

INSPECTION REPORT

**ST MARY'S AMERSHAM C OF E AIDED COMBINED
SCHOOL**

Amersham

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110455

Headteacher: Mrs J Hills

Lead inspector: Mrs D Bell

Dates of inspection: 13th - 16th June 2005

Inspection number: 267866

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Primary
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	4 – 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	290
School address:	School Lane Amersham Buckinghamshire HP7 0EL
Telephone number:	(01494) 726 032
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Susan Pounce
Date of previous inspection:	7 th December 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Mary's is a voluntary aided Church of England school which also has a Nursery that currently has 19 children attending part time. The school takes more children into Reception than it has in the Nursery and overall, the children's attainment on entry to Reception is as expected for their age. The 280 pupils (145 boys and 135 girls) in Years 1 to 6 are taught in ten classes. The school has grown in size since the last inspection and is now larger than the average primary school. This means that some pupils are taught in mixed age classes. There are three intakes each year, in September, January and at Easter. The school's socio-economic circumstances are above the national average overall and there are no pupils on free school meals. This is lower than is found nationally. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, including statements, is similar to that found nationally. The special educational needs include moderate learning difficulties, behavioural difficulties and hearing impairment.

The school has a number of children from a range of minority ethnic or mixed ethnic backgrounds but only a very small proportion of pupils for whom English is not their first language. All pupils are fluent in English. A considerable proportion of pupils join the school after Year 1, many as late as Years 5 and 6. The school has Investors in People status and has an ECO bronze award. It is currently working towards the Healthy Schools Award. Since its previous inspection, the school has suffered great instability in staffing. As well as changes in the teaching staff, it has had three headteachers in the last three years, one of whom was the acting headteacher for a year, following the previous headteacher's retirement. There is currently no deputy headteacher, though one has been appointed to start in September 2005. The new headteacher took up her appointment in September 2004. The school readily recruits staff but has recently had difficulty retaining staff as some have moved away for family reasons or because of the prohibitive cost of housing in the area.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
16413	Mrs D Bell	Lead inspector	Information and communication technology Art and design Design and technology Music Special educational needs
1165	Mr P Danheisser	Lay inspector	
27677	Mrs D Davenport	Team inspector	Foundation Stage Geography History
16761	Mr M Hemmings	Team inspector	Mathematics Science
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

School effectiveness is satisfactory. Very good leadership by the recently appointed headteacher has helped the school to improve considerably in the past year. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory as are the pupils' achievement, behaviour and attitudes to learning. Overall, the school provides **satisfactory value for money**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's very good leadership and perceptive monitoring is improving teaching and learning throughout the school.
- Much work has been done to improve subject leadership in the past year but there is still some way to go for all subject leaders to be fully effective in their roles.
- Teaching is consistently good in the Foundation Stage and children get off to a good start in their education.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. However, more able pupils do not always learn well enough.
- The unsatisfactory teaching in one class slows pupils' learning down considerably, resulting in their immature behaviour and considerable lack of respect for others, including the teacher.
- The governors have a very good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and support the headteacher very effectively in her work.
- The school has very good links with parents that contribute in great measure to pupils' learning.

Overall improvement since the last inspection, in 1998, is satisfactory. Instability in staffing and in leadership has resulted in standards, the quality of teaching and pupils' behaviour all declining since that time. However, the new headteacher moved very quickly to reverse this situation and she has successfully addressed the key and minor issues identified in the last report. Governance is greatly improved and all subjects have appropriate policies and schemes of work and adequate curriculum time. Assessment procedures are satisfactory but the use of the information in planning is still somewhat patchy across the school. Subject co-ordinators understand their roles and responsibilities but their further development has been hindered by frequent changes of staff.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Achievement is satisfactory overall. It is good in the Foundation Stage and in English, information and communication technology and music in Years 1 and 2. Beyond this it is satisfactory because of frequent changes of staff and variations in the quality of teaching, some of which is unsatisfactory. Most children begin their Reception Year with the levels of attainment expected for their age. The majority make good progress and at least reach the goals expected (the early learning goals) in all six areas of learning. Standards in reading, writing, mathematics and science are all above the national expectation in Year 2 and Year 6. Standards in ICT are above the national expectation in Year 2 and match the national expectation in Year 6. However, because of problems with the computers and the pupils' lack of access to them, achievement is unsatisfactory in Years 3 to 6. Good leadership and management are tackling the issues well.

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

science	A	A	B	A
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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.

The trend in this age group is below the national trend although in 2004, pupils in Year 6 made satisfactory progress when the results were compared with how they did in Year 2. The decline in standards in Year 6 in 2004 is partly explained by the higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs, some quite severe, in that year group, and partly by the high proportion of pupils who joined or left the school after they had sat their Year 2 tests. The school did not meet its targets in 2004, and looks unlikely to meet the targets set for 2005. This is because the targets were not based on a rigorous analysis of pupils' prior learning and levels of capability. This has all changed and the targets set for 2006 are much more realistic. **Overall, the pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.** Most pupils attend school regularly and on time, behave well and have good attitudes to learning. However, a small number of pupils behave irresponsibly and disrupt learning especially when teaching is unsatisfactory.

THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education is satisfactory as is the overall quality of teaching, the curriculum and the school's links with the community and with other schools. Teaching is good in the Foundation Stage and satisfactory in the rest of the school. Some very good teaching in the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2 greatly motivated the pupils and resulted in high levels of productivity. Since September 2004, planning, assessment and record keeping have considerably improved. This is beginning to pay off in improved achievement and ensures that the work planned for pupils in all classes, single or mixed age, takes account of their different ages and stages of learning. However, the extension work planned for more able pupils does not always provide the challenges these pupils need to achieve to the best of their capability. The school is working on this through, for example, the able, gifted and talented programme. In one class in the Year 3 to 6 age range, despite appropriate planning, activities were seldom at the right levels for the pupils. This led to some unsatisfactory teaching which resulted in unsatisfactory behaviour and considerable under-achievement. Very good provision for pupils with special educational needs ensures that these pupils make good and sometimes very good progress towards their targets. The curriculum is enhanced and enriched by a good range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils' care, support and welfare are good and parents make a very good contribution to their children's learning by helping in school and with homework.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, leadership and management are good. The headteacher's leadership of all aspects of the school's work is very good. She has operated without a deputy headteacher for the past year. However, she has been supported well by the senior management team and a very effective governing body that has ensured statutory requirements are met. Subject leaders lead and manage their subjects satisfactorily. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning by the headteacher are very perceptive and are helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS

The majority of parents and pupils are pleased with what the school does for them. Most pupils like their school and know their views are sought, valued and where possible acted upon.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

In order to improve further the school should:

- Bring about consistency in teaching and learning throughout the school.
- Raise teachers' expectations of all pupils and provide more challenging opportunities for more able pupils.
- Complete the work on assessment in all subjects; use the information consistently in planning and check that the planning is translated effectively into practice.
- Continue the work to train subject leaders to lead and manage their subjects properly.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects

Pupils' overall achievement is satisfactory except in ICT, where it is unsatisfactory by Year 6, and in the Foundation Stage, where it is good. Standards are above the national expectation in English, mathematics and science in Year 2 and Year 6. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, but more able pupils do not always do as well as they should.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage and overall, they achieve well.
- Pupils in Years 1 and 2 achieve well in English, ICT and music.
- Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards their targets but more able pupils do not always reach the standards of which they are capable.
- Pupils do not use ICT as a natural tool for learning; their progress in ICT is unsatisfactory by Year 6.

