

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **ST MARY'S PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Strood

LEA area: Medway

Unique reference number: 118532

Acting headteacher: Heidi Taylor

Lead inspector: Mr Paul Evans

Dates of inspection: 27<sup>th</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup> September 2004

Inspection number: 267888

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Primary
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 -11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	128
School address:	Gun Lane Strood Kent
Postcode:	ME2 4UF
Telephone number:	(01634) 717 115
Fax number:	(01634) 295 715
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Derek Morrison

Date of previous 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2002 inspection:

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Mary's Primary School is a smaller than average primary providing education for 128 pupils, 59 girls and 69 boys aged four to 11 years of age. There are 11 full-time children in the Reception class and more will join later in the year. Children's attainment on entry to the school is poor. The school has a specialist unit for profoundly deaf children who require sign language in addition to speech in order to communicate. The majority of these pupils live within the Medway area although some do travel to the school from other parts of Kent. At the time of the inspection, 11 pupils attended the unit although they are integrated into most lessons in the main school. The majority of pupils who attend the main school live locally, in an area of very high deprivation compared with the national average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. There are a number of pupils for whom English is not their first language. However, whilst this number is higher than at most schools, these children are not at the early stages of acquiring English. The percentage of pupils on the school's special educational needs register is well above the national average as is the number of pupils with a statement of special educational need. However, these figures do include the pupils in the specialist unit for the deaf who are all on the school's special educational needs register and all have a statement of special educational need. There is a history of high levels of pupil and staff mobility and this represents a barrier to pupils' learning.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
20737	Mr Paul Evans	Lead inspector	Mathematics Design and technology Physical education English as an additional language
9420	Mr David Martin	Lay inspector	
22067	Mrs Janet Stallard	Team inspector	Provision for pupils in the deaf unit Special educational needs
7813	Dr Kevin Wood	Team inspector	Science Information and communication technology History Geography
27667	Mrs Carolyn Renault	Team inspector	Foundation Stage curriculum Music Religious education
20534	Mrs Nichola Perry	Team inspector	English Art and design

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

St Mary's provides a **satisfactory education** for its pupils. Under the leadership of the acting headteacher, considerable changes are being made: leadership, management and governance are improving and strategies to improve teaching and learning are beginning to take effect. Teaching is now satisfactory overall, although its quality needs to be improved further to raise the standards achieved by the pupils. Currently the school provides unsatisfactory value for money because standards are not yet high enough. The school demonstrates good capacity to remedy the shortcomings.

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

- The very good educational vision of the acting headteacher and her skills in teambuilding and prioritising issues for action are central to the improvement being made in the school.
- There is a rapidly improving partnership between the senior management team, other senior staff and the governing body.
- Standards are too low.
- There are some weaknesses in the teaching, particularly in the infants.
- Teaching and learning are good in the Foundation Stage.
- There is good provision for children in the Foundation Stage and for those with special educational needs. The provision for pupils in the unit for the deaf is very good. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good.
- High staff turnover and pupil movement have presented barriers to pupils' learning.
- There are inconsistencies in marking, assessment and the use of assessment to match work to pupils' levels of achievement.

Since the last inspection, the school has made satisfactory improvement. Almost all areas of concern raised in the last inspection report have been tackled appropriately, although little headway has been made in raising standards. The remaining issues are being vigorously dealt with by the new management team. Changes in staff have been frequent and this has slowed progress. The current leadership of the school is developing and implementing strategies which are designed to raise standards quickly.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average; E\* - very low. Similar schools are those with similar percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals.*

Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
English	E*	E	D	B

mathematics	E	D	E	D
science	E	E	E	D

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

**Pupils' achievement, overall, is unsatisfactory**, although achievement is good in the Foundation Stage. Children join the Reception class with skills that are poor for their age. As a result of good teaching, they make good progress and achieve well in all areas of learning, but standards are still well below those expected nationally by the time the children enter Year 1. The school's results in national tests at the ends of Year 2 and Year 6 in 2003 were lower than in most schools and lower than in schools whose pupils have similar backgrounds. The unconfirmed results of tests in 2004 show little improvement. In the work seen during the inspection, standards were also low, but there are signs of improvement, both in the content and quality of presentation of the pupils' work. Pupils' literacy skills and their skills in using information and communication technology are low. **Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good.** They have good attitudes to their work and behave well. Levels of attendance are unsatisfactory, although showing improvement.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is **satisfactory**. **The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall.** It is good in the Foundation Stage and satisfactory in the juniors, but in the infants it is unsatisfactory because there are weaknesses in managing some pupils' behaviour. There are very good relationships between pupils and staff and good relationships between pupils. The promotion of equality of opportunity is good. The quality of the curriculum offered to pupils is satisfactory with a good range of extra-curricular activities.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**Leadership and management are satisfactory overall.** The leadership of the acting headteacher is good. She has a very good, clear educational vision for the school. Financial management is good and the governors now have a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have a good working partnership with the headteacher and with all staff in the school. Many aspects of governors' contributions are good but there are some minor breaches of their statutory obligations in respect of the information published by the school. Governance is satisfactory overall.

## PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are satisfied with the school. In questionnaires, at their meeting with the lead inspector and when spoken to during the inspection, parents were generally complimentary about the school. Pupils are pleased with their school. All now know that their main objective is to learn. They have great confidence in all adults working in the school.

## IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Improve the achievement of pupils and the standards that they reach, throughout the school.
- Raise the quality of teaching, throughout the school, but particularly in the infants, to the highest levels seen within the school.
- Fully implement, and rigorously monitor, the newly-agreed strategies for assessing pupils' progress, and use this information to track pupils' progress throughout the school.
- Improve the use of ICT and the development of language skills in other subjects;

**and, to meet statutory requirements:**

- Ensure that the prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents contain all the required information.



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

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

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

Standards throughout the school are low and achievement is unsatisfactory, although in the Foundation Stage, the children's achievement is good.

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

- The new headteacher has established a climate of improvement.
- Standards are well below average at the end of Years 2 and 6.
- All children in the Foundation Stage achieve well in all areas of learning.
- High levels of staff and pupil movement have a detrimental effect on standards.
- The use of ICT to teach other subjects is not well developed.

#### **Commentary**

1. Children's attainment is poor when they join the school. Children in the Foundation Stage achieve well in all areas of learning because of good provision, high expectations and good teaching. Despite this good provision, standards are still well below expectations in all areas because of the low point from which they start.
2. The 2003 national test results show that by the end of Year 2, pupils' standards in reading and mathematics were well below the national average. In comparison to those in schools with a similar entitlement to free school meals, these results were well below average in all three subjects. The unconfirmed results of the 2004 national tests show a further fall in the percentage of pupils reaching Levels 2B and above in all three subjects.
3. In the 2003 tests at the end of Year 6, standards in English, mathematics and science were well below the national average. The percentage of pupils reaching the higher Level 5 in 2003 was very low compared to national averages. In the unconfirmed results for 2004 tests, the school failed to meet its targets for English. Targets in mathematics were just met for Level 4, but no pupils exceeded Level 4. The acting headteacher has agreed targets for 2005 with all staff, which are much higher than the school has achieved for many years. Results over the past five years have been consistently low although results have improved at the same rate as those nationally.
4. An examination of pupils' work from last year indicates that teaching and learning were affected by the much higher than average number of teachers and pupils who joined and left the school during the year. The pupils' progress has been limited and they have underachieved. Since the arrival of the acting headteacher, strategies for improving the quality of teaching have been implemented and are beginning to have an effect. Although it is too soon for this to have had a significant impact on standards, there are some improvements in both the content and the quality of presentation of the pupils' work. These strategies are already raising expectations for staff and pupils, and whilst teaching and learning are not as good as they should be, there is now some very good teaching which is raising standards in lessons. Inspection evidence shows that standards in English, mathematics and science are now below average and this is a sign of improving effectiveness. These improvements, implemented by the headteacher, are reflected in

pupils' achievement in these areas, but time has been too short for significant improvement to be seen; achievement remains unsatisfactory and pupils are still not achieving to their capabilities. There are no significant differences in the standards reached or the achievements of boys and girls.

