

INSPECTION REPORT

ST NICOLAS' CHURCH OF ENGLAND COMBINED SCHOOL

Taplow, Maidenhead

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110470

Headteacher: Ms R Hancell

Lead inspector: Mrs J Gill

Dates of inspection: 25th - 27th April 2005

Inspection number: 267909

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

© Crown copyright 2005

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Primary
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	4 to 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	213
School address:	Rectory Road Taplow Maidenhead Buckinghamshire
Postcode:	SL6 0ET
Telephone number:	(01628) 603 759
Fax number:	(01628) 669 754
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs M Hawkesworth
Date of previous inspection:	February 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Nicolas CE Combined School is situated in the rural village of Taplow, in Buckinghamshire. Some children come from the local area and through the very strong links with the church; many more are from a much wider area. The data indicates that it is an advantaged area with a high percentage of pupils coming from professional families. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. The few pupils from minority ethnic homes do not require support in learning to speak English. Attainment on entry is broadly average and the majority of children have had some form of pre-school provision. With 213 pupils on roll, the school is around average size; it is popular and oversubscribed and few leave or join the school other than the usual time of admission. Pupils are aged between 4 to 11 years, with a few more boys than girls. The school is a one-form entry school with seven classes from Reception to Year 6. There are 18 children with special educational needs, including three with a statement for their specific needs; this is below the national average. The number of pupils with special educational needs has decreased since the previous inspection because pupils are identified early and additional programmes of work are used effectively to meet the needs of these pupils. The majority demonstrate a range of difficulties with language and reading development and a minority with speech and communication and hearing difficulties. The present headteacher has been in post since September 2003. Recently there have been significant staffing changes but the situation is becoming stable and a new deputy headteacher is due to take up post in September 2005.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
18706	Mrs J Gill	Lead inspector	English Art and design Design and technology English as an additional language
13874	Mrs J Chesterfield	Lay inspector	
14509	Mr P Mann	Team inspector	Science Information and communication technology Music Special educational needs
8710	Mrs J Moore	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages Physical education The Foundation Stage Personal, social and health education
10204	Mr D Vincent	Team inspector	Mathematics Geography History

The inspection contractor was:

Tribal Education
1 - 4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

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

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	4 - 5
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	6 - 9
Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	9 - 14
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	14 - 15
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING AND SUBJECTS	16 - 28
AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE	
SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 AND 2	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	29

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

St Nicolas' Church of England Combined School is a good school. The headteacher is a very good leader and manager and, with her staff, ensures that every child, regardless of ability, is totally integrated into the life of the school. High standards have been maintained and by the time pupils leave the school in Year 6, standards are well above average. Pupils love coming to school; the majority behave well and learn effectively. The school gives good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Pupils achieve well. By Year 6, standards are well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science, information and communication technology (ICT) and music.
- The headteacher is a very good leader and manager and ensures every child is included in all aspects of school life.
- Teaching is good and the work of the learning support assistants significantly contributes to pupils' academic and social achievements.
- The curriculum is good; recent innovative initiatives have significantly enhanced pupils' learning.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good in Years 1 to 6, which contributes to pupils' very good attitudes and good behaviour.
- The partnership with parents is very good and strongly contributes to their children's learning.
- Provision for children's personal and social development is not good enough in Reception.

The school has improved well since the previous inspection in 1999. Only minor weaknesses were identified but these have been tackled well. Since the appointment of the present headteacher, innovative initiatives have given greater breadth to the curriculum, including the improvement of investigative aspects of mathematics and science, introduction of French and work with the National Trust on developing the grounds with the pupils. The effective development of the personal, social and health education programme has significantly contributed to pupils becoming responsible citizens of the future. The use of assessment has been extended well and reports to parents improved.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Pupils achieve satisfactorily in Reception and well from Year 1 to 6. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because provision is good and work is matched well to their

prior ability. There are no significant differences in the performance of girls and boys or of the few pupils from minority ethnic groups. Higher attainers are sufficiently challenged now and achieve well, as is evident from the number who gain the higher levels in the national tests and evidence from the inspection. Children enter Reception with broadly average attainment. By the end of Year 2, pupils are reaching above average standards in reading, writing and mathematics and average standards in science, which is an improvement. By Year 6, pupils are generally performing well above the level expected nationally in English and mathematics and above average in science. Standards in writing have improved across the school, which is contributing to higher standards at the end of Year 6. Improved standards are linked to greater monitoring of teaching and learning by the headteacher, curriculum co-ordinators and local education advisors, good professional development and effective use of performance and tracking data. Too little evidence was gathered to make a firm judgement about standards in design and technology, history, geography, music and physical education. Standards are in line with those expected by the end of Year 2 in ICT and art and design and above average by Year 6.

Pupils' personal development is good overall. Their spiritual, moral and social development is very good and cultural development is good. Behaviour is good and pupils' attitudes to school are very positive. Attendance and punctuality are very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Good teaching and effective support from learning support assistants strongly contribute towards pupils' achievements. Pupils are taught well in Years 1 to 6, including those with special educational needs, higher attainers and the few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Teaching is satisfactory overall in Reception. Assessment procedures are good. Data is analysed effectively and the information used well in planning work or adapting the curriculum. The curriculum is good and innovative and enhanced very well by extra-curricular activities. Resources such as the new interactive whiteboards enhance teaching and learning. Accommodation is good and the grounds are used imaginatively. Provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is good overall. Links with parents are very effective and there are good links with the community, particularly the church, and other schools.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher is a determined and very effective leader who has a very clear vision for the direction of the school. Leadership and management have been developed well, with effective senior and middle management teams now in place. Co-ordinators are empowered to develop their subjects and the overall leadership of key staff is good. Governance of the school is good; governors know the school well and work closely with it and ensure they meet statutory requirements. Finances are well managed and effectively targeted.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The school has a very positive partnership with parents and gives parents every opportunity to play a full part in supporting their children's education. Parents have very favourable views of the school and support it wholeheartedly. The very good quality of written communications means queries are often pre-empted; however, the headteacher and staff are always ready to listen to parents' views and act on their concerns. The pupils' response to the questionnaire showed they are happy with all aspects of the school. The School

Council gives pupils a real opportunity to make their voices heard and influence the way the school is run; they gather the ideas of others and put them forward.