Commentary

1. Children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage because they are taught well and their curriculum is well organised. When they start school, their attainment is as expected for their age and by the end of Reception, they reach, and a significant proportion exceed, the nationally expected early learning goals. While all children make good progress, those who have had longer in Reception do better than those who started in the summer term. Staff work very hard to help the summer born children to catch up and overall, all children are as well prepared as they can be for their work in Year 1.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
reading	16.4 (17.7)	15.8 (15.7)
writing	15.5 (15.6)	14.6 (14.6)
mathematics	17.1 (17.8)	16.2 (16.3)

There were 42 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

2. The school's results in the national tests for pupils in Year 2 in 2004 matched the national average in reading and were above it in writing and mathematics. The results were below those of similar schools in reading, but matched them in writing and mathematics. This reflects the school's hard work to improve writing, which it identified as having been weaker than reading. The trend in the school's results has been broadly similar to the national trend in the last five years and there have been no significant differences in attainment between different groups of pupils. The standards seen during the inspection were above the national expectation in reading, writing, mathematics and science in Year 2, and also in music.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	26.8 (29.5)	26.9 (26.8)
mathematics	27.7 (28.9)	27.0 (26.8)
science	29.8 (30.7)	28.5 (28.6)

3. The school's results for pupils in Year 6 in 2004 matched the national average in English and mathematics and were above the national average for science. When compared to the pupils' prior attainment when they were in Year 2, the results were satisfactory in English, good in mathematics, and very good in science. The trend in this age group is below the national trend and particularly so in English and mathematics. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 achieve well in English, ICT and music, because those subjects are taught well in that age group, and some good achievement was observed in other lessons during the inspection. However, variations in teaching, including frequent changes of staff have affected achievement in Years 3 to 6 and in this age group, it is only satisfactory. Nevertheless, the standards seen in the work of pupils currently in Year 6 are above the national expectation. In Year 2 and Year 6, boys and girls do better than boys and girls nationally. In Year 6, girls do better than boys in English. This is reversed in mathematics, and there is very little difference in science. Standards have risen in Year 6 because the year group is a very able one. Their work, and discussions with them show that they rise to the much higher challenges set for them when they are taught English by a different teacher or, in the case of one group, when they are taught mathematics by the headteacher. This has minimised the impact of some unsatisfactory teaching in those two subjects this year.
4. Pupils with special educational needs make better progress than other pupils because they are supported well, their learning is securely based on the targets in their individual education plans, and their learning is monitored by the special educational needs co-ordinator. These pupils continue to make good progress despite variations in the quality of teaching and the frequent changes of staff some of them have encountered. This is because the overall provision for them is very good. The same cannot be said for other pupils. Until this year, there were no substantial records of progress on which to base pupils' targets. Value added data for 2004, which determines how well pupils have done in Years 3 to 6, is overall satisfactory. This shows that although the school did not meet its targets for English or mathematics last year, pupils made satisfactory progress overall. To move the school on, the new headteacher undertook a rigorous analysis of pupils' progress throughout the school since the start of the year. Based on this, on her monitoring and on the analysis of pupils' work, she feels that the targets for this year's Year 6 pupils are probably too ambitious. However, she also identified some underachievement amongst more able pupils which was also evident in their work during the inspection. These pupils do not always make the progress of which they are capable.
5. Parents expressed concern about the progress pupils make in the mixed age classes but this was found not to be an issue. Overall, pupils of all ages make satisfactory progress in lessons and the issue is more to do with how well more able pupils learn. Although teachers' planning takes account of the pupils' different stages of learning, the extension work they plan for more able pupils is not always challenging enough. The headteacher, who has good experience of mixed age teaching, is working very hard with teachers, providing them with good examples of how to improve their planning further in this respect. She is currently teaching a group of pupils from Years 5 and 6 who have been identified as gifted at mathematics to boost their learning this year.
6. Speaking and listening skills are good throughout the school. Pupils read widely and readily give their opinions about different authors and books. They develop good writing skills and, when the stimulus is there, they write with imagination, engaging the reader well and with a good sense of audience and purpose. Overall, pupils use their literacy skills well in other subjects. Pupils have a good understanding of mathematical and scientific concepts and they use their mathematics skills satisfactorily in other subjects. Although good up to Year 2, pupils' achievement in ICT is unsatisfactory by Year 6. This is because they do not have regular and frequent access to computers to support their learning in Years 3 to 6. Computers are not promoted effectively as a natural tool for learning despite the range of skills pupils bring from home. Achievement and standards were found to be satisfactory in all other subjects inspected.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are all satisfactory. Pupils arrive punctually and their attendance is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils in the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2 behave well and have good attitudes to learning.
- The great majority of pupils are confident and responsible, but have few opportunities to use their initiative.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the principles of right and wrong, but the behaviour of some groups of pupils, especially in Year 6, holds back their achievement.

Commentary

7. Attendance is satisfactory overall. Although in the last reporting year it was above the national average, the latest figures show that this is not the case this year. Attendance has declined but mostly due to an unusual amount of sickness at the start of the school year, and to parents taking their children on holiday during term time.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	3.7	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.

8. The standard of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning have declined since the previous inspection due to frequent changes of staff and leadership and therefore the lack of a consistent approach throughout the school. The present headteacher has rightly given this area a high priority for improvement. A programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education has been introduced, and provides good opportunities for teachers and pupils to work together to improve behaviour, but it will take time before this work is fully effective. There have been no exclusions since this headteacher took up her position.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British

Exclusions in the last school year

Number of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
252	7	0

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

9. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory overall, but relate closely to the quality of teaching they receive. When taught well, pupils are eager to learn. This is seen in the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2 where pupils enjoy learning and behave well. They listen well to each other and to adults, are co-operative and willingly share equipment. Behaviour is good during the daily acts of collective worship, where pupils sit quietly, listen well and enter and leave the hall reverently. This demonstrates that pupils respond well when they know clearly what is expected of them. However, pupils in Year 6 are not always motivated well enough; they become disinterested and their behaviour deteriorates. This has a negative impact on their achievement.