5. There is good commitment to equality of opportunity throughout the school, and pupils with special educational needs make the same progress as their classmates because of the good work of the co-ordinator for special educational needs (SENCO), the very good support offered by teachers and learning support assistants and the use of the targets in individual education plans in lessons. Pupils in the unit for the deaf are very well included in mainstream lessons, and because of the high quality specialist support that they are given, they achieve very well.
6. Standards are now below average throughout the school in English, mathematics and science. Literacy and numeracy skills are lower than those usually found in most schools. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are below expectations at the end of Year 2 and Year 6, and ICT is not well used in the teaching of other subjects. This does not give pupils the opportunity to raise their standards in other subjects through the use of ICT. Standards in religious education are below the expectations of the locally-agreed syllabus. In geography, history and music, standards are below expectations at the end of Years 2 and 6. Standards in art and design, design and technology and physical education were not judged because these subjects were only sampled.
7. All pupils in the school now readily identify their main target as being to learn. Their attitudes to work and their behaviour are now good. Teachers are responding well to the new challenges being offered them and the school now has good capacity to raise standards quickly.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
reading	13.2 (14.1)	15.7 (15.8)
writing	11.6 (13.2)	14.6 (14.4)
mathematics	14.7 (16.0)	16.3 (16.5)

*There were 27 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	25.9 (25.6)	26.8 (27.0)
mathematics	24.1 (25.8)	26.8 (26.7)
science	26.1 (27.0)	26.8 (28.3)

*There were 21 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

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

Pupils' attitudes overall are good and behaviour is good. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also good. Pupils' punctuality is satisfactory, but their attendance is unsatisfactory.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The recently-revised behaviour management policy has already made an impact within the school.
- Extra-curricular activities promote good attitudes and behaviour.
- Pupils are beginning to place an importance on their own learning.
- Attendance is unsatisfactory.
- Levels of pupils' self-esteem and confidence are low on entry.
- Pupils form very good relationships with staff and good relationships with each other.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall.

## Commentary

8. Pupils like the school and are happy there. They show respect for staff and each other. They are aware that their purpose is to learn but this is yet to be fully developed to enable them to be confident and independent learners. They are eager to please and work collaboratively with each other. In interviews with pupils, they expressed the view that all pupils are treated fairly and recognise the need for rewards and sanctions. These attitudes are having the effect of improving pupils' learning.
9. Pupils attend a range of extra-curricular activities such as ICT, cricket and dance. Hearing and deaf pupils are included in these activities; the deaf pupils are provided with communication support in all school clubs. Some extra-curricular activities in the last academic year were occasionally cancelled due to staff shortages but plans are in place for an adventure day for Year 6 pupils. The learning and achievement of pupils who take part in these activities are enhanced.

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.0	School data	0.4
National data	5.4	National data	0.4

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

10. The last reported figure, for the year 2002/2003, for overall attendance is unsatisfactory, being well below the national average; authorised absence was high. In 2003/2004, there has been a substantial increase in the overall attendance rate, entirely due to a decrease in the authorised absences. The school believes that the number of medical appointments necessary for pupils in the unit for the deaf is a significant factor in the high incidence of authorised absences. The school's actions to improve attendance are good. The school works closely with the education welfare officer and, where necessary, home visits are carried out in order to bring about an improvement. The school promotes good attendance by being diligent in establishing reasons for absence, working with families of pupils who cause particular concern and reinforcing the need for good attendance in newsletters and pupils' annual reports.
11. Pupils are interested in their learning and are able to contribute to discussions. This is a result of good questioning by staff, which encourages the pupils to explore their learning;

the activity-based lessons and drama activities are successful at promoting this. There is a school council and pupils discuss the proceedings and outcomes of council meetings during some of their circle time sessions and, as a result, largely feel that their views are listened to.

12. In lessons observed, there were satisfactory opportunities for independent learning; the school realises that this is an area to be further developed. During lunchtime and playtimes, pupils are confident to approach an adult if they have concerns or are worried. This raises their self-confidence, which has a positive effect on their attitude to learning.
13. Some parents and pupils confirm that incidents of bullying occur but these are infrequent and reducing in number; parents stated that incidents were dealt with well. No incidents of bullying were noted during the inspection. Overall, pupils have good relationships with each other and very good relationships with staff. They can work collaboratively and show respect for others' views during discussion time in and out of lessons. Although there was little evidence of formal citizenship teaching in the last academic year, pupils showed a strong sense of community for each other and all groups of pupils were included in the life of the school during the inspection. The new building project for the school has captured the pupils' interest and imagination; the governing body states that it has not seen this before. The caring, inclusive ethos of the school creates an atmosphere which promotes learning, although the school leadership realises that the pupils need more challenge in their learning in order to raise standards of attainment.
14. Some pupils have been identified as having severe behavioural difficulties and most staff are able to apply the school's management strategies consistently. Where there is variation from the policy, both teaching and learning are disrupted. Pupils' behaviour outside the classroom is good. The conduct of pupils is satisfactory overall and is improving, due to the recent development of consistent behavioural management strategies and expectations set by most staff. This has resulted in no exclusions to date this year. Exclusions last year were much higher than in most primary schools. There were no incidents of racial harassment during the inspection and none were reported in meetings with parents and pupils. Pupils are confident in their surroundings and this impacts well on their attitudes to learning.
15. Pupils' spiritual and cultural awareness are satisfactory; pupils are able to understand the importance of caring for each other. The moral and cultural values of the pupils are good; the deaf and ethnic minority pupils are fully included in lessons and in activities outside of the classroom. The caring and inclusive nature of the school leads to pupils having a strong sense of right and wrong and the responsibilities of living in a community. Pupils in the Reception class have poor self-esteem and confidence when they join the school. Good provision results in them becoming self-confident and independent.

***Ethnic background of pupils***

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – any other background
Mixed – White and Asian

***Exclusions in the last school year***

No. of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
107	10	0
6	0	0
2	0	0

Asian or Asian British - Indian	15	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	3	3	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0

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

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is satisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum are satisfactory overall. Pupils have high levels of confidence in adults within the school and they enjoy being at school. Partnership with parents and links with the local community are satisfactory.

### Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning are **satisfactory overall**. Assessment and the use of assessment information are **unsatisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage are good.
- There are weaknesses in the teaching in Year 2.
- Pupils' learning is generally well supported by additional adults.
- The amount of work pupils produce in most lessons is insufficient and homework is not used well to support or consolidate learning.
- In the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 to 6, assessment procedures and use of assessment to respond to individual needs is unsatisfactory so that pupils do not understand how they can improve.

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 21 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
2 (6%)	2 (6%)	17 (51%)	9 (27%)	3 (9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

### Commentary

16. The headteacher and leadership team have a very clear understanding that if standards are to rise, the quality of teaching and learning has to be further improved.
17. The school has recently appointed an experienced acting headteacher and a deputy headteacher with advanced skills status to ensure strong leadership of teaching and the curriculum. Two further advanced skills teachers will be supporting school provision after the Autumn half-term. Senior staff have worked hard with the significant number of new staff to raise the quality of teaching and learning. A variety of strategies have been used to bring about improvement. These include: the use of targets through performance management; team teaching; modelling of lessons; training for teachers and support staff; team planning; work scrutiny and direct observations of lessons with feedback to staff. These strategies have contributed strongly to improvements seen in lessons during the inspection.
18. As a result of ongoing monitoring and the highly effective influence of the leadership team supported by key subject leaders, 91 per cent of lessons observed during the inspection were

judged to be satisfactory or better, with over half of the lessons being good or better. This shows an improvement since the previous inspection and demonstrates the school's capacity to improve.