IMPROVEMENT NEEDED

The most important thing the school should do to improve is:

- To improve the provision for children's personal and social development in the Reception class.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning and subjects

Achievement for pupils in Years 1 to 6 is **good**; it is **satisfactory** for children in the Reception class. By Year 6, standards are well above average in English and mathematics, and above average in science, information and communication technology and music.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have remained well above average in English and mathematics in Year 6 and the trend for improvement has been above average over the last five years.
- Standards are rising at the end of Year 2, particularly in science.
- Pupils achieve well from Year 1 to Year 6, including pupils with special educational needs, higher attainers and those few from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Achievement in children's personal, social and emotional area of learning in the Reception class is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
reading	17.4 (16.4)	15.8 (15.7)
writing	16.1 (16.7)	14.6 (14.6)
mathematics	17.5 (16.6)	16.2 (16.3)

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

1. In the 2004 National Curriculum tests for Year 2 pupils, the school's results were well above those of most schools in reading, writing and mathematics and above that of pupils in similar schools. The trend for improvement has been similar to that found nationally. However, teacher assessment in science showed that pupils' standards were below those expected. The school has put into place effective strategies to bring about improvement, which are having a positive impact on teaching, learning and the standards pupils are reaching.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	28.7 (30.9)	26.9 (26.8)
mathematics	30.9 (30.2)	27.0 (26.8)
science	31.5 (30.8)	28.6 (28.6)

There were 28 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

2. Standards that Year 6 pupils in the 2004 tests achieved were well above average in English when compared nationally. The pupils' performance matched that of pupils in similar schools. Standards achieved were very high in mathematics and science when compared nationally and to similar schools. The reasons standards were particularly high in mathematics and science was because the percentage of pupils achieving the higher Level 5 in the tests was well above average. However, in English, although well above average numbers of pupils achieved the expected Level 4 and above, only the

expected number achieved the higher Level 5. The school has put into place whole-school strategies for raising attainment in writing, particularly for higher attainers, which is having an impact on teaching and learning and pupils' ability to use their literacy skills effectively across the curriculum. Since the last inspection, the trend for improvement has been more rapid than that seen nationally.

Inspection findings

3. Children enter Reception with broadly average attainment. Overall, they make satisfactory gains in their learning and by the end of the Reception Year most children are on course to achieve their early learning goals¹. The main weakness is in children's personal, social and emotional development where a significant minority of children have made less progress than expected.
4. All pupils throughout Years 1 to 6 achieve well. This is because the headteacher and teachers make sure that provision for educational inclusion is very good for all pupils. Work is now matched well to the needs of all pupils, including those with higher abilities, as evident in the high percentage of pupils performing at above average standards for their age, for example in writing. This is particularly the case in Years 5 and 6. In each class, a number of pupils experience degrees of learning difficulty, usually characterised by needs in some basic reading skills and, often, a problem in coping with writing. The very good quality of the support provided means that the progress of these pupils is good. Although some pupils continue to be challenged by classroom activities, they develop an increased confidence in participating in school life, speaking to adults and working in groups. They develop well in reading and in their use of language skills and this helps them to complete tasks in other subjects. These pupils make good progress with regard to the targets within their individual educational plans. The very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds do not require additional support in learning to speak English; they achieve well and make equally good progress as their classmates. No significant differences were noted between the performance of boys and girls.
5. Inspection evidence indicates that standards in Year 2 are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. They are now average in science, which is an improvement, following work with the local education authority to raise standards in teaching, learning and standards in the subject. In Year 6, standards are well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science. A greater percentage of pupils are gaining the higher levels now in writing. This follows a whole-school initiative to broaden pupils' opportunities to write across the curriculum and about relevant events, such as 'The Circus Week'. Teachers promote cross-curricular links well in English. Pupils write in different styles, at length and for different purposes in subjects such as history and science. Numeracy links are promoted satisfactorily overall, although there were some good examples of pupils using their numeracy skills in investigations in both design and technology and science. The use of ICT skills to support learning in other subjects is satisfactory. It is stronger in history and literacy and used effectively to access information. However, there are missed opportunities to use ICT to support learning in subjects such as art and design.
6. A judgement about standards could not be made in many foundation subjects², such as in design and technology, history, geography, music and physical education, as too

¹ The name given to the targets that the children are expected to attain by the end of the Reception Year.

² Foundation subjects include art and design, design and technology, geography, history, ICT, music and PE.

little evidence was available during the inspection. In ICT and art and design, standards are average in Year 2 but above average by the time pupils are in Year 6.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance and punctuality are **very good**. Pupils' attitudes are **very good**. Their behaviour is **good**. Overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils love school and what it has to offer them.
- The school sets very high standards for behaviour but there are occasions of inappropriate behaviour by the youngest children.
- Consistently high levels of attendance help pupils learn well.
- The overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.

Commentary

7. Pupils are very positive and receptive in class, particularly as they progress through the school. They are motivated by their lessons and are keen to find out new facts and learn to do new things. They get on with their work without needing to be told. In assemblies, they respond thoughtfully and sensitively, and are confident about playing an active role. Pupils are very enthusiastic about the wide range of other activities on offer out of the classroom, and are proud to represent their school through music or sport.
8. The school has worked hard to help pupils to be aware of the needs of others and to be considerate in their relationships both in class and in the playground. It has been successful in enabling them to behave well and get on well together. The improvement of playground facilities has helped here, with the introduction of better equipment and more quiet areas. The school plans next to improve the organisation of the playground, so that all pupils have better access to space and facilities, and boisterous games are not able to dominate. The headteacher and staff take unacceptable behaviour very seriously and deal with it firmly. There have been no exclusions in the last school year.
9. A strength of the school is its strong commitment to inclusive education, allowing pupils with special educational needs to be well integrated within classrooms. Pupils work with a "buddy" to check on progress and stickers are used to reward progress. This is checked by learning support assistants. There is no stigma attached to receiving this help. The good quality resources provided, good support and the high quality of adult-pupil relationships mean that pupils enjoy their work and, as a result, there is a secure atmosphere for learning for them.
10. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good in Years 1 to 6. It is sound in the Reception class. The Christian ethos permeates all aspects of school life and pupils respect this. There is a very strong emphasis on caring for others. The significance of worship is recognised, and in one act of worship, the spiritual nature of God's love being the light of the world created a sense of a greater being than ourselves. The school is an aesthetically pleasing place in which pupils and their families, of all cultures, nationalities and beliefs, are valued and respected.