10. Relationships between pupils and adults and between pupils in the school are satisfactory overall. Pupils are confident, articulate and polite, have positive views of their school and say they enjoy coming. The school councillors are proud to represent their classes, and know their views will be taken seriously. The headteacher has worked effectively with groups of pupils to develop rules and rewards. Pupils appreciate this and enjoy receiving an award because they have a high regard for the headteacher. They report that bullying is not a problem, named a range of adults they would go to with any problems or worries, and were confident that difficulties would be quickly sorted out. Pupils with special educational needs are very well integrated into the school, as are the small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. All are valued members of the school community. Pupils carry out their duties well, for example, acting as playground buddies to help younger pupils. Previously, pupils have not had enough opportunities to contribute their very evident skills and initiatives to the life of their school. Similarly, some older pupils are unused to being encouraged to contribute their opinions and felt they were not always treated fairly by their teacher.
11. The school promotes pupils' spiritual development satisfactorily throughout the curriculum and assemblies. Links with the church are strong, and the church team regularly conducts assemblies and participates in visits. In hymn practice, the learning support assistant focused pupils' attention well on the seasonal wonders of the natural world around them. Otherwise, few examples were seen of pupils reflecting on what they have learned, or being gripped and excited by their learning, and a small number of pupils showed a lack of respect for each other or their teachers. Moral development is good overall, however. It is promoted well through the personal, social, health and citizenship programme. Discussions with pupils during the inspection showed a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong and the consequences of their actions. A small number of pupils, however, still do not always behave as they know they should because they do not feel they are respected.
12. Pupils gain a good awareness the needs of others through their charity work. They care for the school's guinea pigs well, and help tend the school's environmental area, through the 'Look after our school' project, thus helping to ensure the attractive grounds are well cared for. Pupils' social development is also good. The great majority of older pupils have developed into mature members of the school, have good social skills and carry out duties sensibly. Extra-curricular clubs and educational visits, including the annual residential visits, contribute well to their social development. School councillors take their responsibilities seriously. A visit to the House of Commons shows older pupils how democracy works and helps them to gain a better understanding of life in the wider community. The school satisfactorily develops pupils' awareness of the range of diversity and culture in Britain today, and they learn of the lifestyles and customs of different faith communities through religious education. However, work in this area is somewhat limited. Participation for events such as the VE day commemorations teaches pupils about local history and traditions. However, there was little evidence in the pupils' work, of the work of great artists, craftsmen or musicians from Britain or elsewhere.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education is satisfactory. The quality of teaching is satisfactory as is the curriculum. The school cares for its pupils well and pays good attention to their welfare, health and safety. However, academic support and guidance are unsatisfactory. The school's links with parents are very good; its links with the community are good and its links with other schools are satisfactory.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching is good in the Foundation Stage and overall satisfactory in the rest of the school. Assessment procedures are satisfactory overall but the use of assessment information in planning, though improving, is unsatisfactory. The overall quality of teaching has deteriorated since the previous inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In the Foundation Stage good teaching helps the children to learn well.
- Instability in staffing, combined with some unsatisfactory teaching slows pupils' learning in Years 3 to 6.
- Pupils with special educational needs benefit from the good support they receive from the teaching assistants.
- Pupils' work does not always build well enough on what they already know. This limits particularly the achievement of more able pupils.
- The quality of teachers' marking is very variable. It does not consistently show pupils how they might improve.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 28 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
0	6	7	12	3	0	0

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

- Children in the Foundation Stage are taught well. They are presented with good learning opportunities that spark their interest and rouse their curiosity. As a result they quickly become involved in their learning and they make good progress. A good balance of teacher directed and child initiated activities turns them into confident young learners eager to do well. While overall satisfactory in Years 1 and 2, some very good teaching in that age group continues to foster in the pupils a love of learning. In the Year 2 class in particular, pupils are highly motivated by the very good use of an imaginative range of activities that make learning fun in subjects as diverse as English, history and music. Pupils work very hard because they have no time to do otherwise as the teacher presents them with a string of progressively demanding activities that really make them think for themselves.
- Teaching is much more variable in Years 3 to 6 although overall, it is satisfactory in this age group. A key feature of some good teaching here was the way in which the teacher in the mixed Year 3/4 class questioned and probed pupils' thinking in literacy. Step by step she took them through how a story could be told in pictures only, requiring them to sequence the order of events into a letter from one character to another. Pupils' learning was moved on considerably as the teacher advised and guided them through the work they did in groups, and called them together at different points to share their work so that they could learn from each other. This good use of ongoing assessment led to high levels of discussion and good productivity and pace in the lesson. Pupils have not achieved as well as they might in Year 4 this year. The work in their books shows that their learning was pitched too low at the start of the year. However, they are currently working at the levels expected for their age and as a result their progress is accelerating once again.
- Unsatisfactory teaching has led to pupils in Year 6 not achieving to the best of their ability. They quickly become bored and restless and show little respect for the teacher, largely because their learning is uninspiring. For example, although their work clearly shows that they can write freely, imaginatively, and at length when the stimulus is right, in the literacy lesson observed, they showed limited progress and considerable underachievement. This was because the tasks they were given to do were not matched to their different levels of capability and they resorted, as in other lessons observed, to unacceptable behaviour which

was not at all well managed. Similar weaknesses were evident in science and history lessons. Pupils in Year 6 voiced their feelings of injustice at the way they were treated, displaying a level of maturity that was not evident in their lessons.

16. The quality of marking is inconsistent. Some teachers mark pupils' work very well, showing them where they went wrong and how to put it right. Pupils respond well to this and try hard not to make the same mistakes again. At the other end of the spectrum, there are no comments to help pupils and pupils are clearly unsure of what to do to improve. Some complained that their teacher's writing was illegible and since their work was not always discussed with them, they had to work out for themselves how to improve it. Assessment procedures are satisfactory overall but the information gained from them is not used well enough in planning except in the case of pupils with special educational needs. These pupils make good progress towards the targets in their individual education plans, largely because their progress is regularly checked by the co-ordinator for special educational needs. Additionally, support staff are effectively deployed to help these pupils. They are well briefed and liaise regularly with the teacher and with the co-ordinator, who keeps a close eye on the quality of their work. The unsatisfactory use of assessment, therefore, limits in particular the achievement of more able pupils. As a result, the work they are given to do does not always provide them with sufficient challenge. Examples of this were noted in English, mathematics, science and ICT, where several opportunities were missed to extend their learning. Under the headteacher's good guidance, the school has started out along the route of setting group and individual targets but pupils do not know what they are and teachers rarely refer to them in lessons or in their marking. Recent improvements in planning are helping teachers to consider more carefully this aspect of their work but there is some way to go before the systems are being used effectively.
17. Throughout the school, pupils are given an appropriate range of homework that consolidates their learning in class. Homework often includes topic work that some parents complain takes too long. However, the pupils are clearly inspired by the chance they have to use their ICT skills independently because they are not given the opportunity to do so in school. They produce some very in-depth and well presented work in, for example, history and geography, that extends their learning well. This homework is often the only opportunity older pupils have to take their learning as far as they possibly can.

The curriculum

Curricular provision, accommodation and resources for learning are all satisfactory. A good range of activities enhances and enriches the curriculum during and outside of the normal school day.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- The curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage is well planned and the outdoor area is used very well to support teaching and learning.
- Teachers plan to meet the different needs of all pupils, but in practice pupils are not always enabled to achieve as well as they might.
- The use of ICT to support learning in other subjects is underdeveloped.
- Pupils enjoy the enrichment opportunities provided through visits, visitors and outside specialists.

Commentary

18. The curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage promotes all six areas of learning well, effectively meeting the children's learning needs and resulting in their overall good achievement.

19. The thorough analysis of curricular provision by the new headteacher has resulted in some good improvements in this aspect of the school's work during the past year. Adequate teaching time is now given to all subjects, and all have appropriate policies and schemes of work. National and local guidance is used to support teachers' planning, which aims to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. However, in practice, work often lacks the necessary challenge to enable more able pupils to work to the best of their capabilities. Good emphasis is placed on the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills and these are promoted well in other subjects. However, the use of ICT to support learning in other subjects is underdeveloped. The unreliability of the laptop computers and insufficient use of the desktops in the classroom have contributed to this. The school now rightly plans to develop more cross-curricular links between subjects to make learning more interesting for all pupils.
20. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. With the exception of the year group in which an electronic version of individual education plans is being trialled, the plans have clear, measurable targets that are reviewed each half term and adjusted as the need arises. In the case of pupils with statements, the plans focus well on the learning and personal needs identified. Liaison with outside agencies is particularly effective and the co-ordinator works very hard, often successfully bringing all agencies together to benefit the pupils' learning. The very good provision enables the pupils to make good progress despite variations in the quality of teaching and the frequent changes of staff some of them have encountered. However, the school is not totally successful in ensuring that all pupils have equal learning opportunities because higher attaining pupils are not always given the additional challenge they need to enable them to reach the higher standards of which they are capable.
21. The provision for pupils' personal, social, health and citizenship education is satisfactory. There is an appropriate policy and scheme of work in place that includes teaching pupils about sex and relationships and about the dangers of drugs and substance abuse, although the school recognises it has more work to do in this area. Visits, visitors to the school and after school clubs provide good enrichment opportunities for the pupils. Pupils participate well in the good range of sporting activities on offer. Visits to museums and the annual residential visit to the Isle of Wight further broaden pupils' experiences and extend their learning across a range of subjects. Staffing levels are satisfactory and, in the main, support staff are effectively deployed and make a good contribution to pupils' learning. The school is bright and clean with attractive displays of pupils' work that celebrate their achievement well and enhance the learning environment. Accommodation and resources in the Foundation Stage are good and very good use of the outdoor area supports learning very effectively. However, some large equipment there is not well enough maintained. In the rest of the school, accommodation and resources are satisfactory. Most classrooms are of an adequate size but some teachers do not always make the best use of the space available.

