

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **ST MARY MAGDALENE CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

Milton Keynes

LEA area: Millton Keynes

Unique reference number: 110483

Headteacher: Mrs Rosemarie Jones

Lead inspector: Mrs Stephanie Lacey

Dates of inspection: 31<sup>st</sup> January - 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2005

Inspection number: 267863

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

© Crown copyright 2005

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Primary  
School category: Voluntary Aided  
Age range of pupils: 3 - 12  
Gender of pupils: Mixed  
Number on roll: 320

School address: Ardwell Lane  
Greenleys  
Milton Keynes  
Buckinghamshire  
Postcode: MK12 6AY

Telephone number: (01908) 321 746  
Fax number: (01908) 220 522

Appropriate authority: The governing body  
Name of chair of Father Paul Hardy  
governors:

Date of previous 1<sup>st</sup> February 1999  
inspection:

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Mary Magdalene Catholic School is a large combined school in the Greenleys area of North Milton Keynes. It has eleven classes in addition to a nursery. This is the last year in which Year 7 pupils will attend the school and from September 2005, pupils will transfer to secondary education at the end of Year 6. Pupils come from a wide range of social, economic and academic backgrounds. Over eight per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is below the national average. The school serves the parishes of St Mary Magdalene, St Francis de Sales and St Edward the Confessor and pupils also come from other Catholic parishes in Milton Keynes. An increasing number of non-Catholic children attend from the area around the school. Most pupils are White British, with 33 per cent from a diversity of other ethnic backgrounds. The largest group of these are Black Africans. Ten per cent of pupils do not have English as their first language and five pupils are at the early stages of learning English. Their home languages are Twi, Chinese, French and Italian. When children start school, their skills, knowledge and understanding are very wide-ranging. In most years, the overall profile is generally a little below the levels expected for children of this age. However, the attainment on entry of the current nursery and reception children is broadly in line with levels expected for their age. Eleven per cent of pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, which is below average. Three of these pupils have statements of special educational need for different learning problems. The percentage of pupils joining or leaving the school, other than at the usual points of entry or transfer, is above average. The school gained an Investor in People

Award and a Charter Mark in 2003. It was given a School Achievement Award in 2001 and 2003.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
3764	Mrs Stephanie Lacey	Lead inspector	Foundation Stage English English as an additional language
14756	Mr John Lovell	Lay inspector	
30618	Mr Paul Story	Team inspector	Mathematics Information and communication technology Italian
22704	Mr Garry Williams	Team inspector	Art and design Geography History Music Physical education
22092	Mr Derek Watts	Team inspector	Science Design and technology Special educational needs

The inspection contractor was:

Tribal PPI  
1 - 4 Portland Square  
Bristol  
BS2 8RR

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the inspection contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet '*Complaining about Ofsted Inspections*', which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637 833) or Ofsted's website ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

## **REPORT CONTENTS**

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>4 - 5</b>
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS</b>	
<b>STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS</b>	<b>6 - 9</b>
Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
<b>QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>9 - 15</b>
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
<b>LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>15 - 16</b>
<b>PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING AND SUBJECTS</b>	<b>17 - 30</b>
<b>AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE</b>	
<b>SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1, 2 AND 3</b>	
<b>PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS</b>	<b>31</b>

## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is a good school with several very good features.** A very strong Christian ethos underpins the work of the school, with all members of St Mary Magdalene valued within a caring, family community. The headteacher is a strong leader with a clear educational vision. She is effectively supported by an experienced deputy headteacher. Pupils achieve well because the teaching is good and most reach the levels expected for their age, with some doing better. The school provides good value for money.

#### The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Good teaching throughout the school ensures that pupils achieve well.
- Pupils achieve very well in Year 7, as a consequence of the very strong provision.
- Pupils are very positive about school and most behave very well.
- The teachings of Christ pervade the every day work of the school.
- Relationships between all members of the school community are very good.
- Pupils' progress is checked carefully, but pupils are not always clear about what they need to do to improve.
- Governors are supportive and helpful, but are not always sharp enough in their evaluations of how well the school is doing.
- There is a good partnership between the school and most parents, but the school does not consult parents sufficiently about school matters.

The school has developed its work well since its last inspection in February 1999. The quality of teaching has improved and all groups of pupils achieve well. The school has made great strides in developing its work with the youngest children and has now opened a nursery as part of a new Foundation Stage unit. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved and all the issues for improvement noted by the last inspection have been tackled. These were related to improving ICT, developing planning for work in different subjects, planning for sex education and the role of subject managers. Standards have fallen, but this is related to the change in the school's intake and not the provision for pupils' learning.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2002	2003	2004	2004
English	B	A	D	C
mathematics	C	A	C	C
science	B	A	C	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 achieve well throughout the school. All groups of pupils achieve equally well, including pupils with special educational needs, higher attaining pupils, pupils from minority ethnic groups and pupils learning English as an additional language. Children achieve well in the nursery and reception classes and are well set to meet the goals children are expected to reach by the end of the reception. Pupils also achieve well in Years 1 and 2,

with most reaching the levels expected for their age in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Standards in Year 2 national tests and assessments have fluctuated over the last few years and standards last year were not as high as they were at the time of the last inspection. This is because in several year groups there has been a higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs than was the case previously. Pupils achieve well in Years 4 to 6 and again the standard of work seen in English, mathematics and science was broadly in line with the levels expected, with Year 6 pupils reaching higher standards in science. The table shows that standards also fluctuate in Year 6 national tests, with a drop last year related to the high number of pupils with special educational needs in this particular year group, who nonetheless had made satisfactory progress since their Year 2 tests in English and mathematics, and good progress in science. In Year 7, pupils achieve very well in English and mathematics. Standards are now in line with expected levels in English and science and above expected levels in mathematics. Work seen in other subjects was broadly in line with the levels expected for pupils' ages in all year groups.

**Pupils' personal development is very good because of the very good overall provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.** Pupils behave very well in lessons and at playtimes and are very positive about school. They get on very well with each other and the staff. Attendance is broadly average.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The school provides a good quality education.** The quality of teaching is good throughout the school and very good in Year 7. Lessons are well planned and interesting and so pupils work hard and enjoy learning. There are good systems in place for checking how well pupils are doing, but pupils are not always clear about what they need to do to improve. A range of interesting visits and visitors enhances the broad curriculum. Pupils are cared for well and the good partnerships between the school, parents and the community enrich pupils' learning.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are good.** The headteacher manages the school well and provides very strong pastoral leadership and a clear vision, firmly founded on Catholicism. She is supported well by the deputy headteacher and together they form a very strong team. Governance is satisfactory, with very supportive governors at an early stage of developing their monitoring role. They are not yet consistently asking sufficiently challenging questions.

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

Most parents are pleased with all that the school does for their children, with a very small minority unhappy about some aspects of the school's work. Parents are particularly positive about the happy atmosphere in the school and the good quality teaching. A minority did not feel well informed about their children's progress and felt that there was a lack of consultation about general school issues. The inspection found that parents are provided with good information about their child's progress, but that the procedures for consulting with parents need improving. Pupils are also positive about school. They particularly like their teachers and friends and feel that there is always someone to turn to if they need help.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**



**The school has a sound strategic plan in place to guide its work over the next four years and improve provision. In association with this plan, the most important things the school should do to improve are:**

- Raise standards by helping pupils to understand what they have to do to improve.
- Put in place robust procedures to help governors to evaluate and question how well the school is doing.
- Put in place regular opportunities for parents to comment on school provision and to make suggestions for further development.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

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

Pupils achieve well in all year groups, except Year 7 where they achieve very well. Standards throughout the school in English, mathematics and science are broadly in line with expected levels. They are not as high as they were at the time of the last inspection.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in national tests have fluctuated since the last inspection and although they are not as high now as they were, there are good reasons for this.
- All pupils achieve well because of the good provision made for them and most reach the levels expected for their age in English, mathematics and science.
- Pupils in Year 7 achieve very well in English and mathematics because the quality of teaching is very good.