19. Teaching is consistently good in the Foundation Stage, which maintains the position at the previous inspection. Staff have high expectations of behaviour so pupils quickly learn how to work within well defined boundaries and these prepare them well for more formal learning Year 1. Teachers' planning, subject knowledge and style of teaching are effective, and teaching assistants are particularly well used so that pupils make good progress in their learning during their time in the Reception class.
20. In the infant classes, a significant number of lessons seen were judged to be good, with one excellent, but overall the teaching is unsatisfactory because teachers do not always interpret lesson planning well and occasionally there are weaknesses in managing the pupils' behaviour, which leads to unsatisfactory learning. Teaching and learning in the juniors are satisfactory. Several lessons seen were judged to be good with some very good, one excellent and one unsatisfactory. However, the amount of satisfactory and unsatisfactory teaching is still too high to make the difference needed to raise standards. The leadership team is aware that this is holding back progress in improvements to the quality of teaching and strategies are already in place, with more planned, to remedy this.
21. Because of the early date of the inspection, limited work was available to scrutinise from the current academic year. Consequently, work from the previous year was scanned in detail to provide evidence of recent practice and standards. This clearly demonstrates low standards and unsatisfactory teaching and learning over time in all subjects. Differentiation and assessment, including marking, were all found to be unsatisfactory across the school. Achievement was also unsatisfactory. This is because of low teacher expectations, with limited amounts of work produced by pupils in lessons. Particularly high numbers of short-term teachers overusing published worksheets, which failed to motivate or challenge pupils effectively, has also prevented pupils from achieving appropriately.
22. Work scrutinised from the current academic year, with changes in teaching staff and leadership of the school, shows clear signs of improvement, although weaknesses remain in assessment, marking and differentiation.
23. Teachers across the school are working hard to raise expectations regarding pupils' behaviour in lessons. Good evidence was seen in lessons where teachers are beginning to use the new behaviour policy more consistently. They make good use of positive praise to reward good behaviour and most pupils respond well to this. As a result, there is clear evidence in the best lessons of pupils' listening skills and attitudes to learning being improved. However, behaviour is currently heavily managed because pupils are still struggling with the concept of independent working and some teachers appear unable to take the necessary step back. As a result, the emphasis in several lessons is on behaviour management rather than good learning and listening. Pupils find it hard to concentrate for any length of time and rarely complete tasks so that too frequently the amount of work produced within the time allowed is still not enough. Inappropriate use of stickers in some classes is preventing pupils from taking responsibility for their own learning and behaviour. Pupils also find writing difficult as a result of gaps in their prior learning and limited development of pupils' basic literacy skills across the curriculum.
24. The school's strategy for helping pupils understand how they can improve is unsatisfactory overall. Improved leadership has ensured that learning objectives are now shared with pupils at the beginning of lessons. In the best lessons, teachers return to these at the end of lessons to ask how well pupils think they have achieved against the objective or whether they require further support. This strategy, which is not consistently used across the school, puts pupils in the position of assessing their own learning and helps teachers to know what more has to be done for all to achieve the objective.

25. The school is still developing the tracking of pupils' progress through the school, so that teachers and managers are able to record pupils' progress year on year. Teachers do not yet demonstrate a secure knowledge of their pupils for meaningful individual or group targets to be set which ensure improvement in English, mathematics and science. Recently-introduced targets are not being well used as a matter of course in all lessons or discussed with pupils so that they are clear about how they can improve. The newly-formed leadership team has already agreed a whole-school marking policy and staff are gradually introducing the new practice. Whilst marking seen in past and current books is wholly positive, it lacks any clarity about what pupils have done well and what they now need to do to improve. This aspect of teaching is not contributing to pupils' own knowledge of their learning.
26. Teachers' assessment, including marking, does not inform pupils with special educational needs (SEN) about their individual progress and is unsatisfactory. For example some pupils are aware of their targets but are unsure of how well they are doing. However, the quality of pupils' individual education plans (IEPs) is satisfactory and the new co-ordinator for special educational needs (SENCO) is planning training for staff on how to improve the quality of the pupils' IEPs. The tracking of progress of pupils with SEN, by group or individually, is satisfactory. However, the school has plans to improve the tracking of pupils' progress. Also it has increased the use of National Curriculum levels and P levels in its assessment of pupils' progress. This has yet to have an impact on pupils' knowledge and understanding of their learning and progress.

## **The curriculum**

The curriculum is satisfactory: it is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is good. The range of extra-curricular activities is good. Accommodation and resources are sufficient to teach the school's curriculum.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There is good equality of access and opportunity for all pupils.
- There is good provision and support for pupils with special educational needs.
- It has been difficult for the school to establish consistency in provision because of the high level of turbulence regarding numbers of staff and pupils.
- Good provision is made for children in the Foundation Stage.
- Good enrichment of the curriculum takes place through lunchtime and after-school activities.

## **COMMENTARY**

27. The school has addressed the key issue of an unbalanced curriculum identified at the last inspection and now has appropriate timetables, a curriculum overview and subject plans, which ensure that all subjects receive an appropriate percentage of time and that knowledge and skills are appropriately developed between Year 1 and Year 6.
28. A particular strength of the school is the way in which pupils with special educational needs, particularly those with hearing impairment, are supported so that they can access all areas of the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. For example, during the inspection, music lessons were observed in which pupils from the unit for the deaf were able to take part in playing percussion instruments and singing and were able to achieve as well as the hearing pupils in these lessons. This was because of the very good support

by the teaching assistants signing the teacher's instructions and the sensitivity and awareness of the teachers. Similarly, hearing-impaired pupils were able to join in the after-school indoor sport with equal enthusiasm and success.

29. Pupils who have English as an additional language are all fluent in English, requiring no additional support. They take full part in all school activities. There are many notices, signs and books in other languages to show that the school values other cultures and languages.
30. The high level of staff turbulence has made it particularly difficult to establish a consistent curriculum. Recent appointments have begun to address previous weaknesses. For example, the appointment of a specialist music teacher has already had a good impact on raising standards in that subject. The newly-appointed school improvement team and subject co-ordinators have identified the ways in which the curriculum should be monitored and developed to ensure that standards are improved, particularly in literacy and numeracy. For example, drama is now being used to increase pupils' language and understanding in all subjects, and the school improvement plan identifies strategies for monitoring the curriculum by co-ordinators and senior staff. However, there has been insufficient time for these new initiatives to have had an impact on standards.
31. The curriculum for Reception children is good. Detailed plans successfully incorporate all the areas of learning that should be taught to children before they enter Year 1. Lesson planning is comprehensive and children have access to a wide range of activities and learning experiences, which provide a good balance between play and rigorous development of skills. The easily accessible outdoor play area means that children have lots of opportunity for using a range of small and large play equipment. Children's achievement is promoted well in all areas of learning.
32. The school's programme for developing pupils' personal, social, health and citizenship education, including sex and relationships education and drugs awareness education, is satisfactory. Parents are informed about the sex and relationships education policy and practice and none of the pupils are withdrawn from the lessons.
33. The provision of extra-curricular activities is good, with lunchtime and after-school sessions designed to support the particular needs of the pupils and promote the main aims of the school. For example, the lunchtime story club provides good language enrichment and promotes a positive attitude towards books and literacy; the lunchtime soccer-related mathematics club run by Gillingham Football Club enhances pupils' numeracy skills in an imaginative way; the art club for the infants enhances the development of creativity and imagination and the signing clubs promote the school's ethos of inclusion. Overall, the extra-curricular activities contribute well to the development of positive attitudes towards learning and help pupils see links between learning inside and outside school.
34. Low literacy and numeracy skills make it difficult for many pupils to cope with the demands of the curriculum when they move into Year 3. Similarly, many pupils are not well prepared to meet the demands of a secondary curriculum when they leave at the end of Year 6, because of low standards. The good links between the school and the on-site pre-school group means that visits are arranged between them and the children have the opportunity to play together. The majority of children attend the pre-school group and so they are familiar with the school environment when they enter the Reception class. The



Foundation Stage co-ordinator also arranges home visits to ease the introduction for children into full-time school.

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

The school provides a generally safe, caring and healthy environment for pupils. It provides satisfactory advice, support and guidance for the pupils and makes appropriate arrangements to involve them in its work and development.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Relationships between pupils and adults within the school are very good.
- Arrangements for the induction of new pupils are good.
- Assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress are significant weaknesses in the school.

