation well including speech marks. By Year 6 pupils are writing independently substantial stories that incorporate adjectives well by drawing on a wide-ranging vocabulary. Characters are portrayed skilfully and tense used correctly as pupils produce good quality writing that is interesting to read.
71. The good teaching reported in the previous inspection has been maintained. It includes many good features that impact positively on standards. In a Year 1 lesson, the teacher's explanation, dialogue with the pupils and engaging use of terms such as 'Cool!' and 'V-e-r-y trendy!' helped pupils to make good progress. In a very good Year 6 lesson where pupils were writing the script for a television advertisement the teacher expected them to work quickly and cooperatively to a deadline. The lesson provided very good opportunities for pupils to learn about stage directions, the power of persuasion and the skill needed to compose a memorable slogan.
72. Overall assessment in English is good. Teachers keep comprehensive records of pupils' progress including reading and writing attainment matched to National Curriculum levels. Marking is satisfactory in infant classes and good in junior classes. The better marking includes checks to make sure pupils have learned from their errors and clear guidance on how to improve.
73. The school is very successful in promoting the daily involvement of parents in their children's reading. Approximately forty parents of infant pupils regularly remain in school at the start of each day to listen to their children read. This effectively promotes parents as partners in their children's learning and impacts positively on the good reading standards that most pupils attain.
74. The very experienced coordinator, who provides good subject leadership, has presided over a period of sustained high standards. The coordinator has analysed the trends in pupil performance data as a senior manager and scrutinised teachers' planning and pupils' work. She has monitored pupils' achievement by observing their confidence in reading and speaking in whole school events such as assembly. Specific aspects of English teaching have been monitored by regularly observing lessons with feedback and guidance provided for colleagues on their classroom practice. The coordinator has regularly attended training and disseminated information to other staff. There is a clear plan to enhance pupils' progress in writing.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

Good opportunities are taken to promote English skills through other subjects. For example, in science, pupils check the progress of broad beans they grow, discussing the development of the roots and shoots and updating their written records.

### **MATHEMATICS**

The provision is **satisfactory** overall. However, there is considerable difference in the provision for Years 1 and 2 and that for Years 3 to 6. The provision is unsatisfactory in Years 1 and 2 and good in Years 3 to 6.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils in Years 3 to 6 receive good teaching and they achieve well.
- The very good teaching by the special educational needs coordinator enables the pupils with special educational needs to achieve very well.
- The time allocation for the pupils in Years 1 and 2 is significantly less than in most schools.

## Commentary

75. There has been satisfactory progress since the previous inspection. Standards at Year 6 have risen from above average to well above average. The standards in Year 2 have declined from well above average to average. However, the unsatisfactory teaching present at the time of the last inspection has been eliminated.
76. The school has maintained high standards for many years. For three of the last four years for which data has been published, standards in the national tests were well above average for pupils in Year 2 and Year 6. The standards in 2004 declined at both Year 2 and Year 6. At Year 6 this was a temporary dip, reflecting the cohort's greater proportion of pupils with special educational needs. Inspection evidence shows that standards have returned to their former well above average levels and the pupils currently in Year 6 are achieving well. In Year 2, standards in 2004 were average. Since these pupils entered school with average abilities this constitutes satisfactory achievement. However, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher levels was below that in similar schools. The proportion of higher attaining pupils has declined further this year and, in part, this too reflects the lower than usual standards on entry. Inspection evidence indicates that the amount of time devoted to teaching mathematics in Years 1 and 2 is relatively low and it is reasonable to suppose that this has contributed to the decline in pupils' achievement.
77. The quality of teaching for the pupils in Years 1 and 2 is satisfactory although there remain some unsatisfactory elements in the organisation of group work. The work in the Year 2 pupils' books and in the lesson observed showed that although the basic skills of computation and number bonds are taught consistently and well, there is a lack of challenge for the higher attaining pupils and they are not sufficiently extended.
78. Teaching is good overall in Years 3 to 6. Most teachers have high expectations and consequently standards rise and pupils achieve well. The pupils in these year groups are highly motivated due to the very good relationships with their teachers and the challenging work. Pupils show a very good capacity to work collaboratively and teachers develop and use these skills well in the group activities. Teachers are less effective at developing the pupils' independence when solving problems. The pupils with special educational needs are given very good teaching of basic skills and they achieve very well.
79. Pupils achieve particularly well in Year 6 due to the very good teaching and the provision of additional booster classes. The teacher's explanations are very clear and the pace is fast. In the lesson seen, these pupils were completing an assignment in which they needed to calculate how many boxes a container lorry could hold. Within this one lesson they consolidated the skills of calculating volume, improved their knowledge of reading tables and charts and extended their understanding of how to undertake problem solving activities. In their review of their week's work on this interesting project, the pupils identified that they have also covered ratios and proportion, nets for three-dimensional shapes and data handling.
80. The coordinator provides satisfactory leadership and management. The priorities for development, such as making mathematics interesting and motivating pupils well, are achieved. All teachers use the newly installed interactive whiteboards effectively to demonstrate and to record information. The coordinator has established good methods of monitoring progress but these are not yet used throughout the school. The impact of pupils in Years 1 and 2 having a numeracy lesson on only four days a week has not been noted.