11. Pupils' behaviour is good. Occasional instances of inappropriate behaviour by the youngest children occurred, but older pupils understand the rules about behaviour and they do their best to adhere to them. Good behaviour is praised and pupils value their awards, which motivate them. There was no evidence of bullying or racism. Pupils are polite and courteous towards each other and to adults. They are very secure in their understanding of right and wrong and they do their best to play a full role in the life of their school community.
12. There is a keen interest in the School Council and the decisions that it takes. These affect the whole school and pupils are keen and eager to contribute to discussions. The broad range of extra-curricular activities encourages pupils to be interested and involved, especially in music and sport where the school has had significant success. Pupils of all ages, except the very youngest, have a range of individual and class responsibilities which are carried out with pride and pleasure, all of which help the boys and girls to become good citizens in the future.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	3.0	School data	0.2
National data	5.1	National data	0.4

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

13. Pupils rarely stay away from school or arrive late because their parents value education and ensure that their children make the most of the opportunities available to them. The pupils, too, are keen not to miss anything because they enjoy school so much.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British – Indian
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Black or Black British – Caribbean

Exclusions in the last school year

Number of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
164	0	0
1	0	0
7	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
4	0	0
1	0	0
2	0	0
2	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 **good**. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 1 to 6, but in the Foundation Stage it is satisfactory, overall. Assessment is good throughout the school. Curriculum provision is good and its enrichment through opportunities in the sports, arts and other activities is very good. Accommodation

and resources are good. Overall care and guidance of pupils is good. The school works very well in partnership with parents, and links with other schools and the community are good.

Teaching and learning

Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is good in Years 1 to 6, which has had a positive impact on pupils' achievements and the standards they reach.
- Overall teaching is satisfactory in Reception although staff have limited strategies for dealing with children's unacceptable behaviour.
- Effective monitoring of teaching and professional development has contributed to better teaching.
- Pupils with special educational needs receive very good support from well-trained learning support assistants, which contributes to their achievements, both academically and socially.
- Behaviour management is good overall, which contributes to positive relationships, pupils' good behaviour and very positive attitudes to learning.
- Assessment procedures are good, particularly in the core subjects and for special educational needs.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 39 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
1 (3%)	8 (21%)	21 (53%)	8 (21%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

Commentary

14. The table above indicates the quality of teaching seen across the school. Overall teaching and learning are good. There has been an improvement in the percentage of good and very good teaching seen since the previous inspection. There are particular strengths in teaching in Years 5 and 6. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory overall but there were weaknesses in behaviour management of the children, which have had an impact on achievement in personal, social and emotional area of learning. The strengths noted in the previous inspection in positive relationships, effective support from learning support staff and behaviour management have been maintained. Similarly, minor weaknesses were noted in some inconsistency in behaviour management, which was observed in the present inspection, in the Reception class.
15. Effective strategies have been put into place to bring about improvement, including greater monitoring by the headteacher and curriculum co-ordinators and strong links between performance management and continuing professional development. Additional support from the local education authority has been used effectively to raise the standards in science, particularly in Years 1 and 2. Teachers offer their pupils more opportunities for practical activities which has already had a positive impact on raising standards. It is evident from the lesson observations that teachers have good expertise in teaching basic skills and use aspects of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies well, which is contributing towards higher standards. Teachers use technical terminology well which helps pupils learn effectively by using the correct vocabulary.

16. The headteacher and staff are keen to ensure that all pupils are fully included in all aspects of learning. Teaching for pupils with special educational needs is good. Teachers plan carefully to ensure that tasks match the pupils' prior abilities in literacy and numeracy. In other subjects the activities tend to be whole-class based and support is provided by the effective well-trained learning support assistants. There is a strong commitment to ensuring higher attainers also have their needs met. Teachers offer very good challenge and are targeting these pupils well, particularly in Years 5 and 6, as is evident in the significant proportion of pupils working at the higher levels, particularly in English and mathematics, which is borne out by inspection evidence.
17. Good relationships and an insistence on high standards of behaviour mean the majority of pupils have very positive attitudes to learning, enjoy their lessons and behave well. The headteacher ensures that there is an orderly sense of purpose in the classrooms and throughout the school which contributes strongly to the very positive ethos and to pupils being happy at school. Teachers are supported very well by the effective whole-school systems for behaviour management and the very good promotion of moral and social development. However, in the Reception class, staff have limited strategies for dealing with children's unacceptable behaviour. This happens when behaviour is not checked effectively; for example, when children choose activities such as playing with cars and the construction equipment, behaviour becomes inappropriate because a few children have little self-discipline or awareness of others and find concentration difficult.
18. Assessment throughout the school is good, overall. The school has improved its assessment procedures. The National Curriculum tests and optional tests are analysed very carefully to identify areas of learning that need further development and monitor individual and whole school performance. Pupils' progress is tracked rigorously in English, mathematics and science, particularly in Year 6. This has had a significant impact on raising standards in Year 6, as work has been very closely matched to pupils' prior attainment and has provided the challenging next steps in learning. Individual targets in English and mathematics are helping to make pupils more aware of what they need to do to improve. Different aspects in subjects are targeted where strategies for improvement are being implemented; for example, pupils' writing is currently being moderated each term. In ICT, a local education authority system of assessment is in place to monitor pupils' progress but it does not enable teachers to provide the next steps to suit all their pupils' needs. Teachers make good use of their learning support assistants during lessons, as pupils' progress is monitored which contributes to the overall assessment system. Assessment takes place at the end of units of work for most foundation subjects and is satisfactory; it gives teachers an overview of 'what next'.
19. There are good systems for assessing children's achievements in the Foundation Stage. A range of assessment information is collected when children first start school which contributes to the Foundation Stage Profiles. The school has its own baseline in place, which is used to identify gaps in knowledge so that appropriate support can be put into place. The procedures for assessing the needs of pupils with special educational needs, reviewing their individual education plans and providing realistic targets are good. Individual education plans have sharp targets which are reviewed by the co-ordinator and teaching staff on a regular basis. Progress is monitored for pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds which indicates that these pupils make similar gains in their learning as their classmates.

The curriculum

Provision for meeting the curricular needs of pupils is **good**. Accommodation and resources are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum meets the statutory requirements in all subjects and is particularly broad and well balanced.
- There is a clear determination to continue the process of curricular improvement. Very imaginative and innovative curricular initiatives have been introduced to support this process.
- The school provides a good level of opportunity and access to the curriculum for all its pupils, which means that curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs is good.
- Provision for personal, social and health education is good.
- The contribution made by the support staff is very good.
- Governors discharge their curricular responsibilities well.
- There is a very good level of enrichment of the curriculum through the extra-curricular activities, educational visits and visitors.