### **Commentary**

35. Some support staff are currently undergoing training, which includes child protection guidance, but there is a need to update the documentation provided to all staff as well as their training. Staff understand how the policy for child protection should be implemented if necessary and the school closely monitors situations which may give rise to concerns. There are good procedures and practices for the medical needs of pupils.
36. Pupils work in a safe and healthy environment. However, some deficiencies were noted during the inspection and the school has been made aware of these. Risk assessments are carried out prior to any external events. The inclusion of all pupils with SEN is good. In lessons observed, teachers and teachers' assistants provided good or very good support for these pupils, ensuring that they played a full part in all activities. All pupils are encouraged to take part in the school's clubs and other extra-curricular activities. Signing is provided for the deaf pupils in order to include them in lessons and in clubs.
37. Pupils report very good relationships with all adults within the school and would feel confident to approach them regarding any matters which were troubling them. They also feel that staff help them with their learning. Circle time or similar activities give opportunities for pupils to discuss matters that concern them, and the buddy system is effectively used to support younger pupils and those pupils who join the school at later times. The breakfast club is well attended and a very good feature of the school, which greatly assists the personal development of those who participate. Pupils are set targets in their annual reports for some of their work and their personal development.
38. The school has good induction arrangements for new pupils, which greatly reduce any potential trauma for the child and assist with their early learning. There are home visits and potential pupils and their parents visit the school for "taster" days and a talk. During their first weeks at school, pupils' attendance times may be varied in order to assist their settling in. There is very good liaison with the on-site pre-school group and curricular links enable the children who join the school from this group to make a smooth transition. This positively benefits their learning and achievement.
39. The school makes satisfactory provision for seeking and acting upon the views of pupils through the school council, to which pupils are elected. Pupils discuss the proceedings and outcomes of council meetings during some of their circle time sessions and, as a

result, largely feel that their views are listened to. Pupils have also been consulted about the plans for the new school building project.

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

Parents' links with the school are satisfactory. Links with the community and other schools are also satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Reports to parents about pupils' progress are unsatisfactory.
- Inconsistencies in setting homework limit the extent to which parents can promote pupils' learning at home.

### **Commentary**

40. The quality of the written annual reports on pupils is unsatisfactory. Targets for future development in core subjects and personal development, and advice as to how parents could help their child's progress, are often not very specific and sometimes written in language that is not readily comprehensible. There are also deficiencies in, or omissions from, other statutory documents such as the school prospectus and the annual report by governors; however these do not adversely affect pupils' achievement or the standards that they reach.
41. The use of homework to extend pupils' learning at home is unsatisfactory. Provision of homework is inconsistent and parents say that it is not always linked to what pupils have been doing in the classroom. This is an area in which improvements are being made but as yet they have not had time to impact on pupils' learning and achievement.
42. Parents receive frequent and informative newsletters and are provided at the start of each term with information regarding curriculum and topic work and assisting their child with homework. Contact books have recently been introduced for pupils in the infants as a means of communication between home and school and a record of home reading. This is intended to involve parents more closely with pupils' learning. The school intends to extend this shortly to pupils in the junior classes.
43. Parent consultation evenings are held each term. These meetings are well attended and provide parents with good opportunities to discuss their child's progress. The school makes a strong effort to see all parents, including providing flexible timing arrangements and contacting parents who do not attend.
44. The school has satisfactory links with the local community. Some local organisations, such as a karate club and a church group, use the school's facilities. As part of the provision for pupils' personal development and better learning, the emergency services visit the school and pupils make external visits to local places of worship for different faiths and other locations of interest such as Rochester Museum. Two local senior citizens come into school to help pupils with their reading.
45. Although pupils' standards do not prepare them well for the next step in their education, the school has satisfactory arrangements for the transfer of pupils into secondary education and these help pupils to settle in quickly. Pupils and parents are given group

and individual advice regarding the 11+ examination and the increased expectations as to the workload and commitment of pupils in Year 6. Pupils visit prospective schools and in turn receive visits from secondary teachers.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Overall, leadership and management are good. Leadership demonstrates clarity of vision and effective inspiration from the top. Management is satisfactory overall, and is presently concerned with team building key players to underpin a drive to raise standards. Governance is satisfactory, but there are some minor breaches in fulfilling all statutory requirements. A high turnover of staff and movement of pupils are barriers to raising achievement.

### **MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

- The leadership of the acting headteacher is good.
- The headteacher's vision, sense of purpose and high aspirations are very strong.
- Leadership of curriculum and teaching by the headteacher is good for co-ordinators. The deployment and workload of staff is well managed.
- The governors are providing effective support to help shape the vision and direction of the school, particularly in dealing with problems of recruitment and retention.
- There is good financial management.

### **COMMENTARY**

46. The assistant headteacher was placed at St Mary's to turn the school around. Her leadership qualities are enabling her to do just that. Both governors and senior staff speak of the creation of a very good learning environment, full of 'calm and tranquillity' that caught pupils' interest and imagination, 'in a way never seen before'. This headteacher's vision, sense of purpose and high aspirations are very strong. For example, she feels it not unreasonable to suppose that three-quarters of Year 6 pupils should reach the required standard in their Standard Assessment Tests in 2005.
47. The acting headteacher's leadership of the curriculum and teaching is effective and inspirational. For example, subject co-ordinators have received specific training, and subsequently made presentations to the governors' curriculum committee. The headteacher has developed the co-ordination of each key stage, and these have an overview of the curriculum, monitoring and reporting results to the headteacher. Changes of staff have continued to make things difficult in terms of consistency. They stress the change of focus in September. The new acting headteacher has made an effective start, has provided clear educational direction and quickly established efficient management systems to tackle and sustain improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. For example, her setting up of a strong senior management team (the leadership team), including the teacher in charge of the total communication unit, has substantial influence for improvement. The co-option of key stage co-ordinators, already noted above, is strongly beneficial, leading to the effective management of the school, addressing problems of recruitment and retention, and is only now approaching anything resembling stability.
48. The governors are providing effective support to help shape the vision and direction of the school, particularly in dealing with the problems of recruitment and retention. The

governing body provides a positive and supportive relationship to senior management, and to the whole school. All statutory duties are fulfilled with the exception of including all the required information in the prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents. The governing body has been revitalised and is now much stronger, with a high standard of reporting at meetings. The governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The very capable chair of governors has quickly built a good working relationship with the acting headteacher, to the extent that she feels he can 'challenge her'. Between them, they are hammering out a new policy for governors' visits, to make them more focused and to allow linking to the school development plan. For example, governors will first meet the headteacher, gather evidence and then meet the co-ordinator. The visit report will feed directly to the leadership team.

49. There is good financial management. Financial planning is effective in helping the school achieve educational priorities. For example, it has supported the further inclusion of deaf pupils, maintaining levels of staffing to allow each classroom to have a signing colleague side by side with the teacher. Thus, pupils are benefiting from wisely targeted spending. Specific grants, such as those for pupils with SEN, and those for pupils with hearing disabilities, are effectively deployed. For example, the provision for pupils with SEN is good and has a beneficial impact on these pupils' progress and standards. Governors seek to ensure that the school implements the principles of best value in its purchasing decisions to further the opportunities open to pupils. Thus, resources are effectively used.
50. In all areas of the school's work, in such a short time, the acting headteacher has built a tangible sense of teamwork. Her strong vision to move the school forward is based on the very good relationships, educational improvement and an inclusive, caring ethos, which means that the school now demonstrates a strong capacity to improve even further. Taking into account the satisfactory teaching, the good attitudes and behaviour of pupils, the low standards in literacy and numeracy, and the unit cost per pupil, the school gives unsatisfactory value for money.

***Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004***

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	798,643	Balance from previous year	119,762
Total expenditure	831,799	Balance carried forward to the next year	86,606
Expenditure per pupil	5,984		

Sources of data:

Final LEA accounting reports March 2004

Initial budget 2004/05 approved by Governing Body

**OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES**

**The Unit for deaf pupils**

The provision made for the deaf pupils is very good and the progress that pupils make is also very good. The specialist provision for deaf pupils is a strength of the school. Pupils make very good progress in relation to their special educational needs.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- All deaf pupils are fully included in the life of the school.
- Teaching is very good overall with some excellent practice.
- Teaching assistant support is of a high standard.