#### Commentary

*Standards in national tests have fluctuated since the last inspection and although they are not as high as they were, there are good reasons for this*

1. Standards in national tests in Years 2 and 6 were not as high in 2004 as they were at the time of the last inspection. There have been fluctuations in standards year on year and in 2001 and 2003, for example, the school was given a government School Achievement Award for the high standards reached. However, the overall improvement in standards in recent years has been below the national trend in both Years 2 and 6.
2. The table below shows that standards in Year 2 tests in 2004 were below average in reading and writing and well below average in mathematics. Standards were well below those of schools with a similar free school meal entitlement in all three subjects.

#### ***Standards in national tests at the end of Year 2 – average point scores in 2004***

Standards in:	School results	National results
reading	15.3 (16.5)	15.8 (15.7)
writing	13.9 (15.8)	14.6 (14.6)
mathematics	15.3 (16.1)	16.2 (16.3)

*There were 30 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

There are several factors that have contributed to these apparently low standards. These include:

- Small numbers in each year group, which means that standards can swing from year to year as a consequence of the performance of one or two pupils. In this school, there would have to be a percentage change of over 13 per cent of pupils reaching any particular level for it to be statistically significant.
- A change in the intake of the school, with more pupils starting school with knowledge, skills and understanding below the levels expected for their age. This is true of pupils in the current Years 1, 2 and 3.

- Some inconsistencies in teaching in Years 1 and 2 in the past, highlighted by the school's own evaluation.
3. Generally, standards have been higher in Year 6 tests than in Year 2. They had been above or well above average in English, mathematics and science until 2004, when standards fell to average in mathematics and science and below average in English. This was because higher attaining pupils did not do as well in the tests as the school had anticipated and a number of pupils who joined the school more recently did not reach expected levels. This relatively high mobility has had an adverse impact on standards. Overall, this year group had made satisfactory progress from their Year 1 tests in English and mathematics and good progress in science. The school's own analysis of progress indicates that the pupils who had been in the school from Year 2 made good progress.

***Standards in national tests at the end of Year 6 – average point scores in 2004***

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	26.5 (28.8)	26.9 (26.8)
mathematics	27.1 (29.7)	27.0 (26.8)
science	29.2 (30.3)	28.6 (28.6)

*There were 47 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

*All pupils achieve well because of the good provision made for them and most reach the levels expected for their age in English, mathematics, science and ICT*

4. Throughout the school, pupils achieve well as a consequence of good teaching. In the nursery and reception classes, children make good strides in their learning and most are well set to reach the goals expected for their age by the end of the reception year in all areas of learning. A few reception children have already met these goals in their language and mathematical development. In Years 1 to 6, pupils also achieve well and most reach the levels expected for their age in reading, writing, mathematics, science and ICT, with a few pupils doing better than this. Standards seen in work in other subjects were also broadly in line with levels expected.
5. The school has worked hard to improve standards in Years 1 and 2. Class sizes have been reduced and full-time teaching assistants have been allocated to each class. Support has been given to less experienced teachers. This is beginning to have a positive impact on standards.
6. All groups of pupils achieve equally well. These include pupils with special educational needs and higher attaining pupils. Pupils learning English as an additional language achieve well, as do those from minority ethnic groups. In older pupils' classes, many of the pupils from minority ethnic groups reach high standards, although some black boys in other classes do not reach high standards in English. There is nothing in the school's provision to account for these differences. Pupils who join the school after the normal entry point are monitored carefully and appropriate support is given to them to ensure that they achieve as well as their peers.

*Pupils in Year 7 achieve very well in English and mathematics because the quality of teaching is very good*

7. In Year 7, pupils achieve very well in English and mathematics particularly, because of the very good quality of the teaching. Standards have risen in English this year and

are now in line with expected levels. Pupils achieve above the expected level in mathematics.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

This strong area has improved even further since the last inspection. Pupils are very positive about all that the school has to offer. They behave very well and get on very well with each other and the staff. Their personal development is very good and is supported very well by the very good overall provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Levels of attendance are broadly average.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils enjoy school and most are very keen to learn.
- Pupils behave very well in lessons and at playtimes.
- Pupils' personal development is very good because of the very good provision made for their spiritual, social and moral development.

### **COMMENTARY**

*Pupils enjoy school and most are very keen to learn*

8. Most pupils are happy at school and clearly value the opportunities provided for them. Children settle in smoothly to the new nursery class because of the encouragement of the staff, and adapt quickly to their new surroundings. Most children transfer to the reception class and easily adjust to the longer day. Pupils like school because of the opportunities to meet their friends and because they find the teachers friendly. They enjoy learning and try hard in lessons. Pupils with special educational needs have very good attitudes to learning and behave very well. These positive attributes contribute to pupils' good achievement. Many pupils stay after the end of the school day to take part in the numerous clubs and activities.

*Pupils behave very well in lessons and at playtimes*

9. There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere in lessons and most pupils respond very well to teachers' high expectations of their good behaviour. Pupils move sensibly around the school and their behaviour in assemblies is excellent. At playtimes, pupils play happily together and enjoy exuberant games and quieter moments with small groups of friends. There are clear policies outlining the school's stance on behaviour and bullying and pupils report that staff sort out any incidents quickly. Pupils mentioned that there has been some name calling, but that teachers dealt with this promptly. Incidents of bullying are not commonplace and are always treated very seriously by the staff. Parents are always consulted and in most cases the problem is resolved to the satisfaction of all parties. No pupils were excluded from school last year, although two boys were excluded from their class for two days. There have been no incidents of a racist nature.

*Pupils' personal development is very good because of the very good provision made for their spiritual, social and moral development*

10. Pupils make very good strides in their personal development because of the school's commitment to making very good provision for their all round development. Children in the nursery and reception classes are on course to reach the goals expected of them by the end of their reception year. The school's very good provision for pupils' spiritual development is reflected in pupils' reflective approach and their respect for other people's feelings. Pupils are reminded of the presence of God by the daily opportunities for prayer and the physical symbols of their belief in classrooms and shared areas. Pupils' very good moral principles are founded on Christian belief.

They are clear about the difference between right and wrong and benefit from the very good role models of staff. Clubs and residential visits make a very good contribution to pupils' social development. As pupils move through the school they gradually take on more responsibility, with the oldest pupils helping with supervision duties at lunchtime, for example. The school council provides good opportunities for representatives to take on further responsibility. The school makes good provision for pupils' cultural development. There has been good progress made in helping pupils to appreciate the wide range of cultures represented in the United Kingdom, with a range of interesting activities organised. These are not yet fully embedded in work in different subjects.

### **Attendance**

11. Attendance is broadly in line with the national average and is similar to that found at the time of the last inspection. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance have improved since the time of the last inspection and are satisfactory. Punctuality is satisfactory and parents seek to ensure that their children arrive at school on time. Most parents contact the school on the first morning of a pupil's absence, to provide an explanation, but the school does not routinely contact parents who do not do this. The school now follows up unexplained absences, and improved procedures have eliminated unauthorised absences.

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.1	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.*

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The school provides a good quality education. Good teaching ensures that pupils learn effectively. Teachers keep a careful eye on pupils' progress, but pupils do not always know what they have to do to improve. The curriculum is broad and enriched effectively by a range of visits and visitors. The school is staffed well and the accommodation is very good. Pupils are cared for effectively and the good partnership with parents supports pupils' learning, although parents are not routinely consulted about school matters.

### **Teaching and learning**

Good teaching throughout the school ensures that all pupils learn effectively. Pupils move on more quickly in Year 7, where the teaching is very good. The overall quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Assessment procedures are sound, but pupils do not always know what they have to do to improve.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good relationships between pupils and staff underpin pupils' self-esteem and help them to tackle learning tasks with confidence.
- Staff set high expectations for pupils' very good behaviour and so little time is wasted in lessons.

- Teaching assistants work very well with teachers and provide very good support for individuals and small groups, especially those with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language.
- Lessons are planned well, although sometimes pupils are not told what they are expected to learn in the lesson.
- Teachers' subject expertise is used effectively.
- Pupils' progress is checked carefully, but most are not clear about what they have to do to improve.

## Commentary

12. Pupils are taught well throughout the school and this has a positive impact on their good achievement. The table below shows the quality of teaching observed in lessons and highlights the high proportion of good teaching, which was a feature of the work in all year groups. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection.