Commentary

20. The curriculum covers all the subjects required by the National Curriculum. Each subject is properly balanced and documentation provides a good structure on which to base content and progression. In most subjects, the programmes are based on guidance published by government bodies but, where necessary, this has been augmented by additional detail so that teachers know precisely what to teach and when. This is helping to ensure that knowledge and skills are built incrementally.
21. The subject co-ordinators work through a strong framework for checking planning, scrutinising pupils' work and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. These checks help to ensure that the intended programmes are accurately delivered and that agreed initiatives are consistently applied.
22. There is a very good level of creative and innovative curricular development designed to enhance achievement, raise academic standards and develop personal qualities. This is exemplified by a greater consideration upon pupils' learning styles, the use of circus artists to stimulate ideas and learning, the introduction of French language teaching and initiatives such as those to involve and inform parents about the curriculum. A positive and productive ethos is central to this thinking and everyone associated with the school, including, where appropriate, pupils, are consulted and involved in the process. Detailed deliberation, careful preparation and specific staff training ensure that each new initiative is introduced with thoroughness and professionalism. The proposals to introduce more investigational approaches to mathematics and science exemplify this process and have brought about improvements in standards.
23. All pupils are given good access to the curriculum. This is because the school is committed to providing an education which meets the particular needs of each of its pupils. The dedication and hard work of teachers and support staff creates a purposeful and secure environment with equality of opportunity for every pupil. Where appropriate, lessons generally contain separate activities designed specifically for the higher and lower achievers. Pupils with special physical, emotional or educational needs are fully incorporated into the life and work of the school. Staff are sensitive to the personal circumstances and characteristics of each pupil and every child is valued. There is a commitment, shared by all at St Nicolas Combined School, to do the best by every pupil. The curriculum provided for special educational needs meets pupils' needs well. Teachers provide appropriate work in literacy and numeracy and support

is very effective. There is a good use of ICT to support learning and the software provided enables personalised learning.

24. The provision for pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE) is good. A specific programme is given prominence within the curriculum and is delivered with sensitivity and challenge but teachers also respond to relevant issues as they arise. Wide-ranging discussions embrace topics of importance to pupils' understanding and needs. Consideration of relationships, responsibilities and feelings is included in this approach. The values are apparent in the life and work of the school and in the good relationships that exist. Considerable efforts are made to develop pupils' self-esteem, to enrich their experiences and to develop them as capable, responsible people. Adults provide very good role models to enhance this approach.
25. There is a satisfactory match of teachers' expertise to meet the curricular demands and this aspect is in the process of being strengthened by recent and current appointments. Teaching is based upon secure subject knowledge and, although some co-ordinators are new to their post, they provide committed leadership. The contribution made by the support staff is very good and is founded upon very good professional relationships that promote an effective partnership between such staff and the teachers. This results in the consistent application of each lesson plan and greater individual attention for pupils. The support staff are well-trained and have received specific training for working with pupils with special educational needs, including literacy, numeracy, emotional and general or specific learning disabilities; this makes them an invaluable resource, significantly enhancing teaching and learning.
26. The governing body discharges its curricular responsibilities well. It is fully involved and informed and has designated individual governors to link with every subject. It has approved an appropriate policy for the teaching of sex education, and matters relating to health education are given substantial emphasis. The school's programme for health education includes the required emphasis on the importance of diet and harmful substances.
27. There is a very good level of enrichment of the conventional curriculum made possible by the efforts of staff, parents and friends. Provision is augmented by a very good range of extra-curricular activities which embrace artistic, sporting, musical and other clubs and through initiatives such as the 'Circus' project. In addition, all pupils benefit from the regular visits to places of educational interest and by specialist visitors to the school. Productions, performances and school assemblies provide further opportunities for pupils to develop self-confidence and a range of talents. Pupils are very keen to participate in these activities and a significant number of pupils are learning to play a musical instrument.
28. The accommodation provides good facilities to meet the needs of the curriculum. Facilities such as the library and the ICT suite make a positive contribution to the curriculum and very good quality displays in classrooms and central areas help to create a stimulating and aesthetically appealing learning environment. The school is working hard to raise funds to provide a specialist music wing. There is a good range of resources to support the delivery of the curriculum, especially in English, art and design and design and technology.

Care, guidance and support

The attention given to pupil's care, welfare, health and safety is **good**. Support, advice and guidance based on monitoring are all good. Pupils are well involved in the life of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pastoral care and guidance are thorough and well organised.
- There are good new systems for consulting and involving pupils.

Commentary

29. The school monitors pastoral concerns carefully, tracking any issues affecting pupils as they grow up. Child protection procedures are good and PSHE provision supports pupils well across Years 1 to 6. Pupils are well looked after throughout the school day, and first aid is administered effectively when pupils need it. There are good relationships between pupils and staff, so that pupils are happy at school and feel there is always someone they can turn to if they have a problem. Good arrangements for induction mean that Reception children settle quickly into their new surroundings.
30. The newly-created school council gives pupils a real opportunity to make their voices heard and influence the way the school is run. The members of the council take their responsibilities very seriously and are keen to gather the ideas of their classmates and put them forward. They have already made a tangible difference to school life by getting the rules on uniform changed and improving play equipment. The new role of playground buddies is also having an impact, as pupils are encouraged to think more about helping others and leading games at break and lunchtime.
31. The school has a caring ethos that values every pupil. It provides security for pupils who experience learning difficulties. The procedures for assessing their needs are good. Outside agencies include the educational psychologist who visits at least each half-term, audiologist and speech and language support. The school buys in to the Buckingham Learning Support Unit for help with assessments and access to resources. These outside agencies contribute towards the good provision for these pupils and the progress they make.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school works **very well** in partnership with parents. Links with other schools and the community are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Day-to-day information for parents is very helpful.
- Parents are actively involved in the school's work.
- The school makes the most of the community around it.

Commentary

32. The school gives parents every opportunity to play a full part in its life and their children's education because of the very good quality of its written communications. The termly curriculum news booklet in particular is excellent, explaining to parents in great detail what their children will be studying in each subject and what they can do at home to support them. The booklet achieves exactly the right balance between using technical language and lapsing into jargon, and so is very clear for a readership which works outside education. Weekly newsletters too are very good. They are friendly and welcoming, keeping parents up to date with everything that is happening at school, from forthcoming events to teacher absences. In this way, the school can pre-empt parents' queries and anxieties. The quality of written information is especially

important for a parent community where the vast majority works outside the home and cannot be at the school gates each day, and the school is very successful here. Reports to parents on their children's progress have improved since the last inspection and are now good. They tell parents how well their children are doing and contain realistic targets for further improvement.