## Commentary

51. The school receives delegated funding from the LEA for 18 pupils in the unit. There are 11 pupils at present. The provision is very well led and managed by the teacher in charge. She has a clear sense of direction which enables continual improvement of the unit. For example, she is trialling the inclusion of hearing pupils in unit lessons in order to enrich the learning experiences of all pupils. She has developed a wide range of policies which are implemented well to ensure the full inclusion for the deaf pupils and high standards of support. The high standard of display and resources enhance the learning of all pupils throughout the school.
52. The teacher in charge is a member of the school leadership team and the current headteacher places a high value on her skills. The leadership team plans to apply the good practice within the unit across the school, for example, the use of activity-based learning. Issues about the inclusion of deaf pupils and associated issues are discussed regularly at staff meetings. The teacher in charge is involved in the new school development project and has submitted plans for the incorporation of audiological provision and specialist deaf social work in the new build scheme.
53. Teaching in the unit is very good. Excellent practice was observed when Year 2 deaf pupils were required to follow simple directions from text. They were able to make a paper hat and a jam sandwich. Pupils were confident and independent learners due to the sensitive support of unit staff. When a group of pupils were unable to complete making the paper hat, the adults did not intervene but other pupils were invited to assist. Year 6 pupils were also able to use thesauri independently to look up alternative words. There is excellent use of the range of ICT equipment available. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, photographs of the pupils' activities were taken by a digital camera and instantly printed so that they are available to support pupils' learning. A video camera was also used so that pupils could see each other during a drama activity. They were then able to suggest improvements to their performance. Teachers' planning shows high levels of differentiation and a wide range of practical activities to support learning.
54. When deaf pupils are in mainstream lessons, the high quality of support offered does not detract from the pace of the lessons and does not affect the class teachers' delivery. The signing ability of the unit staff is very good. Hearing pupils and staff have regular opportunities to practice signing which create full inclusion in the life of the school. New staff are inducted well by unit staff. A comprehensive scheme of work on deaf awareness has been produced to enable this process.
55. The teacher in charge has developed strong links with the parents of deaf pupils and all annual reviews are attended by parents. The parents of prospective pupils are invited to visit. After-school signing classes are available to parents. Good use is made of the home-school books for deaf pupils, to keep parents informed of their child's progress.
56. There are good links with external services. For example, the speech and language therapist liaises closely with unit staff and attends annual review meetings. Liaison with the LEA pre-school service, which works with pupils who may enter the unit, and secondary units to where the pupils transfer, is satisfactory. There are strong links with the health services. For example, the teacher in charge attends the local audiology panel meetings which reviews pupils' audiological needs.

## **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**.

- Good teaching ensures that children achieve well, particularly in developing personal skills and speaking and listening skills.
- Good teamwork between the Foundation Stage co-ordinator and teaching assistant ensures that children settle into school and are secure and happy.
- There is good support for children who have special educational needs.
- The detailed information recorded about each child's learning is not yet used sufficiently well to set short-term personal targets and to plan for the next step in all areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum.
- Every opportunity is taken to develop children's skills and knowledge through lots of short activities that engage their interest.
- The leadership and management of the Foundation Stage is satisfactory.
- There are weaknesses in the use of assessment information about children's progress.

### **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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

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

- The children are learning to work with others and becoming self-confident and independent.
- Firm boundaries are set for appropriate behaviour.
- Relationships between adults and children are good.

### **COMMENTARY**

57. At the time of the inspection there were 11 children in the Reception class, with another group planned to join in January. This small number means that every child receives lots of individual attention, which helps them settle and feel secure. Good links with the on-site Nursery and home visits help to prepare children for full time school.
58. Most of the children in the class have poor personal and social skills when they start school. Approximately a quarter of the group cannot sit on the carpet and listen to the teacher for more than a few minutes without becoming bored and crawling away. Good teaching ensures that poor behaviour is dealt with consistently, with the class teacher and teaching assistant using the same strategies to manage behaviour. Children receive lots of praise for good behaviour and good effort, so they are already learning to do what is expected in school.
59. Many cannot yet play co-operatively sharing toys and equipment, but they enjoy playing alongside one another. Both the class teacher and teaching assistant spend time supervising play in small groups, teaching the children how to take turns and share. The classroom is well organised to encourage the development of independence and self-

confidence with lots of equipment easily accessible to children, such as writing materials, low-level book storage and other equipment so that children can access it easily during “plan, do and review” time. Simple routines have been established to support independence. For example, children know how to place their name on the chart to signal that they have left the classroom to go to the toilet and they take turns taking the registers to the office after registration. Children are developing positive attitudes towards learning because of this good teaching and they achieve well. Standards, however, remain well below expectations by the time children join Year 1.

## **COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Communication, language and literacy skills are generally below or well below the levels expected nationally.
- Good teaching ensures that children are able to achieve well.
- Children enjoy literacy lessons because they are fun.

### **Commentary**

60. Good teaching provides opportunities throughout the day for the adults to engage children in discussion and develop their vocabulary. For example, in a literacy lesson based on the story of Red Riding Hood, the children were encouraged to discuss with a partner what they might give to their grandma and this led to the realisation that there are lots of different names for a grandmother. Both the class teacher and the teaching assistant question the children constantly, encouraging longer statements and clear pronunciation so they are beginning to build up a wider vocabulary based on their experiences. The class teacher and teaching assistant model good listening and the children are praised and encouraged to be good listeners. Most children are able to listen to stories with increasing attention but approximately one-fifth are only able to listen when the conversation interests them. Only one-fifth of the children can sustain attentive listening, responding to what they have heard by relevant comments and questions. Most children have poor or very poor language for thinking. The use of an adjacent room for role-play, currently a pretend school with an ‘office’ and ‘kitchen’, provides the stimulus for children to use talk for pretend situations.
61. Children enjoy simple rhymes and songs and show interest in illustrations in the big books used to teach reading. The children know that information can be retrieved from books and computers. They have lots of opportunities to look at books and use the computer. During the inspection, a good reading lesson was observed where the teacher used lots of strategies to keep the children’s interest and make learning fun and they were able to identify the initial sounds of words through simple games. The most able children are beginning to recognise the shape of letters and associate it with the sound.
62. Good teaching means that all the children understand that writing is used as a means of communication, and they are given satisfactory opportunities to handle a range of writing materials. Most children make meaningless random marks with pencils and crayons and none of the children are yet forming recognisable letters. The most able pupils already hold a pencil correctly, ascribe meaning to marks and are able to make vertical and

circular movements. By the time that they join Year 1, pupils have not reached the level expected nationally.

## **MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Provision for mathematical development is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good teaching provides opportunities for children to develop counting skills throughout the day as well as during numeracy lessons.
- Mathematical skills and knowledge are generally below or well below the levels expected nationally.

### **Commentary**

63. Every opportunity is taken to encourage children to count and develop mathematical vocabulary. For example, during registration the children were asked to count the number of girls present and the number of boys present, and the concept of “more than” was reinforced. During distribution of plates and biscuits, the class teacher introduced questions about how many more were needed, so that the children are becoming more aware of number in everyday life.
64. Later, during the numeracy lesson, the interest of the children was maintained by the use of frog masks during a counting song. Good partnership between the class teacher and teaching assistant helped to maintain a brisk pace and variety for children whose attention span is very short. The children made good progress in their ability to count up to and back from five. The children then carried out an individual recording activity to “add one more” to a group of objects by drawing an extra object on a work sheet. The teacher and the teaching assistant offered good support to the less able and those with special educational needs, helping them achieve this task. The most able children were given a different sheet with counting up to ten. Only one-fifth of the children could record using recognisable numerals. Although children achieve well, standards are well below expectations by the time they join Year 1.

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

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children are provided with good opportunities to explore and investigate through lots of interesting first-hand experiences.
- Adults provide good support and encouragement for children to develop their skills of observation and critical thinking.

### **Commentary**



65. Most children enter the Reception class with limited experiences and their level of knowledge and understanding about the world is below that normally found. Children are given good opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of the world through guided play as well as through more formal sessions where the teacher gives instruction, building on the children's experience. For example, the class teacher gave good instruction about Harvest during a circle time, which included a "thank you" song and a discussion with the children about the importance of saying thank you. A small group of children with special educational needs listened well to the teaching assistant who reinforced the learning with them.
66. Photographic records demonstrate the good opportunities provided throughout the year in the Reception class for children to widen their experiences and knowledge by a good range of first-hand experiences such as baking and growing seeds as well as off-site visits to places of interest in the local environment. These trips are well supported by parent volunteer helpers. Overall, the achievement of children is good but when they enter Year 1, standards are well below expectations for their age.