## Mathematics across the curriculum

81. The opportunities provided for pupils to develop their skills in other subjects are at least satisfactory. Good use is made of the pupils' numeracy skills in Year 6 to develop a project that links with information and communication technology and literacy. In science, good planned provision is made in Years 1 and 2, for example, through measurement made as part of a study of the human body.

## SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good in Years 1 and 2
- Achievement is affected by the relatively small amount of time given to the subject.
- Good teaching ensures that pupils learn well in the time allocated.
- Monitoring by the coordinator is starting to raise standards.

### Commentary

82. Pupils achieve well in Years 1 and 2. The pupils currently in Year 2 entered school with average abilities and teacher assessments show that they attain above average standards. Analysis of the progress made between Year 2 and Year 6 over the last three years shows that, generally, pupils achieve satisfactorily in Years 3 to 6. Overall, standards are above average compared with all schools and average in relation to similar schools. Inspection evidence and data held by the school indicate that the pupils currently in Year 6 are likely to attain above average standards in the national tests. Standards are not as high as at the time of the last inspection. There are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language achieve as well as their peers. However, pupils do not achieve as well in science as in English. This is because significantly less time is given to teaching science throughout the school than in most schools.
83. Teachers' insistence on good conduct, coupled with pupils' very good attitudes to learning result in high levels of engagement. Good use of electronic whiteboards linked to a computer help in the teaching of key ideas although, occasionally, teachers mask the whiteboard, making it difficult for some pupils to see. Teachers work well to help pupils acquire scientific language and very good practice was seen on the part of the teacher supporting those who do not speak English at home. However, teachers do not provide enough guidance in their marking to show pupils how to improve. In the best lessons, very good planning meets the needs of different ability groups and a very good climate for learning results in pupils asking questions and commenting on what is taught. Excellent relationships and very good behaviour lead to pupils learning very well in groups. In Year 6, a group of more able pupils made very good progress as a result of the help of a well qualified teaching assistant who worked very effectively to develop their understanding of electrical resistance
84. The coordinator leads and manages well. Her monitoring of teaching, planning and standards is beginning to have a positive effect on standards. A recent focus on meeting the needs of more able pupils, which arose from the checks the coordinator made on teachers' planning, has resulted in an increase in pupils attaining the higher levels in Year 2. The improvements the coordinator has made to learning resources are helping to promote good levels of practical work. The very good links with a nearby secondary school improve the provision for the most able pupils and the workshops carried out by the secondary school staff on scientific investigation benefit both teachers and pupils. Good use of the school's pond and conservation area boost pupils' achievement. Work in science contributes well to pupils' personal, social and health education.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils attain good standards by the time they leave because the teaching is good.
- Computers are used well in other subjects.
- Leadership and management are good.
- Sometimes adults give pupils too much help.