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 45 lessons*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
1 (2%)	8 (18%)	28 (62%)	7 (16%)	1 (2%)	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.*

13. In the nursery and reception classes, there is a very good emphasis on helping children to learn through structured play. Staff place good emphasis on helping children to be successful learners by their praise and encouragement. Children are encouraged to be independent, although they do not plan or evaluate their chosen activities systematically.
14. In Years 1 and 2, the quality of teaching ranged from very good to unsatisfactory, but was predominantly good. Staff explain new ideas carefully, but sometimes expect pupils to spend too long listening to the teacher at the beginning of lessons. This is exacerbated by some overlong literacy and numeracy lessons.
15. In Years 3 to 6, pupils apply themselves conscientiously to learning tasks because teachers are encouraging and enthusiastic. In the very good lessons, pupils made rapid gains in understanding because a good deal was expected of them. In one or two sessions, a lack of pace, particularly for higher attaining pupils, meant that pupils did not move ahead so quickly. In Year 7 the teaching seen was consistently good or very good. This has had a very positive impact on standards in English and mathematics.
16. There are some common strengths, which underpin teaching and learning in all groups.

*Very good relationships between pupils and staff underpin pupils' self-esteem and help them to tackle learning tasks with confidence*

17. In almost every class, teachers' clear enjoyment of the pupils' company and the very good attention paid to raising pupils' self-esteem through constructive praise mean that pupils are confident learners. Pupils are not afraid to make mistakes and respond enthusiastically in whole-class discussions in the knowledge that their contributions will be valued. Pupils trust and respect their teachers and this helps them to ask for help when they need it.

*Staff set high expectations for pupils' very good behaviour and so little time is wasted in lessons*

18. Staff make it quite clear to pupils what is expected of them in lessons in terms of their behaviour. Consequently, pupils listen carefully to their teachers and work hard. Teachers spend very little time in managing pupils' behaviour, and on the rare occasion that they do, pupils respond very quickly. One or two pupils have identified behavioural or emotional problems and they are generally supported well by staff.

*Teaching assistants work very well with teachers and provide very good support for individuals and small groups, especially those with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language*

19. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, especially those who have special educational needs. The teaching of these pupils is good. Tasks are usually matched well to their needs, particularly in English and mathematics. This helps to ensure that pupils are suitably challenged and can learn well. Targets in pupils' individual education plans are clearly focused and appropriate to pupils' needs. Teachers and assistants are sensitive to the needs of pupils learning English as an additional language and take care to ensure that they understand what is expected of them.

*Lessons are planned well, although sometimes pupils are not told what they are expected to learn in the lesson*

20. Teachers plan and prepare lessons carefully. Most lessons are structured well, with a good balance between listening to the teacher, asking and answering questions and working on activities. Teachers are clear in their own minds about what they want the pupils to learn, but do not always communicate this to the pupils at the start of the lesson. Occasionally, in the written planning, the objectives for the lesson are expressed as what pupils are expected to do, rather than what they are expected to learn. In most subjects, but not always in science, pupils' tasks are matched to their ability.

*Teachers' subject expertise is used effectively*

21. In some subject areas, individual teacher's subject knowledge has a particularly positive impact on pupils' learning. This was particularly evident in some ICT lessons, a music session and in Italian lessons seen.

*Pupils' progress is checked carefully, but most pupils are not clear about what they have to do to improve*

22. There are some good systems in place for tracking pupils' progress, but these are not always used consistently from class to class. There is a clear marking policy, for example, but not all teachers systematically mark pupils' work with reference to the particular objective for the lesson. Sometimes teachers' writing is not a good role model for the pupils. The school has begun to involve pupils more in recognising what they need to do to improve. Pupils have individual targets, for example, in English, but these are not reviewed frequently enough in some classes. Some older pupils are clear about the National Curriculum level that they have reached in English, mathematics and science, but many are not. Pupils do not have clear guidance, readily available, for what they have to achieve to reach the next level and this is a weakness.

## **The curriculum**

The planning for work in all subjects is sound and enriched effectively by a wide range of visits and visitors. Staffing levels and resources are good. The accommodation is very good. Good improvement has been made since the previous inspection.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Work in all subjects is broad, interesting, well planned and relevant to pupils' needs but not as balanced as it could be.
- A wide range of clubs, visits and visitors greatly enhances learning opportunities.
- There is a strong commitment to ensuring that all pupils have access to the full range of learning opportunities.
- The school is staffed well, with teachers and support staff working together effectively.
- The accommodation is very good and this, together with good resources, has a positive impact on pupils' learning.

## Commentary

*Work in all subjects is broad, interesting, well planned and relevant to pupils' needs but not as balanced as it could be*

23. The school provides a broad range of stimulating learning experiences that lead to high levels of interest in lessons. The curriculum is firmly based on national guidance for children in the Foundation Stage, the National Curriculum and locally agreed syllabus for religious education. Italian is taught to pupils from Year 5 to Year 7. Year 7 pupils, with their peers from other neighbouring Catholic schools, attend the senior school for one day a week. This makes the transfer to their next school much smoother. Morning lessons, which are usually literacy and numeracy, tend to be very long, and this limits the time for other subjects. The school has identified sensible strategies to alleviate this imbalance in the near future. All statutory requirements are met, including those relating to sex education, which was an area for improvement from the previous inspection. There is a good emphasis on pupils' personal, social, health education and citizenship, relationships and drugs education. Pupils are prepared well for the next stages in their education.

*A wide range of clubs, visits and visitors greatly enhances learning opportunities*

24. Educational visits and visitors, including a residential experience, for pupils in Years 5, 6 and 7 are built into the curriculum as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Special weeks such as science week, music week, Ancient Greek week, African Music week and Chinese week are planned to provide learning opportunities for pupils to learn together. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular clubs and activities, which cover a wide range of interests, including sport, music and the arts. These enhance and complement pupils' learning and enjoyment and promote opportunities for many of the school-based taught skills to be honed and finely tuned.

*There is a strong commitment to ensuring that all pupils have access to the full range of learning opportunities*

25. The school has a strong commitment to equality of access and opportunity for all pupils. This is reflected in the good provision for pupils with special educational needs, English as an additional language and gifted and talented pupils.

*The school is staffed well, with teachers and support staff working together effectively*

26. The school is generously staffed with well-qualified teachers and learning support assistants who work very effectively as a team. Good use is made of their individual interests and expertise, for example in music and Italian. Teaching assistants work very closely with the teaching staff. They are involved in planning and lesson



evaluations. Teachers very much respect the support they receive from the teaching assistants, who feel valued as an integral part of the school team.

*The accommodation is very good and this, together with good resources, has a positive impact on pupils' learning*

27. The accommodation is very good. The school is a modern building and occupies a large site. The school building is large with a self-contained Foundation Stage department. This houses the newly opened nursery and reception class and has an enclosed outside area. Classrooms for Years 1 to 7 are grouped by age with shared areas. There is an attractive hall, a designated computer suite and a music room. The classrooms for Years 6 and 7 pupils are somewhat limited in space, although this will not affect Year 7 pupils after July 2005. However, the school manages the situation well and pupils are in no way disadvantaged. The school is maintained in a good state of decoration and repairs and cleaned to a high standard. All teachers use the generous wall space to display pupils' work, which is mounted with careful thought for pupil information and creates a purposeful and pleasant environment. The playgrounds and playing fields are generous, giving plenty of space for outdoor sports lessons and competitions. The adventure apparatus is a valued asset to the playground. Resources are good and used well in all subjects.

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

Pupils are cared for well and provided with good support, advice and guidance, based on the good monitoring of their personal development. There are good arrangements for seeking and acting on pupils' views. This area has been maintained well since the last inspection.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The quality of pastoral care is a significant strength of the school.
- Pupils enjoy very good relationships with staff, which benefit the development of their self-esteem and confidence in seeking support.
- Pupils are involved well in contributing their views on how to improve the school's routines and facilities for the benefit of the whole school community.
- Health and safety are promoted well on a day-to-day basis and a comprehensive portfolio of formal risk assessments is being developed.
- First aid provision is very good.