Care, guidance and support

The school takes good care of its pupils and involves them very effectively in its work, valuing their views and where possible, acting on their suggestions. Health and safety procedures are good as are the personal support and guidance given to the pupils but assessment information is not yet used effectively enough to guide pupils academically.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good support is provided by the school nurse and outside agencies.
- The school involves pupils closely and asks them what they think about aspects of the school.
- Pupils with special educational needs are well supported.

Commentary

22. The school's procedures for ensuring the safety and well-being of pupils are good. First aid provision is good and several members of staff are qualified to provide assistance in the event of an emergency. Safe practice is promoted well in lessons. Equipment is regularly checked and tested and the school has well-developed risk assessments. All of this is an improvement since the previous inspection. Staff are aware of the needs of pupils who need specialist medical support and are well trained and willing to help. Child protection procedures meet requirements and the school exercises its responsibilities with vigilance and care. The school is planning further staff training to make sure that all new staff are kept fully up to date. Induction arrangements are satisfactory. Parents and pupils say that there were no problems on starting school. These arrangements start the work of developing good and trusting relationships between parents and pupils with the staff. Outside visits by the police and school nurse provide valuable support to the pupils.
23. Pupils with special educational needs are supported well. Relevant external agencies are involved and all relevant personnel are invited to annual reviews. A number of agencies give good support to the school, including the educational psychologist and behavioural support team. Staff know their pupils well and they assess their learning satisfactorily. However, they do not use the information gained from doing so to support the pupils' learning or guide them to greater achievement. Target setting is in its infancy. Pupils are made aware of their targets, which are displayed in classrooms but they are not wholly conversant with them or what they need to do to achieve them. This limits the usefulness of the targets and ultimately the pupils' overall achievement. One area in which the school has started to move quickly is in the specialist extra classes taken by the headteacher to boost the learning of pupils identified as gifted mathematicians.
24. The involvement of pupils in the school's organisation is very good. The school successfully seeks pupils' views through the school council. This council has helped to set up litter patrols and is given responsibility for deciding how some funds might be spent. It is run by pupils with the help of staff. Pupils have also taken part in a school survey and the staff seriously considers and responds to their views. They are given a range of responsibilities appropriate for their ages and older pupils help younger ones in the playground, taking it in turns to be 'buddies'. They also take great pride and care in looking after the guinea pigs.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's links with parents are very good. Its links with the community are good and its links with other schools are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's very good partnership with parents makes a positive contribution to pupils' learning.
- The Friends Association works hard and very successfully supports the work of the school.
- Reports to parents about their children's progress are informative and helpful.

Commentary

25. The positive views of parents reflect an overall level of satisfaction with all aspects of the school's provision. A minority of parents expressed some concerns about the school's willingness to listen to and act on their views. Much of these views stemmed from a time when the school was going through necessary, but difficult structural and staff changes. Inspectors support the positive views of parents and find that the school is currently making successful efforts to keep parents involved and informed. The headteacher and staff make themselves available to meet parents and there are weekly 'drop-in' sessions as well as informal discussions. Regular newsletters and curriculum information keep parents well informed and there has recently been a curriculum evening with two meetings: one to demonstrate the use of interactive whiteboards, the other to help parents to help their children with mathematics. At the meeting with parents prior to this inspection it was clear

that parents feel the new headteacher has brought an energy and dynamism to the school and the majority of parents are optimistic about the school's future. The annual reports on pupils' progress are good. They inform parents about the work that pupils have completed and their attitudes, and they also provide parents with targets or guidance as to what their children need to do to progress to the next stage of their learning.

26. Links with parents are very good. Most parents support their children well at home by sharing books with them and helping them with their homework. Many parents come into school to help with a variety of tasks including reading with pupils, and managing the library, and road safety and bicycle awareness schemes. The school has good arrangements to survey parents and gain their views. Each class has a parent representative and this helps to provide quick and easy communication links between the parents and the school. Parents are informed and consulted about changes. The Friends of St Mary's has been extremely successful in raising funds to provide additional resources such as the interactive whiteboards. They arrange a variety of popular events of benefit to the school and to the community as a whole.
27. Links with the community are good. There is a wide range of visits and visitors that provide enrichment to the curriculum. This includes visits by a local theatre group, dance groups, and visits to local places of interest such as the local museum and Tudor Hall. The school takes part in local events such as the Amersham Music Festival and church services. The school nurse supports pupils' personal and social development and the Friends of St Mary's involve local industry in their fund-raising. Links with other schools are satisfactory. Staff absence has made close links with homes and pre-school providers difficult recently. However, parents and pupils said that their start at this school was trouble free and enjoyable. Links with secondary schools appropriately support the transfer of pupils at the age of 11 by providing opportunities to visit their secondary schools and teachers from those schools come to see their future pupils. Pupils in Year 6 are ready to move on and are looking forward to the transition.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. The leadership of the headteacher and governors is very good. Subject leadership and management are satisfactory and the school's overall management systems are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher is a very good leader and has been central to the improvements made over the past year.
- Governors know the school very well; they have high expectations of all staff and pupils and monitor the work of the school effectively.
- Teaching and learning are accurately evaluated and good support is given to weaker teachers.
- The role of co-coordinators in leading and managing subjects is not yet sufficiently developed.
- Financial management is good.

Commentary

28. The headteacher has a very clear vision and very high aspirations for all involved with the school. She has a perceptive understanding of the needs of the school and has been the driving force behind the success in tackling the key issues from the previous inspection in a very short period of time. The headteacher has motivated all staff and governors to work together as a team. There is now a clear commitment to improving teaching and learning, raising standards and helping each pupil to achieve their best. These improvements have been made without the support of a deputy headteacher to help share the workload and

show the headteacher's leadership skills to be all the more noteworthy. Members of the senior management team ably support her, however, and she is developing the management structure well, step by step, so that teaching and learning are more closely monitored throughout the school. Her own monitoring is of a very high standard and is a very good role model for colleagues. As a result of her work, subject co-ordinators now have a clear view of their leadership and management responsibilities, which they carry out satisfactorily. Further developments have been hindered by frequent changes of staff. This means that the inconsistencies in teaching and learning, which vary from very good to unsatisfactory, have not yet been totally ironed out. Nevertheless, the headteacher has provided high levels of support for weaker teachers and this has helped to minimise, though not fully eradicate, the impact of their teaching on pupils' overall achievement. The school as a whole is looking forward to some stability from September 2005 when it will have a full complement of permanent staff who can move forward together.