### **Commentary**

85. Despite a significant rise since the last inspection in the expectations that schools must meet in information and communication technology, the standards noted at that time have been maintained. Pupils in Year 2 attain average standards and those in Year 6 attain above the expected levels. Pupils achieve well as they pass through the school, thanks to good teaching.
86. Pupils in Year 6 achieve particularly well in developing a clear understanding of the use of computers outside school. Discussions with pupils in Year 6 show that they know about their use in the currency markets and realise the dangers inherent in Internet 'chat rooms'. The speed at which many pupils work is impressive. Mouse and touch pad control skills are better than normally found and pupils show great confidence in accessing and using programs and menus.
87. The consistently good and sometimes very good teaching seen during the inspection was carried out by teachers, teaching assistants and parent volunteers. Teachers generate a very good working atmosphere and identify tasks that are relevant to pupils' interests, so that levels of engagement are high, behaviour is very good or excellent and everyone works very well together. The adults are knowledgeable and work confidently promoting very positive attitudes on the part of pupils. Sometimes the adults do too much for the pupils, rather than asking them to provide answers or suggest how to proceed. Occasionally, pupils are not reminded to move themselves or the computer to make sure that they can operate the keyboard well rather than reaching across their partners. This detracts from the progress they make in improving keyboard skills.
88. The good work of the coordinator is evident in the improvement in provision since the last inspection. The enhanced quality of the hardware and software available to staff and pupils, has much potential for raising standards further. The electronic whiteboards linked to computers fitted in nearly all classrooms only a few weeks before the inspection are already used with enthusiasm and confidence to get across key learning points very well. This is testament to the good support provided by the coordinator for her colleagues. The coordinator's monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning in all classes contributes well to the progress that pupils make. Targets are used well to improve word processing skills in all classes.

### **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

89. Teachers work well to plan a wide range of activities in which pupils can develop their information and communication technology skills in other subjects. Appropriate use is made of the national planning guidance to achieve this. Pupils in Years 1, 2 and 4 were observed enhancing their computer skills in science and geography activities. Some very good teaching was done in Year 6 in the context of a topic which involved information and communication technology and a number of other subjects, including mathematics and design and technology. Pupils in Year 6 also create a multimedia presentation of the outcomes of studies, including geographical work, done during a visit to Norfolk.

## HUMANITIES

### Religious education

The provision is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils achieve well in the lessons and satisfactorily over a period of time.
- The work in the pupils' books is of a good quality, but in many year groups relatively little is recorded.

### Commentary

90. Religious education is planned in accordance with the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus. Standards at the end of both Year 2 and Year 6 are around those expected in this syllabus. In Year 2 the pupils learn about Christianity and Sikhism and in Year 6 they learn about Christianity and Buddhism. Insufficient priority has been given to the subject and standards have declined since the last inspection.
91. In the two lessons observed, in Years 2 and 6, the teaching was good and the pupils achieved well. In both of these lessons, the pupils learned about the practices of the religion studied and what these mean to the followers of the faith. They also reflected upon their own lives. Through considering the principles that the religions promote, they refined and improved their understanding of right and wrong within the context of their own lives and actions.
92. The teachers use the newly installed interactive whiteboards well and this helps to maintain pupils' interest and concentration well. The lessons are conducted at a suitable pace and the pupils' behaviour is very good, due to the teachers' high expectations. A particular strength in the teaching is the good relationships that the teachers have with their pupils and through this, their ability to promote very good attitudes of respect for the members of the faith groups being studied and the development of a sense of right and wrong.
93. The written work in the pupils' books is of a good standard, and the pupils' high standards in literacy are used well to enhance their work in religious education. However, there is a relatively small amount of written work in the books, making it difficult for the school to check the progress made by pupils.
94. The headteacher is the coordinator for this subject, but she has not been in the school for sufficient time to make an impact. At present, there are no systems for evaluating and recording standards.
95. **Geography** and **history** were not a focus of the inspection. No lessons were observed. Pupils' work was scrutinised and a discussion was held with some pupils in Year 6. These showed that the standard of work produced in Years 2 and 6 in both geography and history is broadly typical of what is expected for pupils of those ages. There was insufficient evidence to make secure judgements about teaching, learning or pupils' achievement.
96. In Year 2, in **geography**, pupils have learned about the weather of a contrasting world location such as the South Pole. They have found out what it is like to live on a Scottish island by learning about the daily routines of characters in a story read to them in literacy lessons. Pupils made simple maps showing island features such as houses, a bridge and a loch. In Year 6 pupils' knowledge of landscape includes environmental issues that trace the impact of the sea on the coastline. Pupils learned the terms cliff, stack and pillar and they annotated coastal maps of the British Isles. In local studies pupils produced a land use map of Hitchin plotting locations by using co-ordinates. Pupils considered how they might improve safety on