## **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Provision in physical development is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children have good opportunities to develop confidence and control in handling equipment, tools, large toys and construction toys, which help develop manipulative skills.
- Good direct teaching helps children develop skills in using tools such as pencils and scissors.
- The majority of children have poor fine motor skills when they enter the Reception class.

### **Commentary**

67. Good planning and teaching mean that within the classroom and throughout the day, children have lots of opportunities to handle tools, equipment and toys, developing their manipulative skills. For example, during an activity involving cutting card, plastic, string and paper to make glasses and telephones for grandma in the Red Riding Hood story, the children became increasingly confident and skilful in using scissors and threading string as the class teacher and teaching assistant showed them how to hold and use the scissors. There was a shared sense of achievement when one child succeeded after struggling for several minutes to thread string through a hole. The children are expected to dress themselves, and learn quickly to cope with buttons and zips. The regular planned use of the outdoor play area means that they are able to develop physical skills such as balance and control through running, climbing and playing with trikes and large scale construction toys. In the PE lesson observed, the children's skills in bouncing and catching balls were below national expectations. Overall standards of physical development are well below expectations for their age as children enter Year 1, in spite of them achieving well.

## **CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Provision in creative development is **good**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children are given opportunities to experiment with a range of materials and activities through creative play.
- There is no designated space for dressing-up and role-play within the classroom to stimulate pretend play.

## **Commentary**

68. Good planning and good organisation of the classroom space mean that children are able to experiment with materials such as sand and water, paint and construction toys to develop their imagination and creativity. Good teaching means that lots of activities are designed to develop a wide range of skills. For example, the teacher used the Red Riding Hood story as a basis to extend the children's imaginative thinking as they were invited to suggest items they would take to grandma, and the more able children were able to enter into this idea and made suggestions such as sweets and flowers. An adjacent room is used for role-play but its spontaneous use is limited whilst the children's independence is being established during their first half term at school. Good use is made of simple songs and rhymes and the children join in with enthusiasm. They are rapidly building up a repertoire of songs. Most of the children enjoy playing alongside others but there is little interaction between them. A significant number of children still use body language and facial expression to indicate frustration. Displays in the classroom and in their books of children's drawing and painting shows that most children are at an early stage of using shapes to represent objects and in differentiating between colours. The more able children can describe what they are trying to do when playing with small construction toys such as sticklebricks and they use them to create imaginary objects such as helicopters and space ships. By the time that they join Year 1, children have achieved well but their standards are still well below expectations for their age.

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

### **ENGLISH**

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The leadership and management of English have been dramatically improved and are now well supported by the leadership of the school.
- The monitoring of teaching is now strong and has led to improvements in teaching.
- Assessment, especially marking, use of targets and tracking of pupils' progress, remains unsatisfactory.
- The development of basic skills across other subjects is underdeveloped.
- Pupils' learning is well supported by additional adults in lessons.
- The amount of work produced is insufficient in the time allowed and there are still weaknesses in handwriting and presentation.

## Commentary

69. Standards in English were well below average in reading and writing in the unconfirmed 2004 National Curriculum tests for pupils in Years 2 and 6. Standards in speaking and listening across the school are below average. Achievement is only just satisfactory and the improvements seen over time have not been maintained this year. The school is very disappointed with the results. The interventions put in place by the English subject leader and other senior managers have not been able to move the school on in the way and at the rate intended.
70. Pupils enter the school with very low attainment in communication, language and literacy and make satisfactory progress to reach below average standards by the time they leave the school. Pupils with special educational needs achieve at a similar rate. This is because they are effectively supported by additional adults in lessons. Work is generally matched to individual pupils' needs so that they are able to take full part in learning at their own level. There was no evidence in lessons of any differences in achievement between boys and girls.
71. Strong leadership of English and a commitment to improve through ongoing monitoring have brought about the good teaching in Year 1 which is building successfully on the progress pupils make in the Foundation Stage. The unsatisfactory teaching in the infants is currently a barrier to pupils making the necessary progress to achieve standards expected nationally. The school is aware of this and already has an effective support programme in place to bring about improvement.
72. During the inspection, teaching in the juniors was satisfactory. The school recognises that this is not sufficient to raise standards. However, from looking at last year's pupils' work, where teaching and learning were clearly unsatisfactory, there is clear evidence of improvement. This is the result of the new leadership team's dynamic approach to bringing about change and provides strong and convincing evidence of the school's capacity and commitment to improve. Teachers' use of questioning is developing appropriately and some are using questions expertly to support lower ability pupils so that they achieve successfully. In the best lessons more able pupils are challenged to provide more detailed responses and use more exciting language. As a result, most pupils are becoming more confident and achieve satisfactorily in spite of their limited vocabulary.
73. Pupils struggle with their writing and few admit to liking it. Most writing sessions are well structured so that learning is effectively supported and resources are used well. In lessons, most pupils make satisfactory progress during taught elements of lessons but the pace slows dramatically as they begin to write, and outcomes from lessons are seriously limited. The development of writing across the school and in other subjects is not yet satisfactory. This leaves teachers in Year 6 too much ground to cover in order for pupils to achieve average standards in writing by the end of Year 6.
74. Assessment procedures in English are not yet fully developed. Teachers are not all fully aware of pupils' attainment levels or of pupils who are making insufficient progress. This is not enabling teachers to focus strongly on appropriate targets which lead to pupils making good progress and achieving well. Some assessment information has been used well to set pupil targets in reading and writing for all pupils. However, pupils' knowledge of their targets is not consistent. Insufficient use of these in lessons means that pupils do not have real understanding of their learning or know how they can improve. An agreed approach to marking has been implemented. All marking is consistently positive and there is evidence in pupils'

books that some teachers are providing clear information on how well pupils are performing and what they have to do to improve. However, this is not consistent practice. Some teachers use basic assessment effectively at the end of sessions to establish how well pupils consider they are doing, for example by a show of hands. Again, this is not consistent practice so that pupils are not constantly being encouraged to think about how they can improve. Pupils' knowledge of their own learning is therefore not satisfactory.

75. There has been only satisfactory improvement on key issues identified at the last inspection and standards in English have gone down this year. It has been an uphill struggle to achieve the improvements in teaching seen during the inspection. High staff turnover has undermined progress made and plans have to be revisited with new and often inexperienced staff. The manager for English demonstrates strong leadership skills through her clear understanding of what needs to be done in order to bring about change and how to go about it. Her management file shows clear thinking through her action plans, monitoring of outcomes and identification of further actions required. She has demonstrated clearly through actions already taken and through those planned, both the commitment and the ability to move the school forward. Other staff are equally committed to achieving this with her. She is well supported in this by the newly appointed headteacher and this is beginning to impact on pupils' achievement.

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

Pupils' use of basic literacy skills in other subjects is not yet fully developed. The school is aware that the development of writing skills is not yet being fully addressed. Planned opportunities to practise their writing skills are not yet maximised. The school is providing good development of speaking and listening in most lessons and teachers' planning identifies appropriate links wherever possible. The use of ICT in English is limited.

### **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

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

- Standards are below average, but are improving.
- Work does not always match the abilities of individual or groups of pupils.
- The marking of pupils' work is inconsistent.
- The subject leader is very well placed to develop mathematics in the school.

#### **Commentary**

76. National tests in 2003 showed that the school results were well below the national average at the end of Years 2 and 6. When compared to the results of similar schools, these results were well below average in Year 2 and below average in Year 6. The unconfirmed results of the 2004 tests show little improvement. The use of the National Numeracy Strategy ensures that pupils' knowledge and understanding are built on year by year and, by Year 6, some pupils have an understanding of working with large numbers. They work with fractions and decimals and use data-handling in other curriculum areas as well as mathematics. All areas of the National Curriculum are covered, but pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to study two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes in enough depth. Strategies are in place to rectify this.
77. From looking at pupils' past work, it is clear that all pupils have made insufficient progress and their achievement has not been as good as it should be. New strategies

are raising pupils' awareness of how they learn and there is a new ethos of striving for higher standards. The school uses specific National Numeracy Strategy techniques to support pupils with special educational needs and those experiencing difficulties. Booster classes in Year 6 and Springboard mathematics in younger classes are now planned, with the intention of raising pupils' achievement and the standards that they reach. Inspection evidence shows that standards in both Years 2 and 6 are now below average and improving slowly. Pupils' achievement is now satisfactory in lessons.