29. Governance is very strong, with an effective balance struck between support and challenge for the school. Governors are well informed and have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The governing body is evaluative and self-reflecting and plays a prominent role in strategic planning. Governors set high expectations for the senior management team and staff and clearly hold them to account. For example there was a rigorous debate about the pros and cons of having mixed age classes, as some parents had voiced concern about this. The governors wanted to be sure that pupils in these classes would have the same quality of education as other pupils, and they regularly check that this is the case. The governors' developing links with subject co-ordinators are making a positive contribution to their understanding of the school's performance in different subjects. Governors have attended a variety of training courses that have successfully sharpened their understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and they carry these out diligently.
30. The co-ordinator for special educational needs provides very good leadership and management of this aspect of the school's work. As a result, extra support is targeted very effectively to meet the individual needs of these pupils so that they make good progress and achieve well. The Foundation Stage is managed well so that all children have a good start to their education. The school evaluates its own performance thoroughly and acts effectively on the information gained. This has led to a sharp focus on improving teaching and learning and raising achievement. Provision for professional development is good and performance management targets are effectively linked to school priorities thereby benefiting staff and pupils.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	656,351
Total expenditure	637,349
Expenditure per pupil	2,529

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	14,602
Balance carried forward to the next year	33,604

31. Financial management has been improved by the appointment of a bursar and is now good. The budget is very carefully monitored and funds targeted effectively on the school's educational priorities. Because the school has operated without a deputy headteacher this year, it has saved some money in its budget. However, a new deputy headteacher takes up post in September 2005 along with several new, permanently appointed staff, the governors having worked hard to secure a balance between experienced teachers and enthusiastic but less experienced staff. The principles of best value are rigorously applied to all budgetary decisions. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Provision in the Foundation Stage is **good**. Most children start school with the levels of attainment expected for their age. Nursery and Reception children are taught in a well organised early years unit and, depending on their age, they spend one, two or three terms in Reception. This, and their varied pre-school experiences, affect the standards they reach at the end of their Reception Year. Nevertheless, they all achieve well and the majority do reach the nationally expected goals (the early learning goals) in all six areas of learning. A good proportion of the older children are on course to exceed the early learning goals.

Parents raised concerns about the induction procedures for when children start school in Reception. Inspectors found them to be satisfactory overall. Parents receive appropriate information about settling in procedures and there is a two week staggered entry system. However, only one pre-school visit is arranged for parents and children and this year there were no links with other pre-school providers to ensure as smooth a transition as possible into full-time education. The staff work well together, forming good relationships with the children and providing a safe and secure environment for them. The quality of teaching is good and the curriculum is well planned with a good range of practical activities that effectively develop the children's skills in all six areas of learning. There is a good balance between teacher directed and child initiated activities. Work is well matched to the children's needs and where learning difficulties are identified, good support is provided to help the children catch up. Assessment procedures are good; the children's progress is effectively tracked and recorded and parents are kept well informed about their children's progress. Accommodation and resources are good and the outdoor area is used very well on a daily basis to support learning across the curriculum. The Foundation Stage is well led and managed and there has been good improvement since the last inspection in the overall quality of provision, leadership and management as well as in the children's overall achievement.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children achieve well because they are taught well, and many are on course to exceed the early learning goals.
- Behaviour is good; children enjoy school and have good attitudes to learning.
- The children's personal skills are developed well across all areas of learning.
- Good relationships ensure the children feel safe, secure and valued.

Commentary

32. Children are eager to come to school and the staff work closely as a team creating a calm and caring environment in which all children feel safe and secure. Adults form good relationships with the children and the children work and play happily together, readily taking turns, sharing resources and handling equipment with care. Children develop good levels of confidence and independence because these aspects of learning are planned into all activities as they 'self register' each day, get changed for physical activities and follow a 'plan, do and review' approach to independent activities. Children readily take on small responsibilities and show an increasing awareness of themselves and their surroundings as they act as class monitors and tidy up after activities. Most children listen attentively to the staff and to each other, and concentrate well on tasks. This has a positive impact on their

learning. A significant number of children call out during discussion sessions but are learning to overcome this through the staff's positive approach to managing their behaviour.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good; children achieve well and most are on course at least to reach the early learning goals in this area of learning.
- Language skills are promoted well across all areas of learning but role-play activities are not always used well enough to develop children's spoken and imaginative language.

Commentary

33. Children develop good speaking and listening skills through the well planned opportunities for them to talk about their work and personal experiences. Adults use questioning well to involve all children in discussions and successfully encourage them to express clearly their ideas and opinions, as seen in a group writing activity. However, limited use is made of the indoor role-play area to develop the children's spoken and imaginative language. Most children enjoy listening to stories and rhymes which they retell accurately, showing a good understanding of the main characters and events. Some parents felt there was a lack of emphasis on reading in Reception. However, children's reading skills are effectively developed during shared and individual reading sessions. Good emphasis is placed on developing phonic skills, especially with children who are finding reading difficult. All children incorporate these skills well into their writing, making good attempts at spelling unfamiliar words independently. Handwriting skills are developing well. The children enjoy making individual books about different topics and most are beginning to write simple sentences independently.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision for mathematical development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and well planned practical activities promote good learning. As a result, children achieve well and are on course at least to meet the early learning goals for mathematics.
- Mathematical activities are effectively incorporated into many activities.
- Teaching assistants effectively support the children's learning.

Commentary

34. Children respond well to the many practical activities which provide them with a variety of opportunities to investigate mathematical ideas and concepts. The Nursery children are beginning to recognise and count numbers to five and beyond in a range of interesting games that make learning fun for them. The Reception children build well on this as they accurately recognise, order and count numbers to 20 and beyond. Most children use this knowledge well to record simple problems such as adding two digits together to make ten, and the staff rightly expect more of the more able children, requiring them additionally to arrange these numbers in a systematic way to develop their awareness of number patterns. The children rise well to this challenge. Children's written work shows they are developing an appropriate range of mathematical vocabulary. They use this effectively in other areas of learning when, for example, they make patterns with two dimensional shapes, measure and compare a range of objects around the class and weigh out ingredients when baking.

Children use the computers well for mathematical games, further developing their number skills. Teaching assistants contribute well to the children's learning, supporting them effectively in their work, asking appropriate questions and successfully developing their mathematical understanding.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and a range of interesting practical activities help children to achieve well; most are on course at least to meet the early learning goals in this area of learning.
- The outside area is used well to promote learning.
- Children have positive attitudes to their learning.

Commentary

35. A good range of well planned, exciting activities effectively develop the children's knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Children are eager to use the computers and do so with increasing skill through regular practice. Most children control the mouse well, follow on-screen instructions to create pictures and patterns and enjoy the interactive games that consolidate their learning of numbers and letters. Regular activities in the outdoor area broaden both the Nursery and Reception children's experience of the world around them as they observe growing plants, changing weather conditions and look for animal habitats in the large environmental area. Children learn effectively about the passage of time through drawings of themselves and their families as they move through the different stages of their life. They gain a good awareness of Bible stories and by participating in the special theme days such as the celebration of the Chinese New Year, they successfully develop an awareness of the customs and beliefs of others. Early design and technology and geography skills are effectively developed as children make plans of the outdoor area using construction kits.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision for physical development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, children achieve well and most are on course at least to meet the early learning goals in this area of learning.
- Children enjoy their work and handle tools and equipment safely.
- The outdoor learning area is used well to develop the children's physical skills.