the busy road that runs past the school. A discussion with pupils showed that, although they had a secure understanding of the local area and its transport systems, their knowledge of places throughout the British Isles was more limited.

97. In Year 2, in **history**, pupils learned about Samuel Pepys and the diary he kept. Their knowledge of more recent history includes the space journey of Neil Armstrong. They learned about the spacecraft Apollo 11 and the features of the landing craft. In Year 6 pupils used their good research skills gained in English to analyse a school inspection report from the Victorian period. They noted key dates such as 1891 when a law was passed requiring children to attend school. Pupils also learned about the mining and farming industry at that time. Pupils contrasted artists' impressions and photographs of Queen Victoria from different stages of her life to draw conclusions about her characteristics. Pupils provided a number of reasons why Queen Victoria wore black clothes; one suggesting that this represented her grieving for the death of her husband Prince Albert.

## **CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS**

98. Subjects in this area were sampled. Pupils' work and displayed work were scrutinised, and when time allowed lessons were observed. There was too little evidence to judge provision.
99. Limited evidence indicates that standards in **art and design** are average in Year 2 and Year 6, as was the case at the time of the last inspection. Drawing is generally done skilfully and often with great care. The work of talented pupils in Year 2 is particularly impressive in its maturity. Teachers use the school grounds well to provide a stimulus for drawing and painting from life. However, in most classes pupils do not make enough use of sketchbooks to collect visual information to be used as a basis for their own work. Little three dimensional work was seen, except in clay. Discussions with staff point to the difficulty of storing large scale works. The after school ceramics and craft clubs provide very valuable opportunities for pupils to improve their skills.
100. The two lessons observed were good, characterised by good preparation. Pupils responded well to the challenges set and worked hard. Computers were employed well in the Year 3 lesson about pointillism and in the Year 6 lesson very strong cooperation between pupils significantly enhanced progress. The narrow range of media available to pupils restricted their response in both lessons. Scrutiny of samples of pupils' work confirms that good teaching in Year 3 results in pupils attaining above average standards. The teacher's good subject knowledge enables him to provide a wide range of learning experiences and adopt a structured, but stimulating approach.
101. The good leadership and management of the coordinator have a positive effect on standards. Her efforts to raise the status of the subject by bringing in a professional artist to work with pupils have been successful. The monitoring of provision by the coordinator has identified the need to discuss with pupils how well teachers judge they are progressing and to encourage them to evaluate their own work more. The weakness in collecting evidence of the pupils' achievements found during the last inspection has been addressed satisfactorily through the use of digital photography and compact computer discs.
102. Although the school makes proper provision for teaching **design and technology**, few lessons were scheduled during the inspection period and it was not possible to observe any teaching. Consequently, no judgement is made of provision. Not enough products made by pupils were available to judge standards. Limited evidence from pupils' recorded work suggests that pupils in Year 1 and 2 attain standards that are at least average, and that some aspects of their design work are above average. These include the identification by pupils in Year 2 of the steps needed to make wind up toys. Good links between design and technology and history, information and communication technology and art and design are made in the Year 2 work about the Great Fire of London. These make the lessons more interesting and relevant.