33. Parents in their turn support the school wholeheartedly. They ensure that their children come to school regularly and on time, make sure that they do their homework, and uphold the school's values and ethos. Many parents give up their time and energy to help at the school, working in classrooms or around the school, and acting as governors or members of the thriving parent-teacher association. Parents are very willing to support the school financially, and the PTA raises astounding sums of money for the benefit of the children. The school respects and appreciates its parents and is always ready to listen to their views and act on their concerns. Systems for regular consultation with parents are being developed.
34. The headteacher and staff have successfully forged positive links within the small community surrounding the school. Underpinning everything the school stands for is its close and mutually supportive relationship with the church, which does much for pupils' inner growth and spiritual development. Exciting science work has begun with the neighbouring National Trust property, and the school's choir is prominent in the life of the village. Pupils have gained a lot from using the specialist resources of nearby secondary schools and from sharing resources with other small local primaries.
35. Teachers and the special needs educational co-ordinator maintain good parental contact and individual education programmes are discussed with parents in September. These are then reviewed in February (or more frequently where necessary). For pupils with learning difficulties, the close contact with parents is beneficial. The school welcomes parents who have concerns about their pupils. Parents do not attend Individual Education Plan reviews but are kept closely informed about progress and are involved in annual reviews.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management of the headteacher are **very good**. The headteacher is a determined and effective leader. The effectiveness of management and governance of the school are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher has led the school well since her appointment one-and-a-half years ago.
- Challenging staffing situations have been well managed.
- The headteacher has a very clear vision for the school, centred on teaching and learning.
- Governors know the school well and work closely with it.
- Finances are effectively managed.

Commentary

36. Since her arrival, the headteacher has made many changes, including the setting-up of effective senior and middle management teams. This has enabled the inherited organisation to be refined and improved. She is passionate about her vision for the school which is centred on how children learn. She is respected by those around her,

she leads from the front, and the warm and friendly ethos of the school is a direct result of her leadership. The very good leadership of the curriculum is a result of delegation by the headteacher that is both supporting and challenging. The headteacher promotes a collaborative approach to curriculum planning and monitoring and this ensures continuity across the school. This newly-established system provides a stable working environment for the pupils and they respond with calm and respectful behaviour and very positive attitudes to their learning and school.

37. The ethos of the school is one of acceptance and emphasises how special each pupil is, irrespective of their academic ability. Care is taken to meet pupils' individual needs. Leadership of the work for pupils with special educational needs is good, ensuring that these pupils are supported well. The special educational needs co-ordinator is well informed and is a good manager of special needs provision. Necessary training has been provided especially for support staff who take an important role in their support for pupils with special educational needs. However, the leadership of the Foundation Stage is barely adequate and issues linked to managing unacceptable behaviour are not tackled with sufficient rigour.
38. Overall, the effectiveness of management of the school is good. The procedures in place to enable the school to run smoothly on a day-to-day basis enable pupils to enjoy their time in school. There are good strategies for evaluating how well the school is progressing in order to plan for the future and improve the learning environment. The school has embraced interactive technology and aims eventually to put an interactive whiteboard into all classrooms.
39. School self-evaluation is very good. The headteacher monitors teaching regularly. Linked with performance management this highlights where staff development is necessary. Subject leaders have clear roles and responsibilities and the recent emphasis on assessment enables a clear picture of pupils' progress to be made.
40. The governing body takes an active interest in the school's progress and development and has ensured that all statutory requirements are met fully. Although it has seen some fundamental changes within school, its goal of ensuring the school provides well for the community has remained constant. The governing body has a shared vision of how the school is to evolve and gives the headteacher unstinting support. Governors have subject responsibilities and are knowledgeable about classroom practice as they regularly visit classes and are often welcomed on an informal basis.

Financial information

41. The finance committee has budgeted prudently and financial procedures are well managed by the administration staff. The school has carried forward finances to cater for the heating system within school. Value for money by the school is good.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	531,856	Balance from previous year	31,029
Total expenditure	527,316	Balance carried forward to the next year	35,569
Expenditure per pupil	2,487		

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

The provision for children in the Foundation Stage is **satisfactory**, a decline since the previous inspection. The reason for this is because the children's social development and their behaviour fall short of expectations.

Children join the Reception class at the start of the school year they are five and their skills and understanding are broadly average for their age. Almost all the children have attended some form of pre-school provision, which helps them to adapt to school life speedily. Teaching is satisfactory, as is pupils' achievement. By the end of the Reception Year, most children are on course to achieve their early learning goals. The main weakness is in children's personal, social and emotional development where a significant minority of children have made less progress than expected. This group have much work still to cover and they will find it difficult to attain their targets by the end of the school year. The curriculum is planned carefully and there are good systems for assessing how well the children are achieving. Two part-time teachers and two teaching assistants teach the class soundly. Children with special educational needs have individual support and their achievement is satisfactory, like that of their classmates. There are no pupils who speak English as an additional language and all are fluent English speakers.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Many children work co-operatively together and relationships are good.
- Staff have limited strategies for dealing with children's unacceptable behaviour and teaching is inadequate.
- Achievement is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

42. There are good systems for introducing children to the Reception class, and the staff collect a wide range of information about their pupils. This information is used well to plan the first stages in learning for children of all capabilities. Most children soon learn to work together co-operatively, taking turns with their equipment as they investigate the properties of different materials and sharing their toys and games with pleasure. When this happens, relationships are good.
43. From the start of their time in school, a significant minority of children find co-operation difficult. They have a limited concentration span and they tend to select the same

activities during their 'choosing' time, resulting in noisy and unacceptable behaviour which hampers their learning and that of others. Teaching and learning fall short of expectations. Many children have more positive attitudes to learning when they are working with an adult, but even so, their concentration is limited and achievement is unsatisfactory in this area of learning³.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Books and stories are enjoyed and most children are soundly launched into reading and writing by the end of the Reception Year. They speak clearly and articulately.
- The children have many planned opportunities to develop their skills.

Commentary

44. Children join the Reception class with broadly average skills. Higher, average and lower attaining pupils make satisfactory progress and most are on course to achieve their targets by the end of the year. Their achievement is satisfactory. Staff work hard to plan a good range of suitable activities. One main strength is the way in which speaking, listening, reading and writing skills are developed across the entire curriculum. In one example, the children worked with a teaching assistant making patterns with their paint by blowing through a straw. Their delight when they discovered how to change the shape of their pattern by blowing in different directions resulted in some imaginative vocabulary that successfully extended the vocabulary of the small group. Children have access to a wide range of books and stories which develop a love of reading right from the start. Almost all children are reading a simple book and some children read more challenging books. Most of them know the sounds made by letters and combinations of letters and they try to apply this knowledge to their reading. Writing skills are limited but the children try hard to form their letters correctly, with some success. Higher attainers can write simple sentences unaided but the others are not at this level. Teaching is satisfactory overall but there were some missed opportunities to extend children's learning at the end of 'carpet sessions'.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in mathematical development is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Planning is pitched at the right levels and there are effective systems for checking how well the children are doing.
- The emphasis on using the correct mathematical language soundly promotes children's understanding.
- Children have a sound range of practical activities which successfully develop their understanding of number facts.