78. There is now a consistent approach to mathematics teaching and teaching overall is satisfactory. Almost all teachers have good mathematical knowledge and teach with enthusiasm, emphasising mathematical language. There is little time wasted during lessons and all teachers use clear strategies to help pupils understand the focus for learning. This is referred to during the lesson and often discussed at the end, and promotes the learning and achievement of pupils in lessons well. Every lesson starts with a 'mental mathematics' session, which quickly helps pupils to focus and start thinking mathematically. Pupils enjoy the wide variety of activities and recording they do. These keep them interested and help their learning, as well as giving teachers opportunities to assess what the pupils know and understand. They encourage pupils to discuss their mathematics and how they 'work things out'. Challenging questions and work which is matched to the ability of individual pupils results in them making good progress in current lessons. However, from looking at pupils' past work, tasks have not always been matched to pupils' ability and this means that some pupils have not been engaged in learning and have not made satisfactory progress. This has slowed their rate of learning and achievement.
79. Pupils are unclear about how well they are doing, and looking at their past work with previous teachers showed that there was little marking of work which could help pupils understand how they could improve and develop their work. This is a missed opportunity to promote good learning and achievement.
80. The new mathematics co-ordinator has developed very good ideas and strategies for improving pupils' performance. This is strongly supported by the headteacher and other colleagues. The school now has good capacity to improve its performance in mathematics.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

81. Information and communication technology provides many opportunities for links between mathematics and other subjects, using data as well as shape, area and measures. The skills and knowledge of mathematics are used in a wide variety of real-life situations, helping to consolidate learning. Mathematics is used to support design and technology, science and art. Mathematics vocabulary is used in other areas and reinforced whenever possible. In a Year 4 design and technology lesson, pupils made chairs and discussed the different properties of shapes used to make their chairs stand up. This has the effect of consolidating their learning in several subjects and promotes their achievement.

## **SCIENCE**

The provision for science is **unsatisfactory**.

### **MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

- Standards in the infants have fallen since the last inspection, so that standards throughout the school are below national expectations.
- The quality of teaching and learning is improving.
- The recent focus on practical activities helps pupils to develop investigative skills.
- The subject co-ordinator's planning does not develop the use of ICT sufficiently to support scientific investigation.

### **COMMENTARY**

82. Standards are below national expectations throughout the school. Pupils do not make enough progress, as a consequence, and their achievement is unsatisfactory.
83. From looking at pupils' past work, it can be said that teaching and learning have been unsatisfactory throughout the school because work often did not take into account the pupils' low abilities, especially in reading and writing. In lessons seen during the inspection, however, planning in a Year 2 lesson showed graded tasks well suited to pupils' abilities when investigating materials. Similarly, in a Year 6 lesson, tasks and support were well matched to pupils' needs, developing opportunities for experiments in providing food, water and warmth to encourage seed germination.
84. The recent focus on practical activities helps pupils to sustain concentration in lessons. They are interested in developing investigations, but in most of the work seen, pupils' written work is often untidy and the poor presentation detracts from the quality of their investigations. For example, pupils in Year 2 examine broken circuits to find out why they do not work. In Year 4, pupils investigate the circumference of the human skull to determine if it increases as a person grows. Pupils in Year 5 test soluble substances to see if they disappear in water. In all of this work, teachers do not expect work to be finished; they accept poor presentation and basic skills are not developed through science.
85. The subject co-ordinator's planning does not develop the use of ICT sufficiently to support scientific investigations. She has supported colleagues by levelling work and promoted the subject in staff meetings. The school grounds provide a rich resource for science, and pupils in Year 6 were observed after a bug hunt, some with specimens and others with observational drawings. This lesson, like all others, is fully inclusive. A deaf pupil described finding her specimens at the base of a tree. These pupils are well supported, for example by the use of a radio microphone to ensure their fullest access to the lessons. The subject co-ordinator is actively considering how to effectively meet the needs of pupils with poor literacy skills, for example the provision of writing frames on the computer to use in recording experiments.
86. The strong teaching seen during the inspection shows distinct improvement in science provision. This leads to the judgement that there is good capacity to rapidly improve further all aspects of the subject.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

**THE PROVISION FOR ICT IS SATISFACTORY.**

### **MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

- ICT is insufficiently used in classrooms.
- Good support for pupils with SEN, including those pupils with hearing disabilities.
- The subject co-ordinator provides good leadership and management.
- The resources are good and support the teaching well.

### **COMMENTARY**

87. By the end of Year 2, standards in ICT are below national expectations. Pupils are not given enough opportunities to use the computers in classes, so they experience difficulties using a moving electronic toy, and then the screen turtle. The end of Year 6 also finds standards below national expectations. There is limited evidence of their work in the subject, thus their progress is unsatisfactory. In science, a higher-attaining pupil in Year 4 designed a poster on the computer to illustrate his scientific research. The opportunity to spend this time actually researching his science using the Internet was missed, but the use of the Internet is a recent development. Pupils use the computers to word-process, illustrate and print some of their work. This has a positive impact on their learning and achievement.
88. The teaching of ICT is satisfactory. There is good support for pupils with SEN, and for those pupils with hearing disabilities, when teachers are working side by side with signing colleagues. However, there are limited opportunities provided for pupils to practise their skills through the use of the ICT suite. All pupils positively enjoy working with computers.
89. The leadership and management of ICT is good. The subject co-ordinator's leadership is already having a good effect on the way ICT is taught and managed, but she has been in post only a short while. She gives in-house training for staff, for example in the use of the digital camera and the interactive whiteboard. Resources are good and sufficient to deliver the programmes of study. Accommodation is satisfactory, but would be improved if computer bays in classrooms were well labelled to ensure access. Pupils' progress is assessed and recorded using an appropriate checklist.
90. Planning is coherent with a clear vision for development over the next four years. The co-ordinator has good capacity for rapid improvement in all aspects of the subject.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION ACROSS THE CURRICULUM**

91. ICT is used satisfactorily to support pupils' writing; for example, Year 6 pupils write to the project manager of the new school building to explain the requirements for deaf pupils. In science, Year 6 pupils use the Internet to search for plants and flowers. In Year 3 in geography, pupils use an Internet website to locate the school by postcode and pinpoint the school on the resultant map. No other examples were found. There is limited use of ICT across the wider curriculum, so pupils are denied opportunities to practise their skills. This picture is already changing. The co-ordinator is new and brimming with ideas for development.

## **HUMANITIES**

Religious education and history were sampled. Geography was inspected in full.

### **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

92. Because of timetabling, only two religious education (RE) lessons were observed during this inspection and therefore an overall judgement on provision cannot be made.
93. Judging from lessons observed and from the scrutiny of pupils' work from this term and the previous year, standards remain unsatisfactory and below the expectations of the locally-agreed syllabus, as they were at the last inspection.
94. Scrutiny of planning documentation indicates an improvement since the last inspection because there is now a structure shared with all staff for teaching the agreed syllabus in every year group. However, the variable amount of work in pupils' books during the past year indicates some inconsistencies in the use of the agreed syllabus and the amount of RE taught. Pupils in Years 1 to 6 have an insecure knowledge and understanding of the basic principles and traditions of both the Christian faith and other world religions. The slow rate of work and poor writing skills of many pupils are reflected in the low standards evident in RE books. Assessment is not used, either to record pupils' levels of attainment in RE or to plan the next step in learning for particular groups of pupils.
95. The school is well resourced with religious artefacts and books. For example, in one lesson observed, the pupils were able to look at and handle items relating to the Sikh religion. This raised their level of interest and potential for learning. Insufficient use has been made of local religious communities and places of worship to enhance the teaching of RE.
96. The recently-appointed subject co-ordinator is providing satisfactory subject leadership. She has identified weaknesses and has begun to address them. For example, she has



monitored a number of RE lessons and provided feedback to teachers to help them understand the agreed syllabus and to plan appropriate lesson activities. This is intended to raise the quality of teaching and thus raise standards.