Commentary

36. Nursery and Reception children develop their manipulative skills well through the regular use of pencils, crayons, paintbrushes, scissors and gluing and sticking equipment. Physical activity sessions effectively promote good control and coordination skills and the children move well in a variety of ways, stopping and starting at given signals and showing a good awareness of their own and others' space. The outdoor area is used very well as a continuous teaching and learning resource and is well equipped to promote the children's physical development. All children show good control of wheeled toys as they ride around a given track and develop good coordination as they climb and balance on the large apparatus. Children really enjoy their physical activities and their good attitudes and behaviour ensure that they use all equipment safely and with care.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

37. It is not possible to make an overall judgement on provision in this area of learning as no direct teaching was observed. However, evidence shows that an appropriate range of well planned activities effectively develops the children's creative skills and the majority are well on the way at least to meet the early learning goals. They use paper, paint, modelling materials, chalk and pencils to make drawings, painting models and collages which are attractively displayed around the unit. This puts value on the children's efforts and develops their confidence and self-esteem, and work is often linked well to other areas of learning. Role-play activities outside effectively develop children's spoken and imaginative language as they plan a picnic or work in the Garden Centre. However, the indoor role-play areas are underused during 'choice' activities and there is not always enough structured adult intervention to develop children's speaking, listening and creative skills. Children enjoy listening to different styles of music and teachers' planning shows that an appropriate range of musical activities is provided for all children.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 AND 2

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above the national expectation in reading, writing, speaking and listening in Year 2 and in English overall in Year 6.
- Good vocabulary and the pupils' good speaking and listening skills support their learning across the curriculum.
- Pupils achieve well in Years 1 and 2 because they have good attitudes to learning and overall, they are taught well.
- Pupils with special educational needs are supported very well.
- Achievement in Years 3 to 6 is satisfactory, but a lack of challenge for some groups of pupils means they do not do as well as they could.
- Assessment information is not used effectively enough when setting targets for the pupils.

Commentary

38. The rate of progress that pupils make relates closely to the quality of teaching; where teaching is good or better, pupils achieve well. However, in some classes, pupils are not inspired by their work and average and more able pupils are not sufficiently challenged. Consequently, they are prevented from reaching their full potential. While teaching is satisfactory overall, unsatisfactory teaching in Year 6 and a lack of continuity in teaching staff in Year 4 have slowed pupils' achievement in those two year groups. The very good support for pupils with special educational needs enables them to achieve well. Staff are well briefed and the pupils' work is carefully planned in small steps that are regularly reviewed. Class teachers and support assistants meet regularly with the special educational needs co-ordinator to review each pupil's progress and adjust their targets when necessary. Overall, achievement is good in Years 1 and 2 and satisfactory in the rest of the school.
39. Pupils in all classes speak clearly and confidently. They use their wide vocabulary well to express their thoughts and give considered reasons for their answers. By the end of Year 2, most pupils are fluent readers and have a good knowledge of letters and sounds which they use well to tackle unknown words. They enjoy spotting rhymes and patterns in words and this helps to broaden their reading skills. Younger pupils take reading books home regularly to practise. Those who find reading more difficult are given extra adult support and more frequent practice in school. By Year 6, pupils are competent, fluent readers. They select books independently from the school library, report that they regularly visit the local library,

and talk knowledgeably about the works of a wide range of authors. Pupils of all ages say they really enjoy reading.

40. The school has worked hard this year to improve pupils' writing skills and this is beginning to pay dividend. By Year 6, most pupils write imaginatively, freely and at length, using the correct style of writing to suit their audiences. Their writing was particularly good when they were clearly very inspired as they worked with a different teacher and produced humorous accounts of a bad day. They used alliteration effectively and well chosen punctuation, lively adjectives and adverbs added to the effect. Good teaching ensures that pupils in Years 1 and 2 quickly progress from simple printing to neat, joined handwriting. Pupils present their work well because they are expected to work with care. Spelling correctly is given due attention, and throughout the school, pupils have weekly spellings, matched to their ability to learn for homework. This helps their written work in all subjects.
41. Teaching is satisfactory overall. During the inspection, good and very good teaching was seen in Years 1 and 2. The quality is more variable in Years 3 to 6. All teachers now make sure their pupils know what they will be learning in each lesson. The best lessons were well planned and taught in imaginative ways that made learning exciting and fun, including for example, teaching pupils in Year 2 about rhyming words by allowing them to dip their hands in red jelly. Pupils in the mixed Years 3 and 4 class were really motivated by a book without words as a starting point for their writing. In these lessons, pupils were keen to learn, they behaved well and consequently achieved well. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, there is limited challenge or stimulus to capture the pupils' natural enthusiasm or encourage them to do their best. Many simply switch off and their behaviour deteriorates. They know they do this and are clear about the reasons why. At times, despite planning showing differently, pupils are all given the same work to do, regardless of their capability, and this hinders their achievement. Pupils are not always encouraged to discuss or contribute ideas, and teachers throughout the school miss many opportunities to extend their ideas and thinking skills.
42. English is currently led and managed satisfactorily by a temporary co-ordinator who has good knowledge of the subject. There is an appropriate focus on raising standards, and improvements in writing show that this is beginning to happen. Assessment systems are satisfactory, but the information gained from them is not used well enough in planning or target setting. Consequently, pupils are not sure what they need to do to improve their work, or what their targets are. Resources, including the school library, are satisfactory. However, the library is a thoroughfare and is used for group withdrawal and this limits opportunities for pupils to use it for private study or research.
43. Pupils' work is celebrated and their efforts encouraged in bright displays. Some texts enable pupils to consider moral and social issues, for example the pupils in Years 3 and 4 observed the effect of industrial development on a pretty rural area. Pupils have few opportunities to develop their social skills by working together to plan and evaluate their work. Overall, however, there has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

44. Pupils use their reading and writing skills well in other subjects, for example, researching information in books or via the Internet in history and geography, or writing reports, accounts or bullet points to record facts or give instructions in science. The older pupils' letters about life in London during the Blitz are good examples of imaginative writing using a vivid choice of words. Year 6 pupils also wrote thoughtfully about their hopes for the future and gave well considered opinions on moral issues in personal, social and health education work.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above the national expectation in Years 2 and 6.
- There is insufficient challenge for higher attaining pupils and limited use of ICT to enhance learning.
- Pupils with special educational needs are given extra support and so achieve well.
- There is good emphasis on providing practical activities to develop pupils' learning.

Commentary

45. Although overall satisfactory, the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement are variable throughout the school. Recent improvements in planning ensure that teachers make appropriate provision for the different ages and stages of learning in their class. However, the extension work planned does not always provide more able pupils with enough challenge to help them reach the higher standards of which they are capable. The headteacher has started to address this through her work with a small group of pupils identified as gifted at mathematics and this is improving their learning. Most pupils have positive attitudes to their work. They try hard and particularly enjoy the wide range of practical activities planned for them that help them relate mathematical learning to real-life situations. They show a good understanding of all aspects of mathematics. They work well together in pairs and small groups, applying themselves well to problem solving activities. This makes a positive contribution to their personal development. However, in some classes, the immature and unsatisfactory behaviour of some pupils adversely affects the learning of the whole class.
46. Teachers use their secure subject knowledge satisfactorily to explain and demonstrate new mathematical ideas to pupils. Pupils are therefore clear about what they are to learn and what is expected of them during lessons, and for the most part are successfully encouraged to use their previous learning in new work. By Year 6, pupils have a well developed understanding of how to solve relatively complex problems step by step, bringing a good range of mathematical knowledge and understanding to their work. Whole class sessions at the ends of lessons are not always used effectively enough to evaluate and consolidate pupils' learning. They are often too short and tend to be just a recap of the activities undertaken during the lesson.
47. In the good lessons observed, snappy introductions greatly improved pupils' mental recall skills. In these sessions, pupils use and extend their good mathematical vocabulary effectively as they are challenged to explain the methods they have used to solve the problems they have been set. This was seen in a lesson for pupils in Year 2 on learning what each digit in a two digit number represents. Activities are often linked to everyday life, enabling pupils to use their own experiences to support their learning. Computer operated whiteboards are used effectively during introductions as a visual stimulus and to involve pupils actively in the session. Throughout the school, teaching assistants are deployed well to provide extra help for pupils with special educational needs. As a result, these pupils achieve well, making good progress towards the targets in their individual education plans. This was evident in a lesson for the lower set in Years 3 and 4 on partitioning and multiplying numbers. The good teamwork amongst the adults meant that all pupils had a high proportion of direct teaching which resulted in good pace and productivity overall. Limited opportunities are provided for pupils to use ICT to support their learning, for example, to gather, display and investigate data and record the findings of mathematical investigations.
48. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The co-ordinator's role is currently being developed to enable her to monitor teaching and learning more closely through the school. Assessment arrangements are secure, though the information gained is not always used effectively to plan further learning experiences. The curriculum is appropriately planned with a good emphasis on pupils' learning through interesting, practical activities. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