### **Commentary**

*The quality of pastoral care is a significant strength of the school*

28. The good support, advice and guidance identified at the time of the previous inspection have been maintained and there are now some very strong features, particularly in respect of pastoral care. This significant strength is recognised by parents and pupils. The school provides an emotionally secure and happy environment in which pupils' individual wellbeing is very effectively promoted. The very high quality of the pastoral support is based on caring Christian principles in which every member of the school community is valued for their own gifts and contributions and these are celebrated as a regular part of school life. This helps to develop an appreciation and understanding of others. Pupils are supported very well because staff monitor their personal development carefully and have a very good awareness of those factors that might affect their progress at school. There are sound

procedures in place to track pupils' academic progress. The school meets the requirements of the Code of Practice, with good provision for pupils identified with special educational needs. The special needs co-ordinator, teachers and teaching assistants work effectively to meet the needs of all pupils with special educational needs and to monitor their progress in relation to the targets on their individual education plans.

*Pupils enjoy very good relationships with staff, which benefit the development of their self-esteem and confidence in seeking support*

29. The teaching and support staff know the pupils, and their families, very well and are very sensitive to pupils' individual needs. Staff work very hard to ensure that the best interests of pupils are met and respond very well to pupils' personal and social needs. The very good relationships between staff and pupils begin when children first start school and underpin the very good guidance that pupils and parents feel staff provide. Pupils turn readily to their teachers or support staff if they have any problems. The trusting relationships which pupils enjoy give them confidence to share their news or concerns and cope with any problems that they may encounter.

*Pupils are involved well in contributing their views on how to improve the school's routines and facilities for the benefit of the whole school community*

30. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to contribute to the development of the school through pupil surveys and the work of the school council. Pupils' views are valued and recent surveys have looked at issues such as buildings, playtimes and security. Pupils feel that their opinions are valued but would appreciate more formal feedback on the ideas that they generate, although they are pleased that there is a school council noticeboard in the foyer.

*Health and safety are promoted well on a day-to-day basis and a comprehensive portfolio of formal risk assessments is being developed*

31. Arrangements for ensuring that pupils work in a safe environment are good. Safe practice is promoted well on a day-to-day basis and in lessons, where teachers emphasise safety issues. Equipment is checked regularly, evacuation procedures practised and regular safety audits are completed. The school has a developing portfolio of risk assessments, which includes full assessments for all visits. Child protection arrangements and training meet requirements and the headteacher, who co-ordinates this area of activity, views this work as a priority and kept parents advised of the procedures when they were reviewed earlier this year. All staff are vigilant and work effectively within the agreed local area protection committee procedures.

*First-aid provision is very good*

32. First aid provision is very good because of the large number of staff who have undertaken first-aid training and their understanding of individual pupils' needs.

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

The partnerships between school and home and with other schools are good. Links with the community are also good. The school has maintained strong links with parents since the last inspection.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents have positive views of the school and, in particular, the pastoral care which it provides.
- The information provided to parents about pupils' progress is good.
- The school does not consult with parents sufficiently about school matters.
- The Friends of St Mary Magdalene provide very good support.
- Links with the local Catholic primary and secondary schools are good.
- Links with the community are good, but business links remain underdeveloped.

## Commentary

*Parents have positive views of the school and, in particular, the pastoral care which it provides*

33. Parents express positive views of most aspects of the school, pupils' progress and, in particular, the pastoral care provided and support for pupils' personal development, which the inspection found were very good. The school usually manages to resolve any concerns of parents informally. However, in the event that a parent should wish to make a formal complaint, there is an appropriate complaints procedure.

*The information provided to parents about pupils' progress is good*

34. A minority of parents have some concerns about the information provided to them about their children's progress. The inspection found that the school seeks to involve parents in supporting their own children's behaviour and learning. There are good arrangements for helping children to settle easily into the nursery and reception classes; with several visits arranged for parents and children before the children start school. Teaching staff are very accessible to parents and consultation evenings to discuss pupils' progress are very well supported by parents. In addition, parents receive an annual report, termly newsletters and information about what children are being taught and the themes being addressed in religious education. This information is good overall although there is some inconsistency in the tone and quality of the information provided. It is generally free from educational jargon. Reports are good and clear targets enable parents to understand what their children have to do to move on to the next stage of their learning. Staff are very willing to discuss any concerns or answer questions. The school's partnership with parents of pupils with special educational needs is good. Targets in individual educational plans are shared with the parents effectively and they are appropriately involved in reviewing their child's progress each term.

*The school does not consult with parents sufficiently about school matters*

35. A minority of parents also have some concerns about the extent of the school's consultation with parents. The inspection found that the school does not have appropriate arrangements to regularly seek parents' views on issues affecting the school community and the improvements that are planned. Parents are consulted about issues that rely upon parental support and financial contribution, such as transport and school lunches. There is no effective formal dialogue involving parents and their views are not sought sufficiently or used well to contribute to the school improvement planning process.

*The Friends of Mary Magdalene provide very good support*

36. The Friends of St Mary Magdalene run regular events that involve pupils and the wider community. They raise substantial sums of money to support the work of the school

and provide valuable additional resources and facilities such as seating for the playground and materials for musical productions. In addition, about ten parents help regularly in school with practical activities and reading within classrooms. The support of these parents and the Friends is greatly appreciated by pupils and staff.

*Links with the local Catholic primary and secondary schools are good*

37. The school has good curricular and sporting links with other local Catholic primary schools and share moderation of work, some aspects of staff training and joint competitions such as that for the inter-school Catholic Shield (track and field events). Staff from all of the local Catholic schools come together during the year to share in an Academic Mass. Links with the secondary Catholic school, to which most pupils transfer, are good. The year-long induction programme for Year 7 pupils, who spend a day a week at the secondary school, is very good.

*Links with the community are good but business links remain underdeveloped*

38. Links with the community are good overall. They enrich the curriculum and benefit pupils' social development. Pupils have a very good understanding of the needs of others, illustrated through their charitable giving to organisations and appeals such as CAFOD, the Samaritan's Purse and the recent Tsunami Appeal. This understanding is developed through speakers from the community and in assemblies. There are very good links with the parish priests but the distance of the school from the parish churches means that the school's links with the churches are often limited. The school's use of the local area involves environmental projects, recycling programmes and participation in local festivals. Links with local businesses remain underdeveloped since the last inspection.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are good. Governance is satisfactory. This area has been maintained well since the last inspection.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher provides strong pastoral leadership and leads and manages the school effectively.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning is used effectively to identify areas requiring attention, but the analysis of assessment data is still being developed.
- Opportunities for staff development, at all levels, are used well to develop expertise and improve provision.
- The supportive governors are developing their monitoring role and recognise the need to support senior staff and ask challenging questions.
- Good management and financial systems ensure the school runs smoothly.

### **Commentary**

*The headteacher provides strong pastoral leadership and leads and manages the school effectively*

39. The headteacher is a caring and effective leader. She has a very clear vision for the school, based firmly on Christian values, and has developed the pastoral aspect of the school very well. These values are reflected in the high expectations of attitudes and behaviour and a very caring and supportive atmosphere. She works in close partnership with the deputy headteacher and together they form a strong partnership,

promoting very good relationships and teamwork. They are very well respected and supported by the other senior colleagues and a hardworking staff team. This is recognised and appreciated by parents and pupils. Senior staff, including the Foundation Stage leader and key stage leaders, undertake their responsibilities well. The leadership and management of special educational needs are good. The co-ordinator liaises well with teachers, support staff and outside agencies in order to provide appropriate and effective support for pupils. She has effectively mentored learning support assistants through training. The special educational needs governor is supportive and has a good understanding of the school's provision.

*Self-evaluation of teaching and learning is used effectively to identify areas requiring attention but the analysis of assessment data is still being developed*

40. A regular programme of lesson observations, often focused on school improvement plan initiatives, enables the headteacher and key staff to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and identify areas requiring development. Moderation exercises and scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning have helped to give staff a better view of what is required at each level and keep co-ordinators informed about their subjects. A number of co-ordinators, particularly in the foundation subjects, are relatively new to their post and have not yet had the opportunity to develop their roles. Pupils' progress is tracked over time, targets are set for improvement and results are now being analysed to indicate the relative performance of different groups of pupils. The analyses of data have only recently become sufficiently focused and detailed to identify precisely how well individual pupils are doing and allow comparison of different groups.