³ Areas of learning is the name given to the different curriculum areas for children aged three to five.

Commentary

45. The focus on oral and practical mathematics means that the children enjoy learning as well as developing their understanding of number and shape. Effective planning ensures that there are many opportunities for children to count, sing and play number games, all of which help to familiarise them with numbers to 10 and 20. Learning is consolidated soundly as children use vocabulary such as 'less than', 'more than' and 'the same as', when working out simple problems. One teacher based her lesson on the story of *Handa's Surprise* as the children took pieces of fruit from a basket and mentally worked out how many were left. Higher-attaining pupils managed this but the average and lower attainers found it difficult and they needed help. Achievement is satisfactory and many children are on course to attain their targets by the end of the year. Teaching is satisfactory but staff have limited strategies to manage difficult behaviour and this slows down learning for a number of children in the group.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children have a good range of practical experiences that develop their understanding well.
- Teaching is good, as is the children's achievement.

Commentary

46. The well-planned activities successfully stimulate children's curiosity about the world around them. Computing skills are taught well and the children are confident when using technology to support their learning. Average attainers are competent when using the mouse, dragging the cursor and effectively accessing their program. Standards are above average and pupils achieve well. The good links across the curriculum enabled staff to extend children's ideas during an investigation into which material was best for a raincoat for Pookey Bear. The children were very involved in investigating the properties of the different materials, giving good reasons for their choices and drawing on their prior knowledge to arrive at their decision. Teaching is good throughout this area of learning and the children are on course to exceed their targets by the end of the year.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in physical development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Outdoor facilities are very good.
- Learning outside the classroom is planned well and teaching is good.
- Children's achievement is good.

Commentary

47. The outdoor area and playground facilities mean that children have a good range of opportunities for physical development that offer appropriate challenges. Learning is enjoyed. Effective planning, alongside a good range of opportunities, means that children's physical skills are developing well. They move confidently around the outdoor areas and the hall. Children can run, jump and balance with safety and with good control. They are aware of the importance of exercise and its effect on their body. Small equipment, such as cutlery, pencils, brushes and scissors, are handled safely and appropriately. Teaching is good, as is achievement, and most children are on course to exceed their goals by the end of the year.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Provision in creative development is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children enjoy being creative and they have positive attitudes towards learning.

Commentary

48. Satisfactory teaching enables the children to make sound progress in developing their creative skills. There is a satisfactory range of planned opportunities for drawing, painting, modelling and collage, which are all enjoyed. However, in one session, there were missed opportunities to develop the children's awareness of different shades of colour, but their achievement was good as they extended their own ideas and completed their task. Role-play is used soundly to extend children's imagination. Songs and singing games are enjoyed, as is playing instruments, and these activities play an active part of the Foundation Stage curriculum.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 AND 2

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in English are above average at the end of Year 2 and well above average at the end of Year 6.
- Teaching, learning, assessment and the co-ordination of the subject are good.
- Pupils use their literacy skills in other subjects well.

Commentary

49. Pupils' achievement in English is good throughout the school, including for those with special educational needs and the few from minority ethnic backgrounds. Children enter Year 1 with broadly average attainment. They make good progress in Years 1 to 4, and in Year 5 and 6 pupils' progress accelerates. Following a disruptive Year 5, the present Year 6 pupils had 'gaps' in knowledge. This has now been effectively addressed by close targeting of pupils' work to their ability and challenging teaching

and support for all pupils. Inspection findings indicate that standards in Year 6 are well above average. This is because a significant proportion of pupils are working at the higher levels in all aspects of English. In Year 2, standards are above average, which is similar to standards in 2004 national tests. However, the breadth of the curriculum is much broader now, which is an improvement, and has contributed significantly to pupils' speaking, listening and literacy skills.

50. Standards in speaking and listening are above average by the end of Year 2 and well above average in Year 6. In lessons, pupils listen attentively; they are articulate and speak with confidence. A range of strategies, including drama, has been put in place to help pupils think and talk about what they are learning. In an imaginative Year 2 lesson, pupils worked together in groups to devise questions to ask the wolf and pigs what really happened in '*The Wolf's Story*'. They recorded their questions and later in the lesson went into the '*courtroom*'. The '*characters*' in the story were questioned effectively by each group, who used a range of 'wh' words, typically used to open questions. Teachers know their pupils' abilities well and have particularly good questioning skills which help to draw out answers from individual pupils and to encourage longer replies than some pupils might give. By Year 6, all pupils are working at the expected level, with a good proportion at the higher level. Challenging questioning by the teacher meant pupils had to think hard about their work and describe the characters and emotions portrayed in the mysterious setting from a section in '*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*'. They expressed their views of the story with confidence, and discussed the tension, imagery and personification within the text. This discussion contributed significantly to the high quality of the later writing that pupils produced.
51. Pupils achieve well in reading; standards are above average in Year 2 and well above average by Year 6. Effective analysis of data indicated that Year 2 boys performed less well than girls in the tests. This is being addressed well by the co-ordinator and headteacher who are providing books with greater challenge and interest for boys. Inspection evidence and school data show that boys are now achieving similarly, with a good proportion achieving the higher levels. Teachers promote reading well throughout the school. The youngest pupils in Year 1 are developing good prediction skills in stories, as they talk to a partner about what they thought might happen in the story '*Where the Forest meets the Sea*'. The teacher effectively built on pupils' responses and encouraged them to consider how they would feel if they went into the rain forest. This helped pupils build on their previous learning about tropical rainforests. Good attention is given to teaching basic skills as Year 1 pupils identify 'ea' and 'ee' words in the text. Pupils in Year 2 have good knowledge about books. They understand the use of the contents, index and glossary and employ appropriate alphabetical knowledge to locate words in a dictionary. Pupils are developing a good awareness of cultural diversity through stories, as in Year 5. Very good questioning by the teacher ensured that pupils looked for clues to establish that the story was set in an Indian village. Year 6 pupils are reading a wide range of books and all are challenged well. Pupils enjoy reading fiction, and those in Year 6 are clear about their favourite authors and summarise well some of the books they have read. Higher-and average-attaining pupils are very confident, fluent and expressive readers.
52. Improving the breadth of writing has been a whole-school priority. Strategies put into place are already having a significant impact, as is evident in pupils' writing across the curriculum. Pupils achieve well. Standards are above average in Year 2 and well above average by Year 6. This is because a high proportion works at the higher level. Good teaching of basic skills is contributing to higher standards. Throughout the

school, writing is used well for different purposes, such as poems, letters, news reports and instructions. The vast majority of pupils, by Year 6, use an appropriate joined handwriting style and present their work neatly. The school has set out to ensure writing is relevant to pupils' experiences; for example, during 'Circus Week', lots of cross-curricular activities gave children the impetus to write. There are very good examples of pupils' work, such as persuasive posters and newspaper reports, well written in an appropriate style. The use of word-processing supports the development of writing, as in the writing about 'Circus Week', where pupils choose a suitable font and colour for their report.