Mathematics across the curriculum

49. There are satisfactory but limited opportunities for pupils to use and consolidate their numeracy skills in other subjects. For example, in science, pupils in Year 6 have taken careful time readings when measuring pulse rate before and after exercise. In geography, they have produced line graphs to show the average daily temperature in Sydney, Australia. There was little evidence in other subjects.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils in Years 2 and 6 reach standards that are above the national expectation.
- Although achievement is satisfactory, higher attaining pupils are not always given enough challenge.
- The use of ICT to enhance scientific knowledge and understanding is limited.
- Because pupils with special educational needs are given extra help they achieve well.

Commentary

50. Most pupils in Years 2 and 6 reach standards above those expected for their age and overall, achievement is satisfactory. Higher attaining pupils are not always given enough challenge and so do not perform to their full capability. Such was the case in a lesson in Year 6 on investigating whether light reflects better off shiny or dull surfaces. The activity was well within most pupils' capabilities and did not develop their scientific knowledge or understanding to any great degree. Pupils with special educational needs are supported well in class and they make good progress. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about their activities in science. Most of them showed interest and curiosity in what they were doing, especially when involved in practical investigations. However, in some classes there are groups of pupils whose behaviour is unsatisfactory and their attitudes unhelpful. This limits the progress and achievement that they make, especially where this is allied to unsatisfactory teaching. Nevertheless, most pupils have good scientific vocabulary which they use well in their work, and a good understanding of how to set up a fair test. Opportunities for older pupils to do so by themselves, however, are limited.
51. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Teachers carefully plan their lessons to link with pupils' own experiences and to build upon previous work. Because of this, pupils use their existing scientific knowledge and understanding effectively to support their learning of new ideas. Teachers have secure subject knowledge which they use satisfactorily to explain and demonstrate ideas. Consequently, pupils are clear about what they are to learn and how to set about their work. This was evident in a lesson for pupils in Year 1 on learning that objects made from some materials can be altered by squashing, bending, twisting and stretching. Pupils enjoyed the interesting activities set up for them to test the materials, and the teacher's good questioning effectively developed their understanding of how forces can affect materials. Teachers successfully encourage pupils to use accurate scientific terminology when answering questions, communicating ideas or recording investigations in different ways. This was seen in a lesson for pupils in Years 3 and 4 when they were discussing the dangers of electricity. Pupils' work is regularly marked but throughout the school, marking does little to help pupils improve their work.
52. Leadership and management are satisfactory and the co-ordinator's role is being developed further to include opportunities to evaluate teaching and learning more regularly and more formally. The curriculum is planned appropriately to provide interesting opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills through practical work. Literacy

and numeracy skills are satisfactorily promoted in science through, for example, the opportunities pupils in Year 6 have to take careful time readings when measuring pulse rate before and after exercise, and the different ways in which the outcomes of investigations are recorded. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to use ICT to support their scientific learning and assessment information is not used consistently in planning, resulting in a lack of suitable challenge at times. Overall, improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory, science now has adequate curriculum time and appropriate emphasis is placed on developing pupils' investigative skills.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good in Years 1 and 2; standards are above the national expectation in Year 2.
- Standards match the national expectation in Year 6 but by Year 6, pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory.
- The lack of frequent access to computers and the unreliability of the laptop suite hinder achievement in Years 3 to 6.
- Good guidance on assessment is available to staff but this has not been put into practice consistently well throughout the school.

Commentary

53. Although no teaching was observed in Years 1 and 2, the samples of pupils' work show good coverage of all aspects of ICT. Word processing skills, an introduction to control technology, and the use of the computer for research are all developed well and by Year 2, pupils successfully cut and paste text and pictures from the Internet. They confidently download information, manipulate text using different sized fonts and styles, and use drawing tools such as straight and curved lines and fill tools to colour their drawings.
54. Three sessions were sampled in Years 3 to 6. While no judgements are therefore made about the overall quality of teaching, there were elements of good teaching in one session, and several elements of unsatisfactory teaching in the other two, both taught by the same teacher. In this age group, pupils' progress in ICT has been hindered by three major factors: the lack of regular, frequent access to computers; the unreliability of the laptop suite; and the fact that some teachers do not take enough account of the skills pupils bring from home. This adds up to unsatisfactory achievement by Year 6, which is nevertheless improving due to improvements in teachers' planning, and access to a technician to keep the laptops up and running.
55. The teacher's good management enabled the pupils in Year 4 to cope well with the pitfalls as they quickly became deflated when one after another, the laptops refused to work. Some pupils had to wait around for their turn, thus slowing the pace of their learning, but they made satisfactory progress in learning how to create a simulation. In the unsatisfactory lessons, the lack of 'hands-on' experience very much limited the Year 5 pupils' understanding of how to create a program to make a Belisha Beacon flash. They were not being taught by their own teacher and it is to their credit that they behaved satisfactorily in what became a rather boring paper-based exercise with the promise that some might be able to try out their programs on the one available computer before the end of the lesson. A lack of freedom for pupils to use their skills and proceed at their own pace was found in Year 6. Here, the step by step approach the whole class was required to take greatly limited the pupils' progress. Some pupils clearly knew how to change the backgrounds of their slides, alter text and make it spin around to create visual interest. They were much further

on in their learning than the teacher gave them credit for, because of the skills they had developed at home.

56. The subject is well led and managed. The co-ordinator is enthusiastic, knowledgeable and well organised. She has checked teachers' planning and pupils' work and has a very good understanding of what needs to be done to improve teaching and learning. She leads by example and has provided teachers with good guidance on how to assess pupils' work. However, the systems are relatively new; they are not yet embedded throughout the school, and have not extended to using assessment information in planning. Statutory requirements are met and improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Resources have increased, the subject has a higher profile, written portfolios are in place and access to regular technical support is minimising the impact of the unreliable laptops.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

57. There are good examples of the use of ICT in other subjects in Years 1 and 2. However, the limited opportunities that pupils have to use the computers in class mean that ICT has not become a natural tool for learning. Several pupils in Year 6 indicated that they were not allowed to use computers in class. This is unsatisfactory use of a valuable learning resource, especially as pupils make very good use of computers at home to do their homework.