*Opportunities for staff development, at all levels, are used well to support improvement initiatives*

41. Good use is made of training opportunities to develop the expertise and skills of staff at all levels. Well-established performance management procedures feed into planning future training. Work with trainee teachers and links with neighbouring schools provide further good development opportunities. There are good arrangements to mentor and support new teachers and those early on in their careers.

*The supportive governors are developing their monitoring role and recognise the need to support senior staff and ask challenging questions*

42. Governors are very supportive of the school and many are regularly involved in its day-to-day work. Statutory requirements are met. Informal visits and the good information provided by the school raise their awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have recognised the need to develop their monitoring role, are adopting a more formal approach to visits and are looking to identify their training needs as part of the school's improvement plan. Some governors are more closely involved than others in the development of specific subjects and are able to bring an objective and informed view to discussions. However, as a group, they are not yet in a sufficiently informed position to probe and challenge the headteacher and senior staff on provision and developments. Governors monitor progress on the tasks in the school improvement plan, but do not have sufficient information to judge the benefit of initiatives on pupils' attainment. They do not yet play a sufficiently informed role in shaping the direction of the school.

*Good management and financial systems ensure the school runs smoothly*

43. Strategic planning for the development of the school runs over a four-year planning cycle, with more detailed plans for the current year. This does not always allow

sufficient flexibility for a more immediate response to changes in circumstances. Last year, for example, the plan was established before the national test results were available and so did not include measures to raise standards. Staff views are incorporated in the school improvement plan and due account is taken of national initiatives. Development areas are identified clearly and tasks and responsibilities defined well. The budget is carefully prepared after exploring different possibilities, considering the current needs of the school, and taking account of the planned initiatives in the school improvement plan. Recent burglaries and staff absences have meant that surplus balances have been used to replace ICT equipment, improve security and provide supply cover. This accounts for the very low carry forward. Plans are in place to manage the imminent reduction in year groups and transitional funding will cushion the school against an eventual reduction in income. There are good financial systems in place and purchases are carefully researched to ensure monies are well spent. Well-established routines and good systems ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the school. Overall the school provides good value for money.

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	636,751
Total expenditure	656,635
Expenditure per pupil	1,971

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	20,135
Balance carried forward to next year	251

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

### AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

There are two classes in the Foundation Stage. The 26-place nursery opened a year ago and takes children for mornings only. Most of the children then move into the reception class for a further year. The Foundation Stage unit is at one end of the school and is self-contained. The two class bases are joined by a shared area used for activities like role-play and small group work. Both class bases open out onto an enclosed outside classroom. The staff plan together very effectively.

### PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff are encouraging and supportive and so children settle into school life easily.
- There are good opportunities for children to work independently.
- Children are clear about the difference between right and wrong.
- Children do not plan or review their activities routinely.

#### Commentary

Standards of attainment	Most children reach the levels expected for their age with a few doing better
Achievement	Good, including achievement of pupils with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language
Quality of teaching and learning	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Good
Other factors affecting pupils' achievement	Good procedures for settling children into the nursery and reception classes
Improvement since last inspection	Good

*Staff are encouraging and supportive and so children settle into school life easily*

44. Very warm relationships between children and staff are evident in the nursery and reception classes. Children bound into school in the mornings, confident that the assistants and teachers will be pleased to see them. Staff are very sensitive to the needs of individuals and always have the right word to encourage or support. Consequently, children settle happily into their new surroundings and soon become accustomed to school routines.

*There are good opportunities for children to work independently, but they do not plan or review their activities routinely*

45. Children in both classes have the opportunity to work and play independently every day. They select from a range of interesting activities inside and outside the classrooms. Some already co-operate well with their friends and have learnt to take turns and share. Others prefer to play alone or alongside other children. Usually children sustain their concentration and work on one activity for a reasonable length of time. At the moment they are not expected to plan which activities they will undertake, or evaluate how they have got on at the end of the session and this is a shortcoming.

*Children are clear about the difference between right and wrong*

46. Most children are clear about the difference between right and wrong because staff set high expectations for good behaviour. Staff take care to explain why some kinds of behaviour are not acceptable and try to encourage children to think about what they are doing. There was an interesting discussion between staff and children about why they are not allowed to make and use swords at school, for example. Most of the time children behave very well; occasionally, children do not keep to the school conventions, for example not running inside the building.

## **COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There are good opportunities for children to develop their skills and understanding through structured play.
- Stories are used effectively as a basis for children's learning.
- There is a good emphasis on focused teaching of reading and writing.

### **COMMENTARY**

Standards of attainment	Most children reach the levels expected for their age with a few doing better
Achievement	Good, including achievement of pupils with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language
Quality of teaching and learning	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Good
Other factors affecting pupils' achievement	Children use their communication skills well in all areas of learning
Improvement since last inspection	Good

*There are good opportunities for children to develop their skills and understanding through structured play*

47. Children achieve well in this area because there is a wealth of opportunities to develop their skills in all areas of communication, language and literacy. In their play, children are continually talking and listening to their friends. Staff take every opportunity to participate in these conversations to help children to develop their speaking skills, as well as their understanding. Role-play areas are used well by the children to model their talk on a chosen character. There are cosy book areas for children to curl up with a book and again staff join them and share books requested by the children. There are writing areas in the classrooms, which children use well to write their own stories or messages.

*Stories are used effectively as a basis for children's learning*

48. Staff frequently use stories as a basis for work in all areas of learning. This good practice captures the children's imagination and means their learning activities are interesting and relevant. During the week of the inspection, for example, the children were working effectively on the story of '*The Three Little Pigs*'.

*There is a good emphasis on focused teaching of reading and writing*

49. In both classes, children work in a whole-class group on work related to early reading and writing skills. These short sessions are backed up effectively by small group work with a teacher or assistant, where children practise their skills. In the reception class,



for example, children worked well in ones or twos with an assistant to make good quality 'zigzag' books of the story of *'The Three Little Pigs'*.

## MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in mathematical development is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Class sessions are used well to help children to consolidate their understanding.
- Staff use action songs effectively to reinforce children's learning.

### COMMENTARY

Standards of attainment	Most children reach the levels expected for their age with a few doing better
Achievement	Good, including achievement of pupils with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language
Quality of teaching and learning	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Good
Other factors affecting pupils' achievement	Classroom displays are constant reminders to children of what they have learnt
Improvement since last inspection	Good

#### *Class sessions are used well to help children to consolidate their understanding*

50. Short, snappy sessions with the whole class are used well in both the nursery and reception class to help children learn about and enjoy working with numbers. In one session in the reception class, for example, children counted to twenty and back, counted in fives and some added single-digit numbers together correctly.

#### *Staff use songs effectively to reinforce children's learning*

51. Staff make good use of number songs to help children to consolidate their understanding. In the nursery, for example, the children loved the repetition in *'When Goldilocks came to the house of the bears'* as they came to a clearer understanding of what 'three' meant.

## KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

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

### MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Staff plan interesting topics to grab children's interest.
- The outside area is used effectively, as it is in all areas of learning, although it is congested when both classes are out at the same time.

### COMMENTARY

Standards of attainment	Most children reach the levels expected for their age with a few doing better
-------------------------	---

Achievement	Good, including achievement of pupils with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language
Quality of teaching and learning	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Good
Other factors affecting pupils' achievement	No significant other factors
Improvement since last inspection	Good

*Staff plan interesting topics to grab children's interest*

52. Staff select interesting topics that become the focus for work in all areas of learning. As a consequence, children enjoy learning. During the inspection, children gained a good understanding of houses and construction materials in their work on '*The Three Little Pigs*' and had great fun, as well as learning a good deal, in making houses out of straw, sticks and bricks. They learn about the cycle of the year by planting and growing seeds and bulbs. They have the opportunity to use computers and manage this independently, showing good control of the mouse in the reception class.