53. The overall quality of teaching is good, with very good teaching observed in the two older classes of pupils. Teachers' planning is good and what is to be learnt is effectively shared with pupils. They have good subject knowledge, which enables them to give clear explanations and teach basic skills effectively. Lower-attaining pupils are supported very effectively by learning support assistants who make a significant contribution towards ensuring all pupils are fully included in lessons. This helps all pupils achieve well. In addition, higher attainers are sufficiently challenged in lessons; this is evident in the high proportion of pupils who perform at the higher levels in the national tests.
54. The leadership and management of English are good. The co-ordinator is relatively new to the post but is knowledgeable, enthusiastic and determined to promote a greater breadth of teaching and learning in English. Effective support is given to colleagues. She and the headteacher (joint co-ordinator) have a clear view of what needs to be done next through good evaluation of data, monitoring teaching and learning and sampling pupils' work. They both have a strong commitment to ensuring all pupils' needs are met and they ensure that work is challenging for the higher attainers, as well as those with difficulties being well supported. Assessment procedures are extensive and the national tests are analysed very carefully to identify areas of learning that need further development. A detailed action plan has been produced for continuing to raise standards and ensuring greater breadth in the subject. Inspection findings indicate that there are already improvements, particularly when teachers use drama, role-play and literacy across the curriculum.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

55. There are good cross-curricular links with other subjects which help develop pupils' literacy skills. Teachers provide plenty of opportunity for pupils to write in different styles, at length and for different purposes across the curriculum and this contributes significantly to the good progress and achievement of pupils. In design and technology, following detailed group and class discussion, Year 4 pupils wrote reports and evaluated their '*wind propelled vehicles*'. They have been taught the correct procedure and set out their work appropriately for the subject. Whilst in Year 2, pupils used their literacy skills in history to write about the Great Fire of London and the work of Florence Nightingale. Opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills are developed particularly well, which contributes to high standards. For instance, in art and design, Year 5 pupils discussed the works of still-life artist, Cezanne. Through very good questioning by the teacher, they confidently spoke about the pictures using technical vocabulary, described the context of paintings in considerable detail and explained how the picture made them feel.

French

56. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 have one French lesson on a regular weekly basis. In Year 6 their class teacher teaches this lesson. His teaching is brisk and pupils rise to the challenges set for them, responding well when speaking in French. Learning moves forward at a very good pace and pupils of all capabilities are keen and well motivated.
57. The lesson observed focused on the weather, and was part of a series of lessons on this topic. Pupils' vocabulary was extended successfully as their confidence and achievement developed very well throughout the entire lesson. Teaching was excellent. Skills of speaking, listening, reading and – for the higher attainers – writing, were rapidly enhanced. By using the interactive whiteboard effectively and linking it to the Internet, all pupils were able to participate in a game about the weather, extending their vocabulary and their understanding of speech patterns. No-one was left out. The achievement of all pupils was very good in the lesson observed.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils leave the school with overall standards that are well above the national average.
- Achievement throughout the school is good.
- Procedures to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics are good. This means teaching is consistently good throughout the school.
- Pupils' attitudes are very good in all parts of the school.
- Leadership of the subject is very good. There is a particularly clear direction, with innovative initiatives sharply focused on improving achievement and standards.
- The procedures for assessing pupils' progress and achievement are good and there is thoughtful analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of provision.
- The school has accurately identified ways in which the mathematics programme can be improved and is taking suitable steps to address them.

Commentary

58. Pupils in Year 2 reach standards that are above the national average. Standards in Year 6 are well above the national average. Attainment properly reflects all the required elements of the National Curriculum.
59. Pupils enter school with a range of numeracy skills which are typical for their age and make consistently good progress as they move through the school. Despite a somewhat disrupted Year 5, the progress of the current Year 6 has accelerated to reach well above standards. Throughout the school, pupils achieve well in relation to their capabilities because of the consistently good teaching, the fostering of very positive pupil attitudes and the fact that teachers provide a range of tasks which ensure that pupils are working at the appropriate level.
60. Teaching is good throughout the school. This is because teachers manage the pupils well and employ a range of stimulating approaches in their lessons. There is good focus on ensuring that learning is based upon sound mathematical understanding rather than upon rote techniques. Correct mathematical terminology is routinely introduced and used. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and develop

pupils' understanding by encouraging them to reason and explain their mathematical thinking. Graded tasks within each lesson further promote work that is suitably matched to pupils' capabilities. This includes good challenge for the higher attainers and effective support for those with special educational needs. In some of the better lessons, there is productive emphasis upon the importance of mathematical pattern as a mathematical tool and to foster aesthetic appreciation through the exploration of relationships in number and shape. In many lessons, sensitive and effective support is provided by the learning support assistants.

61. Pupils' attitudes are very good throughout the school, with almost all showing interest, concentration and maturity. This has a good impact on their learning because the very positive attitudes of the pupils mean that most strive to do well and little time is wasted in lessons. Productive collaboration between pupils makes a very good contribution to social and moral development.
62. Leadership of the subject is very good. The headteacher and the co-ordinator have high aspirations for the subject and monitor provision with care and rigour. They have considerable subject expertise, have carefully and thoughtfully analysed the information available and have instigated a number of initiatives designed to improve the school's performance in mathematics. This is exemplified by the action taken to strengthen the reasoning and problem-solving aspects of mathematics. Here, different approaches and greater emphasis are providing pupils with greater mathematical insight and understanding. Commendable efforts have been made to communicate the rationale for these changes to staff, governors and parents.
63. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are good. They provide an informed and objective basis upon which to analyse individual and whole-school performance. Individual targets are helping to make pupils more aware of what they need to do to improve. The agreed initiatives are implemented with consistency and rigour and they are proving instrumental in raising standards.
64. There is a good structure for monitoring provision for mathematics through observing teaching, scrutinising pupils' work and checking planning. This is having a good impact on learning since it helps to ensure that agreed initiatives are implemented with consistency, that coverage and progression are verified and that shortcomings are quickly identified and acted upon.
65. The findings of the last inspection were generally favourable in respect of mathematics. Since then, the school has continued to develop the subject and to respond to changing demands. Overall, there has been a good level of improvement since the previous Ofsted report.