HUMANITIES

58. Geography was sampled during this inspection. No lessons were observed and therefore no judgements are made about overall provision or the quality of teaching and learning. Evidence from a variety of sources shows that achievement is satisfactory and standards match the national expectation in Year 2 and Year 6. An appropriate range of topics is covered, although there is insufficient depth to the work recorded in the books of the pupils in Year 6. Visits out of school effectively enrich the curriculum and good links are made to history through a study of the local area. Throughout the school pupils use their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills satisfactorily when researching and recording information in individual and group projects. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory but the use of assessment information in planning is underdeveloped.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Inconsistencies in teaching result in some pupils, particularly in Year 6, not achieving as well as they could.
- Visits, visitors and the local environment are used effectively to enrich and enhance pupils' learning.
- Literacy, numeracy and ICT are promoted well through history.
- Teachers' written marking does not always inform pupils of how to improve their work.

Commentary

59. Standards attained by pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 match those expected nationally for their age, and achievement is satisfactory. Teachers plan an appropriate range of topics that satisfactorily develops pupils' understanding of life, people and events in the past. Pupils use an appropriate range of secondary sources to develop their historical enquiry skills and the good use of timelines effectively develops their understanding of chronology. Pupils in Year 2 speak knowledgeably about the life and work of Florence Nightingale and Isambard

Brunel and pupils in Year 6 have a secure knowledge and understanding of different periods of history.

60. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, ranging from very good to unsatisfactory. Where it is very good, work is well matched to pupils' needs, and the teacher's enthusiasm, effective questioning and good use of resources spark pupils' interest and make learning fun. In the unsatisfactory lesson observed, pupils lost interest and their behaviour deteriorated. They learned little because the teacher talked for too long and did not include all of them in the lesson. Throughout the school, pupils record their findings in different ways using their literacy and numeracy skills well, and their ICT skills satisfactorily, to support learning. However, teachers' written marking is very variable. Too often, pupils' work is simply ticked or the comments praise what has been done without providing guidance as to how the work might be improved. The use of the local environment, visits to museums and the residential visit to the Isle of Wight effectively enrich the curriculum and make learning more relevant to pupils' own experiences. The subject makes a positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
61. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The co-ordinator's role is currently underdeveloped because until recently she did not have the opportunity to lead, monitor or manage the subject. Her subject knowledge is secure and she has improved the range of resources and enrichment opportunities. She does not, however, have a clear overview of standards or achievement throughout the school. Assessment takes place at the end of each unit of work but the information is not used well enough in planning. Overall, however, improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

62. **Design and technology and music** were sampled in this inspection. One music lesson was observed and two instrumental music sessions were sampled. No lessons were observed in design and technology. No judgements are therefore made about overall provision.
63. In **design and technology**, the work in pupils' folders shows that pupils achieve satisfactorily in Years 1 and 2, and standards are at the national expectation in Year 2. Plans, labelled designs, records of materials used and evaluations show that they understand the processes involved in designing and making artefacts. There was not enough evidence to make a secure judgement about standards or achievement in Year 6. Nevertheless, the standard of work in the one project seen was satisfactory. The use of national guidance ensures that statutory requirements are met. The co-ordinator, who is relatively new to the post, is clear about how to improve the subject. However, although each unit of work is assessed as it is completed, the information gained is not used to inform the next stage of learning.
64. Standards in **music** are above the national expectation in Year 2 and achievement is good. In the one lesson observed, teaching was very good. The teacher very skilfully incorporated listening, composing and performing into a succession of progressively demanding activities. This greatly improved pupils' understanding of the importance of selecting sound sources carefully to produce, in this case, the impression of a shower of rain. Simple, but very perceptive questioning also improved the pupils' ability to evaluate the quality of their own and others' work, and the pupils were highly motivated by some exciting learning. The music curriculum is adequately covered using a commercial scheme and greatly enriched for a large proportion of pupils through access to instrumental teaching and participation in the choir, recorder groups and the school orchestra. Leadership and management are satisfactory. However, there is little recording of pupils' progress and no evidence of assessment information being used in planning.

ART AND DESIGN

Provision is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well in Years 1 and 2 because they are taught well. Standards are above the national expectation in Year 2.
- Observational skills are developed well throughout the school but opportunities for three-dimensional work are limited.

Commentary

65. In Years 1 and 2, teachers provide pupils with very good, first-hand experiences that very effectively build up their observational skills. The pupils produce some very detailed drawings of natural objects collected from the environmental area using different pencil techniques that show a good understanding of line, colour and texture. In the two lessons observed, highly motivated by exciting activities, they threw themselves wholeheartedly into arranging and drawing leaves, twigs, flowers and different combinations of them, working very effectively together to discuss and evaluate, for example, the imaginative sculptures some of them had created. The good focus on observational skills continues in Years 3 to 6, resulting in good representations of still life objects by Year 5. Pupils have had experience of working in clay in the past but there was little evidence of three-dimensional work during the inspection, and there are few opportunities for pupils to explore materials and decide for themselves how to proceed. Work on display shows that standards match the national expectation in Year 6. Sketchbooks are used satisfactorily and work is regularly marked. However, pupils are not given guidance as to how to improve, and information gained from recording their achievement is not used in planning. No direct teaching was observed in Years 3 to 6 therefore no judgement is made about the quality of teaching in that age range. The co-ordinator has only recently taken over the subject but has a clear view of what needs to be done to improve, for example, improving assessment and its use in planning and extending the range of artistic experiences for the pupils. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum for physical education is fully covered.
- Pupils have good opportunities to participate in physical activities outside the school day.

Commentary

66. Two physical education lessons were observed during the inspection in Years 4 and 5, and therefore no judgements are made about teaching and learning for younger pupils. In the lessons observed, standards, achievement and the quality of teaching were satisfactory. The pupils enjoy physical activity and behave satisfactorily although in one of the lessons, needed several reminders to stay on task. They move safely and demonstrate satisfactory levels of co-ordination, for example, in a Year 4 dance lesson, where they successfully portrayed a cartoon character in a short, well planned movement sequence. They found difficulty, however, extending this to portray emotions through movement, and this limited their achievement. Year 5 pupils demonstrated satisfactory skills in running, hopping and jumping during an athletics lesson. The teacher used the lesson time well and supported pupils as they worked, but did not enable pupils to evaluate their own or each other's work in order to improve their techniques and skills. Pupils are aware of the need to warm up and cool down to protect their muscles. Pupils have good opportunities to extend their physical skills outside of the school day by becoming involved in extra-curricular sporting activities.

For example, teams participate in the local football and netball leagues, and pupils have opportunities to play cricket, tag rugby and tennis. Assessment and its use in planning are underdeveloped. Accommodation and resources are adequate. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall, as is improvement since the previous inspection.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL, HEALTH AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION (PSHCE)

67. This aspect of the school's work was sampled and provision is satisfactory overall. The programme of work is well structured and comprehensive but it is not being taught consistently well throughout the school. For example, older pupils reported that they are not often given the opportunity to discuss their ideas and opinions and they do not feel that these are valued. In most classes, weekly sessions often include circle time and give pupils the opportunity to discuss matters of importance to them. The results of the programme have yet to be seen in raising standards of behaviour, and some pupils recorded in their books that they wished their class would behave better. In a sampled Year 2 lesson, pupils enjoyed several games aimed at encouraging them to work as a team. However, opportunities to develop PSHCE in other subjects and lessons are not taken and this limits the impact of the programme. A visit to the House of Commons helps Year 6 pupils to learn about government and citizenship, and furthers their understanding of how society works. The School Council takes its responsibilities seriously and knows its views will be carefully considered by the school management, and pupils with monitor duties carry them out well.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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