*The outside area is used effectively, as it is in all areas of learning, although it is congested when both classes are out at the same time*

53. The outside area is used well to encourage children's development in all areas of learning, but especially in their knowledge and understanding of the world. There is a range of interesting and challenging activities available to which children respond well. These include working with pulleys and buckets, for example, when children are fascinated with the ease with which they can raise heavy objects.

## PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in physical development is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff are increasing opportunities for physical development in the outside area.
- Children enjoy working with tools and small equipment.
- The outside area is small for both classes to use at the same time.

### COMMENTARY

Standards of attainment	Most children reach the levels expected for their age with a few doing better
Achievement	Good, including achievement of pupils with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language
Quality of teaching and learning	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Good
Other factors affecting pupils' achievement	There is no large balancing equipment in the outside area
Improvement since last inspection	Good

*Staff are increasing opportunities for physical development in the outside area*

54. Children generally use the space well in the outside area to run and play freely. At the moment there is not any large balancing apparatus for children to use. Staff have plans to develop this aspect of provision.

*Children enjoy working with tools and small equipment*

55. Children are developing their manipulative skills well and have good opportunities to work with a range of small toys and equipment.

*The outside area is small for both classes to use at the same time*

56. The outside area provides good opportunities for learning, but is quite congested if all the nursery and reception children are playing outside at the same time. Staff have made some sensible arrangements, but these restrict opportunities for reception children to go outside in the morning session.

## **CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Provision in creative development is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There are rich opportunities for children to develop their skills in all areas of creative development.

### **COMMENTARY**

Standards of attainment	Most children reach the levels expected for their age with a few doing better
Achievement	Good, including achievement of pupils with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language
Quality of teaching and learning	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Good
Other factors affecting pupils' achievement	This area of learning is resourced very well
Improvement since last inspection	Good

*There are rich opportunities for children to develop their skills in all areas of creative development*

57. Children are encouraged to use their imaginations and to use a range of media to express themselves. There are several role-play areas, for example, which are used well by the children. There are always opportunities for children to make pictures or models, which they do well. During the inspection, one of the reception children received an award from the Director of Education for a drawing of the city church. Staff also teach specific art and design skills and in one session used sticks carefully to print marks on paper. Musical instruments are available for children to make sounds, although in the sessions seen children did not take up this opportunity.

## **SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1, 2 AND 3**

### **ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

#### **English**

Provision in English is **good**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards fluctuate in national tests and before 2004 have been above or well above average in Year 6.
- All groups of pupils achieve well because the teaching is good.
- Pupils speak confidently, but planning for the development of speaking and listening skills is not yet embedded in work in all subjects.
- Pupils are developing their reading skills effectively through a structured approach, with a good emphasis on helping pupils to learn about books and authors.
- Pupils' writing is often lively and imaginative, but some work is not well presented and most pupils are not clear about what they need to do to improve.

## COMMENTARY

	Years 1 and 2	Years 3 to 6	Year 7
Standards of attainment	Most children reach the levels expected for their age with a few doing better		
Achievement	Good	Good	Very good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good	Good	Very good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Good	Good	Good
Other factors affecting pupils' achievement	Some sessions are overlong, which makes it harder for pupils to remain focused Some pupils receive good support with reading from parents or carers		
Improvement since last inspection	Good		

*Standards fluctuate in national tests and before 2004 have been above or well above average in Year 6*

58. Standards fluctuate from year to year in national tests, depending on the number of pupils with special educational needs in particular year groups. Standards in Year 2 tests were below average in reading and writing last year and the school has put several measures in place to improve these. Those particularly related to English include:

- reorganising the reading scheme books;
- hearing children read individually; and
- setting individual targets in writing.

59. Generally, pupils in Year 6 do well, although there was a dip in 2004, when standards fell below the national average. This was because there was a higher number of pupils with special educational needs. The school's predictions indicate that standards in this year's national tests in Year 2 will be above average in writing, but below average in reading. In Year 6, predictions indicate that standards will be above average. This is an improvement from last year. The inspection found that standards are broadly in line with levels expected for pupils' ages in Year 2, Year 6 and Year 7.

*All groups of pupils achieve well because the teaching is good*

60. All groups of pupils achieve well because of good teaching overall. Pupils do very well in Year 7, where teaching is particularly strong. Pupils with special educational needs do well because they are given good support in lessons and 'catch up' programmes are used effectively. Pupils learning English as an additional language achieve well. Most are fluent English speakers and teachers are sensitive to their particular needs. Higher attaining pupils are challenged effectively. There is no difference in the overall attainment of pupils from minority ethnic groups. The school's tracking of pupils' progress shows that many of these pupils attain high standards, but that some black pupils in Years 3 to 7 do not. There is nothing in the school's provision to account for this and the school continues to monitor these pupils' progress carefully. The quality of teaching ranged from unsatisfactory to excellent, with all but two lessons good or very good. Particular strengths in the very good and excellent lessons were subject expertise, imaginative approaches, opportunities for pupils to work independently and high expectations. Occasionally, in some of the overlong sessions, pupils flagged and the pace of learning slowed.

*Pupils speak confidently, but planning for the development of speaking and listening skills is not yet embedded in work in all subjects*

61. Throughout the school, pupils speak confidently, with the complexity of their sentence structure increasing with age. Almost all of the activities seen were related to question and answer sessions at the beginning of lessons, paired discussion and reporting back at the end of the lesson. In one very good lesson, a group of pupils worked together to present a poem, demonstrating good speaking skills. The school has identified the speaking and listening skills that pupils are expected to learn year on year, but planning does not yet encompass the ways in which these skills can be developed in different subjects.

*Pupils are developing their reading skills effectively through a structured approach, with a good emphasis on helping pupils to learn about books and authors*

62. There is a good emphasis on helping pupils to learn the mechanics of reading. Most, for example, are quite clear about what strategies they need to use to work out unfamiliar words. There are also some interesting activities planned to help pupils to enjoy reading and to find out about books and authors. An annual book week stimulates pupils' interest and a recent visit by Year 3 to the Roald Dahl museum in Aylesbury has been the stimulus for a good deal of interesting work. All classes have a book selection for pupils to borrow, which pupils find enjoyable. Some classroom book areas are pleasant places to browse, but others do not whet pupils' appetites for particular authors or books. Sometimes teachers use good quality texts and books as a starting point for work; however, in spite of some new initiatives, there is not a clear expectation of which authors and books pupils of this age should be taught about. The library is well sited in a central area and used by groups of pupils during the week.

*Pupils' writing is often lively and imaginative, but some work is not presented well and most pupils are not clear about what they need to do to improve*

63. Pupils have good opportunities to write in a range of genres. Much of the writing is rooted in pupils' own experiences and is lively and interesting. Some interesting initiatives, such as the stories written by Year 6 pupils, provide the scope for pupils to write at length. Pupils are developing spelling and punctuation skills well, but handwriting is not always well formed or well presented in Years 3 to 7. Reasons for this include a transfer to pen before a neat, joined style has been established and inconsistent expectations about the type of pen to use. Pupils have individual targets in their books, but generally do not know which level they have reached, or what they need to do to reach the next level and this is unsatisfactory.
64. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The two new co-ordinators are working closely with the deputy headteacher to monitor provision and plan for improvements. There are good assessment procedures in place and pupils' progress is carefully analysed. Sound use is made of this information to plan for pupils' individual needs.

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

65. Pupils use their literacy skills well in other subjects and staff are beginning to make useful links in their planning, especially in the humanities.

## **Italian**

Pupils in Years 5, 6 and 7 benefit from weekly lessons in Italian taken by a native speaker. These sessions help pupils to develop basic vocabulary and understanding of a foreign language. Only two lessons were seen and so it is not possible to make an overall judgement on provision. The quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory in one lesson and good in the other. Lessons with the younger pupils are mainly conducted in Italian with the occasional need to use English to help pupils understand new or more complex ideas. Pupils are encouraged to respond in Italian and in a session seen, Year 5 pupils enjoyed

participating in a simple repetitive song to reinforce what they had learnt. By Year 7, lessons proceed with pupils only occasionally resorting to English. Pupils are developing their accent and pronunciation by listening carefully and imitating the expert. These sessions and the concentration on oral language skills also help to reinforce pupils' speaking and listening skills in their own language.

## MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in national tests fluctuate, but are not now as high as they were.
- Good emphasis is placed on teaching different numeracy strategies, but pupils do not use these skills to help them to solve problems.
- Pupils achieve well because of good teaching.
- Pupils do not understand what they have to do to improve.
- The use of mathematics in other subjects is not consistently planned or developed.

### Commentary

	Years 1 and 2	Years 3 to 6	Year 7
Standards of attainment	At the expected level	At the expected level	Above the expected level
Achievement	Good	Good	Very good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good	Good	Very good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Other factors affecting pupils' achievement	Good emphasis on numeracy skills		
Improvement since last inspection	Satisfactory		

#### *Standards in national tests fluctuate, but are not now as high as they were*

66. In the 2004 national tests, standards in Year 2 were well below the national average and were average in Year 6. Results fluctuate from year to year. Major factors in this have been high levels of pupil mobility and the different distribution of abilities in small year groups. Although overall attainment is not as high as it has been in the past, work seen during the inspection generally shows pupils working within the expected level for their age in Years 1 to 6 and above in Year 7. The school's predictions suggest that in national tests this year, standards are likely to be below average in Year 2, and average in Year 6.

#### *Good emphasis is placed on teaching different numeracy strategies, but pupils do not use these skills to help them to solve problems*

67. Pupils' work shows that they make good progress. Pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, those learning English as an additional language and more able pupils, achieve equally well. There is no evident difference in the performance of boys and girls. The work in pupils' books shows neat recording of

calculations, a good degree of accuracy and a strong emphasis on the development of numeracy skills. However, pupils' ability to employ these skills to solve problems is not so well developed. This means that pupils of all abilities do not always achieve as well as they might. The school has rightly identified this problem and is working to address it. In order to raise standards the school has recently introduced setting in Years 2 and 6. This provides good opportunities to extend more able pupils and support less able pupils. Tasks are challenging, but even higher attaining pupils are sometimes unsure about how to use previous learning to solve tasks.

*Pupils achieve well because of good teaching*

68. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Teaching is very good in Year 7 and never less than satisfactory in the other year groups. Throughout the school, teachers make good use of brisk oral sessions to sharpen the speed of pupils' mental calculations. This is most successful when techniques, such as the use of whiteboards, allow all pupils to contribute. Teachers always expect high standards of behaviour and a good level of response. The well-prepared lessons generally have good pace and make good use of the National Numeracy Strategy and Unit plans. Teachers and the well-briefed teaching assistants ensure pupils of all abilities achieve well and in most lessons different tasks are set for different ability groups. Learning is less successful when the whole class complete the same task and insufficient thought is given to what pupils already know, understand and can do. In more successful lessons all pupils feel secure enough to contribute and varied practical activities capture their interest. Pupils are very attentive and persevere well with tasks but some sessions are over long. The school has recognised this and has plans to address it.

*Pupils do not understand what they have to do to improve*

69. Marking is helpful and usually indicates to pupils what they should do to improve in the short term. Pupils are not generally involved in assessing their work. The purpose of the lesson is usually shared with pupils in lessons, but not always in a form they can understand and is rarely revisited in the brief end sessions. Good arrangements for monitoring and assessing pupils' progress are in place and good use is made of these to set targets for each year group. Their use to identify gaps in pupils' understanding and plan suitable next steps is less developed. Teachers are beginning to set individual targets for improvement, but pupils do not know which level they are working at or what they need to do to achieve the next level.
70. The subject is satisfactorily led and managed. The recently appointed, knowledgeable co-ordinator has audited resources, looked at pupils' work and teachers' planning and produced a subject action plan. There have not yet been opportunities for lesson observations or the analysis of assessment data. Resources are now good. The use of ICT in the subject is developing well.

**Mathematics across the curriculum**

71. Teachers make good use of opportunities to develop pupils' mathematical skills as they arise in subjects such as science, geography and design and technology, but opportunities are not yet systematically identified in the planning for other subjects.

**SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **good**.



## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well throughout the school.
- Teaching and learning are good and there are examples of very good teaching.
- Activities and tasks are not always matched well to pupils' different abilities.
- There is an effective partnership with the local secondary school.

## Commentary

	Years 1 and 2	Years 3 to 6	Year 7
Standards of attainment	At expected levels	Above expected levels	At expected levels
Achievement	Good	Good	Good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good	Good	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Other factors affecting pupils' achievement	Good links with the secondary school		
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory		

### *Pupils achieve well throughout the school.*

72. Standards are in line with expected levels in the current Year 2 and Year 7. They are above expected levels in the current Year 6. There are variations in the overall attainment of year groups and this accounts for differences in standards. This has been evident in Year 6 national tests in recent years, with standards dropping to average in 2004 because of the number of pupils with special educational needs in the year group. Throughout the school, most pupils, including higher attainers, those with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language, are achieving well because of the good teaching and support they receive. Standards in Year 2 are similar to those reported at the last inspection. Standards in Year 6 and in Year 7 are not as high as the well above expected levels reported last time.

### *Teaching and learning are good and there are examples of very good teaching*

73. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall with examples of very good teaching seen in Years 2 and 6. Teachers show a secure command of science and how to teach it. Lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives identified. Teachers' explanations and instructions are clear and informative and pupils make good gains in acquiring scientific knowledge. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed and contribute well to pupils' learning particularly those with special educational needs or those learning English as an additional language. In a very good lesson in Year 6, the teacher made excellent use of ICT to introduce the learning intentions and the task. Using a multimedia presentation, pupils were introduced to imaginary planets with extreme environmental conditions. The graphics, illustrations and sound effects were most impressive and this engaged and inspired the class. Pupils were set the interesting task of designing an animal that would survive on one of the planets. The pupils worked with enthusiasm and were creative in applying their knowledge of how animals adapt to their habitats.

### *Activities and tasks are not always well matched to pupils' different abilities*

74. The study of pupils' work, and the observation of a few lessons, indicate that activities and tasks are not always sufficiently well matched to pupils' attainment. While pupils with special educational needs receive effective support from learning support

assistants, more challenging or extension work is lacking for higher attainers and so they do not always progress as well as they could. Some practical work is over directed and this impedes the development of investigative skills. For example, pupils do not always have the chance to plan their own investigations and decide how to record their results.

*There is an effective partnership with the local secondary school*

75. Pupils in the current Year 7 benefit from specialist science teaching at St Paul's Secondary School every week. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the interesting investigative work undertaken and the good facilities. The Year 7 curriculum is planned effectively and pupils are taught well. The effective partnership between St Mary Magdalene and St Paul's Secondary School is enriching the science curriculum and facilitating pupils' smooth transfer between the schools.
76. Leadership and management are sound. The co-ordinator and teachers view pupils' work to monitor standards and coverage of the curriculum. However, the co-ordinator has not had recent opportunities to observe and support teaching and learning. National test results are effectively analysed by the senior management team. An enthusiastic governor runs a rocks and minerals club and provides high quality resources and considerable expertise in earth science.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

### MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- There has been good improvement in standards, resources and staff expertise since the last inspection.
- Good teaching of skills enables pupils to achieve well.
- There is good leadership, management and development of the subject through a clear agenda for improvement.
- There is no consistent planned approach to the use of ICT to support learning in other subjects.
- Pupils are not involved in assessment and are not aware of how well they are doing and how to improve.

### Commentary

	Years 1 and 2	Years 3 to 6	Year 7
Standards of attainment	At least at the expected level in work seen	At the expected level in work seen	At the expected level in work seen
Achievement	Good	Good	Good
Quality of teaching and learning	No lessons seen	Good	No lessons seen
Quality of curriculum leadership	Good	Good	Good
Other factors affecting pupils' achievement	Good improvement in resources and staff expertise		
Improvement since last inspection	Good		

*There has been good improvement in standards, resources and staff expertise since the last inspection*

77. The school has worked hard to address the concerns of the last inspection. Pupils' work, teachers' planning, conversations with pupils and lessons seen all demonstrate that by Years 6 and 7 pupils are now working at the expected level for their age. Younger pupils, including those in Year 2, have enjoyed the continuous benefits of the improvements. They are usually working at least at the level expected. National guidance has been adopted successfully as the basis for planning and all strands are covered. There is a good range of software to support this. The school has correctly identified the need to provide greater opportunity for older pupils to work on monitoring and control. Training has been used well to increase the confidence and expertise of teachers and teaching assistants. The ICT technician provides further good support. The main suite, the mini suite in the lower school and the introduction of interactive whiteboards in some rooms mean resources are good. Greater use is being made of ICT to support learning in other subjects.