## **History**

97. It was not possible to make an overall judgement of provision, standards or achievement in history, but the sample of work seen was unsatisfactory.
98. From looking at pupils' past work, indicators are that teaching is unsatisfactory. Teachers did not expect work to be finished; they accepted poor presentation, and basic skills were not developed through history. In Year 2, pupils have studied the life and work of Florence Nightingale, and sequenced the events leading to the Great Fire of London in 1666. In Year 6, pupils study the Victorians, looking at differences between the poor and rich families. The curriculum is enhanced through visits, as when Year 2 visited Rochester Castle, or when Year 6 visited the Guildhall Museum in London. There is no evidence of the use of ICT in history. The co-ordinator is new in post and has already brought good organisation and some enthusiasm to the subject, indicating a strong capacity to improve.

## **Geography**

THE PROVISION FOR GEOGRAPHY IS **UNSATISFACTORY**.

### **MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

- The curriculum is supported by visits and visitors.
- The teaching of geography is unsatisfactory.
- The co-ordinator is fairly new in post, well organised and enthusiastic, indicating a strong capacity for improvement.

### **COMMENTARY**

99. By the end of Year 2, standards in geography are below expectations for pupils of this age. Pupils recognise features of places when comparing Egypt with Strood. In Year 2, pupils draw maps of the Island of Struay. Whilst the school plans to cover the statutory curriculum, pupils' experiences lack depth and they should be achieving higher standards. By the end of Year 6, standards in geography remain below expectations. Pupils consolidate their knowledge and understanding of places through a study of coastlines. In Year 6, pupils consider the environmental effects of the proposed new school to be built on this site. After a close inspection of the grounds, pupils offer relevant ideas and explanations. Progress for most pupils is hampered by low levels of literacy, so that pupils have difficulty recording work. Pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory throughout the school.
100. Good opportunities for pupils' first-hand experience exist, for example when Year 6 pupils interviewed the local travel agent when studying holidays in a mountainous area, or the visit to Rye when studying coastlines. Pupils also make visits locally, for example when

pupils in Year 3 viewed local terraced houses and street furniture. Good use is made of the school grounds.

101. The teaching of geography is unsatisfactory. Not enough account is taken of the low levels of pupils' literacy, so that in discussions pupils show limited fluency and oral skills. In the work seen, teachers do not expect work to be finished; they accept poor presentation and basic skills are not developed through geography.
102. The co-ordinator is fairly new in post. She is well organised and enthusiastic. Planning is coherent and comprehensive, enabling satisfactory arrangements for the assessment of pupils' work. The contribution of ICT is improving, as pupils already use the Internet to locate street maps of the area and pinpoint the school using its postcode. This indicates a strong capacity for improvement of the subject.

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

Art and design, design and technology and physical education were sampled. Music was inspected in full.

### **Art and design and Design and technology**

103. Only one lesson was seen in **art and design** so it is not possible to make secure judgements on standards, provision or the quality of teaching.
104. Based on limited work seen, pupils' creative skills are being appropriately developed. There are only a few bright art and design displays around the school and these indicate that teachers plan a satisfactory variety of activities and that pupils are encouraged to use an appropriate range of media. Basic skills in colour-mixing appear to be satisfactorily taught when paintings include a range of primary and secondary colours and sound use of tones to enhance their work. Basic skills in painting are being taught, when work shows careful application of paint with well-chosen colour schemes. Use of sketchbooks is developing and work is satisfactorily presented, often with the date and learning objective. Where work is marked, all comments are positive with some marking referring to learning objectives. There has been satisfactory progress on the key issue identified at the last inspection. Art and design is now timetabled regularly and skills are taught more systematically. No lessons were seen in **design and technology**. So early in the year, there is very little evidence to show pupils' skills in designing or making. The school's planning shows that the full range of activities required by the national curriculum are planned to be taught.

### **Physical education**

105. Only two lessons were seen in physical education. Whilst the teaching in both lessons was good, it is not possible to make a firm judgement about provision. Inspectors looked at teachers' planning and spoke to pupils about what they had learnt in physical education.
106. Teachers' planning shows that all aspects of physical education are taught. Pupils value and enjoy their physical experiences. There is a good range of sporting clubs and the involvement of Gillingham Football Club in providing an exciting use of pupils' interest in football to extend pupils' mathematical learning is a praiseworthy and worthwhile venture.

## **Music**

Provision for music is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The recent part-time appointment of an excellent music teacher has enabled pupils to make good progress in their knowledge and skills.
- Standards are still below national expectations in all areas of the music programme of study in most classes.
- Pupils respond with good behaviour and enjoyment when lessons are well taught.
- Pupils with hearing impairment are supported very well and achieve well.
- Assessment is not used to identify the next step in pupils' learning.

### **Commentary**

107. The appointment of a skilled music specialist has enhanced the provision of music by providing all classes with lessons on a regular basis. Excellent teaching, with appropriate content, variety and a lively pace, ensures that pupils of all abilities are able to make good progress in these lessons. The result is rapid improvement in standards, with pupils in a lesson observed in Year 4/5 attaining standards in performance of singing and percussion in line with average standards for their age. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory throughout the school.
108. In other lessons observed the quality of teaching was good, with teachers having a satisfactory grasp of subject knowledge and demonstrating good enthusiasm. This meant that pupils joined in eagerly and with enjoyment. Pupils in Year 1 were able to make good progress in their understanding of pulse and rhythm and were able to sing well in unison. Pupils in Year 5/6 enjoyed experimenting with body parts to discover "found" sounds and made good progress in their understanding of time and use of symbols to write music. Their standard of singing was in line with standards for the pupils' ages, although their knowledge about musical terms and composition skills was below average.
109. The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in music lessons is a particular strength. Pupils with emotional behavioural difficulties responded well in the Year 4/5 lesson observed because they were enjoying being actively involved in music-making. The participation of pupils with hearing impairment was very good in both the Year 4/5 and Year 5/6 lessons as they were very well supported by teaching assistants who signed the teacher's instructions for them. The teachers used a range of very good strategies to ensure that the hearing impaired pupils were included throughout the lesson.
110. The music co-ordinator provides satisfactory subject leadership. A new scheme of work has been introduced; she has carried out an audit of resources and made links with the music governor. Appropriate targets to raise standards in the subject have been identified. No time has been available for monitoring music. Assessment sheets have been designed in order to track individual pupils' attainment from Year 1 to Year 6 in music, but these are not yet being used by all teachers.

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

111. Personal, social and health education and citizenship was sampled and some lessons were observed.
112. In this academic year, the school has placed a greater emphasis on this area of learning. Teachers are now planning together and sharing expertise. A more structured approach to the allocation of time for the area of learning is now apparent in class timetables. The policy is due for review this term.
113. The very caring ethos of the school promotes and supports pupils' personal development well. However, pupils lack confidence in their own abilities but staff, particularly teachers' assistants, are sensitive to this and help raise pupils' self-esteem. In lessons observed during the inspection, the standard of teaching was good.
114. There is very good provision for deaf pupils. The inclusive nature of the school ensures that they achieve well. They have additional sessions timetabled in which they explore issues related to deafness. For example, an unknown deaf adult visitor was arranged to meet all the deaf pupils. They were patient and able to turn take when asking questions. They held a very high level of interest and recognised the visitor as a member of the deaf community.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

### *Inspection judgement*

### *Grade*

<b>The overall effectiveness of the school</b>	<b>4</b>
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4
Value for money provided by the school	5

<b>Overall standards achieved</b>	<b>5</b>
Pupils' achievement	5

<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)</b>	<b>3</b>
Attendance	5
Attitudes	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>	<b>4</b>
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	4
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	4
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	4
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	4
The quality of the school's links with the community	4
The school's links with other schools and colleges	4

<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>	<b>4</b>
The governance of the school	4
The leadership of the headteacher	3
The leadership of other key staff	4
The effectiveness of management	4

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