103. There is insufficient evidence to make secure judgments on teaching, learning and pupils' achievement in **music**. Lesson observations covered one infant and one junior class in this inspection. During these lessons and in school assemblies, standards were above average. This is an improvement since the last inspection. This is largely because pupils are taught music each week by a teacher who specialises in this subject. This arrangement contributes strongly to the good standards attained by most pupils.
104. In Year 2 pupils sing songs such 'The Music Man' tunefully with good diction. Pupils can play untuned percussion instruments confidently. They have a good sense of rhythm and can control well the sounds produced by shakers, tambourines and castanets. Most pupils can change the volume and speed of their playing by following the teacher's conducting very carefully. Most pupils have good listening skills; this helps them to gain a good understanding of rhythmic patterns. Some pupils can name individual instruments, such as a triangle, played on pre-recorded sequences. Pupils work well together in small groups to develop their understanding of composing. In a Year 2 lesson pupils collaborated well and sometimes included a 'rest' while practising the concept of four beats in a bar.
105. In Year 3 pupils produced good volume when singing a two-part round keeping to the beat effectively. Pupils confidently played tuned percussion instruments including chime bars when they played compositions from the previous lesson. Pupils had learned to use notation by using motifs based on animals. Pupils negotiated amicably when deciding on the final versions of their compositions. During the performances that followed most pupils could maintain their own part while performing in a group from simple notations, a standard normally expected of older pupils.
106. Pupils have regular opportunities to sing and play together in assemblies. In a whole school assembly the quality of singing was good. It was enhanced by recorder players who played a counter melody keeping good time and in tune with each other. Scrutiny of pupils' files from Year 6 confirms pupils have composed music to represent different moods and they have taken part in a music hall production. Some pupils had used formal notation when composing. In design and technology pupils produced outline plans for percussion instruments that they subsequently made. They considered how the sound was produced and how their instrument might be modified to change the tone. Through evaluation and modification pupils produced instruments that they could use in music lessons.
107. The school makes proper provision for teaching **physical education** but it was only possible to observe one lesson. Consequently, no judgement is made of teaching, learning and pupils' achievement.
108. Information held by the school indicates that pupils attain good standards in swimming, with a high percentage able to swim 25 metres unaided by the time they leave. The lesson observed was good. The teacher's good knowledge of maypole dancing helped to ensure that pupils attained satisfactory standards. The brisk pace ensured that the pupils got plenty of exercise.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

109. This area was sampled and no lessons were observed. The evidence from sampling shows that the provision is good overall. The teaching of personal, social and health education and citizenship follows the content of a commercial scheme of work, the lessons alternating with those provided in religious education. At the time of the inspection religious education was being taught. No judgements are therefore made for teaching, learning, standards and achievement. The evidence that was secured, however, indicates that overall provision is good. The recently appointed headteacher has already identified the need to review the timetabling of personal, social and health education and citizenship within the overall curriculum provision.
110. The governing body ensures that statutory requirements for this area of the curriculum are met well. Governors have agreed that sex education will be provided and a formal programme is

delivered separately to girls and boys in Years 5 and 6. Parents are informed about the provision made and invited to preview the materials. Drugs education is provided within a regular programme of personal health and safety delivered by community organisations including the police and fire services. Similarly, members of staff from the railway police visit the school to alert pupils to the dangers of living close to a high speed electrified line.

111. During the inspection the recently established school council for pupils held its second formal meeting. Although the council is a recent initiative, pupils' views about the school have been sought for many years. Pupils were directly involved when the playground facilities were redesigned and improved.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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