*Good teaching of skills and well-chosen activities enable pupils to achieve well*

78. Good emphasis is placed on the development of specific skills. Pupils use the computers confidently to complete tasks, such as creating text and images, using the Internet and handling and presenting data. They correct and amend their work quickly and save and retrieve it from the system. Year 2 pupils' work shows careful use of different techniques to create pictures and present poems. By Years 6 and 7, pupils are creating complex multi-media presentations.
79. In the lessons of direct teaching seen, careful introductions, demonstrations and explanations using the interactive whiteboard meant pupils settled to the activity quickly. For example, Year 6 pupils found information on the Internet to solve a mystery and Year 5 pupils searched a database to find performers with specific skills. Pupils are eager to begin their lessons and persevere well; consequently, learning is good. Teachers, teaching assistants and the technician provide good ongoing support so pupils of all abilities, including higher attainers, those with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language, achieve equally well. Teachers are careful to use and reinforce the correct terms and build learning on previous work. However, opportunities for pupils to engage with the interactive whiteboard are not exploited sufficiently.

*There is good leadership, management and development of the subject through a clear agenda for improvement*

80. The very knowledgeable co-ordinator has kept governors well informed about developments and created a clear agenda for improvement with a well-constructed action plan. Governors have made a financial commitment to ongoing development, with plans to install interactive whiteboards in all classrooms. The co-ordinator provides good support for colleagues and, with the help of the technician, resolves technical problems as they arise.

*Pupils are not involved in assessment and are not aware of how well they are doing and how to improve*

81. Assessment procedures have been developed and are now sound. Teachers now have a clear record of what pupils can do. However, this does not clearly identify the gaps in pupils' learning and is not always used to plan further lessons. Pupils are not clear how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve.

**Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

*There is no consistent planned approach to the use of ICT to support learning in other subjects*

82. Opportunities for using ICT in other subjects are not always identified in teachers' planning.
83. Teachers choose ICT tasks that provide opportunities for pupils to practise and consolidate their ICT skills in other subjects, but this tends to be on an 'ad hoc' basis. With the installation of interactive whiteboards in some classrooms the opportunity now exists to make greater use of ICT as a tool for learning.

## **HUMANITIES**

84. Work in **history and geography** was sampled with three lessons seen in history and none in geography. This is because history and geography are 'blocked' and no geography was being taught during the inspection. It is not possible, therefore, to form an overall judgement about provision in these subjects. Limited work was examined for geography. The history work seen in lessons in Years 2, 3 and 5 and examination of Year 7 work indicated that pupils are working at least at the level expected for their age. Teaching and learning were good overall in the lessons observed.
85. Good use is made of visits, visitors and artefacts to bring learning alive in both subjects, particularly in history. Victorian household objects are displayed well in Year 1, for example, and a senior citizen has been invited into the class to talk about his childhood memories. Year 7 pupils visited the local Abbey during the inspection week and spoke in awe of the experience, which had brought the past alive. Their digital photographs showed their interest and enthusiasm for this study of medieval times. Pupils use their literacy skills well in history. For example, in their study of World War Two, pupils wrote letters home as if they were evacuees. Those on display are well written and give a very realistic account of their perceived experiences and often anxious moments away from home and their family. This makes work interesting and relevant as well as helping to reinforce pupils' chronological skills and work on using primary and secondary evidence.

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

86. Work in creative, aesthetic, practical and physical subjects was sampled, with seven lessons seen in total. It is not possible, therefore, to make a judgement about standards or overall provision.
87. In the one lesson observed in **art and design**, teaching and learning were good and most pupils reached levels above those expected for their age. The lesson led on from the previous day's lesson in science. Some pupils worked on an exercise experiencing the effect heat has on materials, whilst others painted sunflowers in the style of Van Gogh. The teacher showed good knowledge of the subject and all pupils were totally motivated and took great care in order to produce high quality work. The art portfolio examined confirmed the range, quality and breadth of opportunities that pupils experience in this subject area.
88. No lessons were seen in **design and technology** but pupils' work was examined and discussions were held with pupils. The planning of the curriculum for Years 1 to 7 is sound and appropriately based on national guidance. Pupils in Year 2 designed and

made model vehicles with axle wheels, for example. In another project, they designed and made model sailing boats. They used a plastic hull for the boat, a wooden mast and tried different sails from plastic. Pupils tested their boats and made suggestions for improvements. Standards of work seen in Year 2 are broadly in line with levels expected for the pupils' age. Pupils in Year 7 are taught by specialist teachers each week at St Paul's Secondary School. During the year, they are taught a programme of work involving food technology, graphics and mechanisms. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their work and enjoy using the specialist facilities.

89. Two **music** lessons were seen, with teaching and learning sound in one and good in the other. The music co-ordinator makes a good contribution through teaching other classes as well as taking whole school hymn practice. She uses her expertise to extend pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding and uses and encourages a 'hands on' approach to develop musical skills. The influence and encouragement of the co-ordinator has a clear impact on lessons taken by non-specialists. In assemblies, pupils clearly enjoy singing, which is of good quality and at least at the expected level. Evaluation of a video of school performances indicated a very professional approach to performing in singing and orchestral support, using both pitched and unpitched instruments. Some pupils learn to play pitched instruments from specialist peripatetic teachers and the school allocates time for a 'music week'. The subject leader has a very clear picture of standards and works well with staff to develop confidence and expertise.
90. The **physical education** programme is planned well and is enhanced and complemented by extra-curricular activities. These are offered on a regular basis in addition to the residential experiences which extend the physical education programme with activities such as canoeing, abseiling, archery and team building. The programme includes gymnastics, games, dance, athletics and swimming and by the time pupils leave school in Year 7, most swim the required 25 metres. The good opportunities and the large take up of pupils joining in the main extra-curricular activities provided indicate the enthusiasm and enjoyment pupils receive from them. These, together with the residential programme, promote social and moral development as well as independence and inter-dependence. In the two lessons seen, teaching and learning were good. Staff and pupils were appropriately dressed and were well motivated. Pupils listened carefully to instructions, were aware of the effect of activity on the body, displayed good spatial awareness, offered advice on how their peers could improve their performance and handled equipment carefully and sensibly. The experienced co-ordinator ensures pupils are given the opportunity to participate in mixed and single gender sports. The school enjoys success in this area and makes effective use of the good facilities available.

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

91. There is insufficient evidence to judge the overall quality of teaching and standards achieved. However, the good range of experiences provided by the school illustrates the value the school attaches to personal development. As pupils travel through their school years, the experiences they gain assist them to mature well and gain self-confidence and self-assurance. This was clearly observed when Year 7 pupils visited the comprehensive school. Their relationships with the teachers and pupils from other schools quite clearly demonstrated their very good moral and social development. Their behaviour was exemplary; they answered questions confidently and set about

their group tasks, competently displaying the good quality personal development they had acquired during their education at the school.

92. Teachers deal with issues such as good health and relationships, drugs use and misuse. Many of these issues are dealt with in specific sessions, but some are dealt with less formally as and when the situation arises. The school's sex education policy, for example, is not to teach sex education formally.
93. Pupils take responsibility in the school council and adopt responsible roles, such as setting up the hall for assembly and operating the overhead projector. They are encouraged to be helpful and considerate in their school and the wider community.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

### *Inspection judgement*

### *Grade*

<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	3
Value for money provided by the school	3

<b>Overall standards achieved</b>	<b>4</b>
Pupils' achievement	3

<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)</b>	<b>2</b>
Attendance	4
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	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	4
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	3
Accommodation and resources	2
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3

<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>	<b>3</b>
The governance of the school	4
The leadership of the headteacher	3
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).*