Mathematics across the curriculum

66. The use of numeracy skills to support the work in other subjects is satisfactory. In a Year 4 design and technology lesson relating to the construction of a vehicle, for example, the 'movement time' results were measured and then charted graphically. Scale and measurement featured in a Year 6 science investigation into the relative position of the planets. In this way, the numeracy skills are being reinforced while being used as a tool to advance standards across the wider curriculum.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Above average standards have been maintained at the end of Year 6.
- A new approach to the management in Years 1 and 2 is beginning to have an impact on standards.
- Good use is made of the local environment and school grounds to stimulate learning in science.
- Assessment and tracking of pupils is good.
- Learning in science is enhanced where ICT is used.
- Control and monitoring is underdeveloped.

Commentary

67. Pupils' achievement in science is good. The school has maintained the above average standards by the eleven-year-old pupils since the previous inspection. Standards of seven-year-old pupils have been below average and the school correctly identified this as an issue. Several changes have been made to address this, including involving support from the local education authority science consultant, teacher training in assessment of science and looking carefully at what science activities were planned for the pupils. This inspection found standards to be in line with expectations for the seven-year-olds and that the changes made are already having a positive impact on the teaching and learning of science.
68. Pupils in Year 1 enjoy using their senses to describe different smells, sounds and textures as they develop their observational skills and abilities to discern and describe. Year 2 pupils are beginning to understand the importance of making predictions and fair testing. Their scientific understanding is developing well. During an investigation into waterproof fabrics, they made accurate predictions and understood the importance of using the same amount of water to test each piece of fabric. In general, up to Year 4 the standards of presentation are inconsistent and there is no accepted way of setting out work. Where there is an emphasis on the use of worksheets, pupils' development of presentational skills is limited. Older pupils build on earlier scientific understanding and are able to use scientific terminology in more sustained writing. In Year 5 and Year 6, there is better consistency in setting out investigations, pupils are using tables and graphs to illustrate patterns in their findings and standards of illustrations and labeling improve.
69. Major changes have recently been made in the teaching of science, including a greater emphasis on practical activities. A more challenging and innovative approach has been introduced, helping to challenge the higher-achieving pupils and generate more positive attitudes to the subject. For example, in connection with Life Processes and Living Things, Year 3 were growing Grass-Heads and investigating why some heads of hair were thicker and longer than others. The school is involved with the National Trust Guardianship Scheme, enabling excellent enhancement of the school grounds and pupils' involvement in gardening activities at Cliveden. Whilst finding out about how their bodies work, Year 5 made models of their internal organs from cereal packets, straws and sponges. Year 6 pupils were being challenged by marking out at 1mm to each million kilometers a scale model of the solar system.
70. The quality of teaching is variable; good in Years 1 and 2 otherwise satisfactory. Where the teaching is good, resources are well managed and help is provided to

enhance learning and understanding; pupils are offered a range of challenge by the activity matching their ability. Throughout all lessons seen, the learning support assistants were very effective and had a significant impact on the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, the progress of pupils with special educational needs was good. Teachers are beginning to use the interactive whiteboards to good effect. Where ICT is used, pupils' learning is improved, such as the Year 5 lesson on parts of the body where they saw an animated illustration of the main organs of the body. The use of databases and data logging in science is underdeveloped and teachers' planning does not give enough opportunity for the development of numeracy skills in science activities.

71. The leadership of the subject is good. Important decisions have been made in order to raise standards further and bring a change in attitude to the subject. These decisions are having a positive result. Teachers are beginning to know what their pupils' abilities are through the use of an effective assessment system to monitor and track progress, and learning support assistants log pupils' comments during discussions, providing further important information. Non-contact time has been made available for teachers to enhance their skills and find additional resources.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in Years 3 to 6 have improved and are above those expected for 11-year-olds.
- Hardware and software provision has improved.
- Interactive whiteboards have a good impact on teaching and learning.
- Teachers need to plan for all pupils' abilities.
- Control and monitoring are not fully embedded into the curriculum.

Commentary

72. Standards have improved for eleven-year-old pupils since the previous inspection and are now above expectations. Those of seven-year-olds remain in line with expectations. Pupils achieve well and make good progress as they move through the school, especially in Years 5 and 6. Seven-year-old pupils explained how they had used ICT within their class recently to draw graphs in connection with going on journeys as part of geography studies. Eleven-year-old pupils spoke with confidence about many aspects of ICT that had helped them with their learning. They could easily describe what the advantages of using ICT were.
73. Pupils' attitudes to ICT activities are very good and both boys and girls share the same enthusiasm. Pupils use ICT to share and present information throughout the school. Older pupils make good use of desktop publishing software to present their findings, such as information about living in the 1960s in history and producing a newspaper story concerning forest fires as a literacy exercise. Younger pupils use graphics software to illustrate how they feel or draw monsters from favourite storybooks. ICT is used well to support literacy activities such as the Year 3 writing of letters of complaint based on fairy tales. Older pupils use formulae in spreadsheets to model the costs of having a party and manipulate scores of a spelling test. Using ICT to enable a more innovative approach to curriculum work is developing. The use of digital photography is beginning to have an impact on pupils' learning and where

interactive whiteboards are used, pupils benefit especially from a wide variety of available Internet resources. In Year 6, as part of their science lesson, the class could watch a NASA simulation of why the earth has seasons.

74. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers' confidence in the use of interactive whiteboards is developing and the school is working to install more of these. An adopted local education authority system of assessment enables teachers to monitor their pupils' progress; however, this does not enable teachers to provide varied activities in lessons to suit all their pupils' needs. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported with ICT. In one class, a laptop is available for a pupil to use and a variety of appropriate software is used to support slower learners, which contributes towards their effective inclusion in lessons.
75. Leadership of the subject is good. There are clear plans for the development of the subject, including the necessary training of teachers. The school has worked hard at increasing the hardware and software provision. The suite, with accompanying range of software, is a very good resource. Pupils receive at least an hour of ICT a week in the suite and this is often supplemented by additional time on a computer in the classroom. Classroom computers are used to provide practice and consolidation activities for individual pupils. Older pupils have not yet used ICT with a control box, data logger and sensors. The school has recently purchased the appropriate equipment so the full programme of study can be taught throughout the school.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

76. The use of ICT to support learning in other subjects is satisfactory and is becoming more of a cross-curricular tool. The support of ICT in literacy and history is stronger than other subjects. The use of the Internet to access information is providing a most useful resource to support pupils' learning within the school.

HUMANITIES

Geography and History

77. **Geography and history** did not form part of the focus for the inspection and provision was sampled through the observation of a small number of lessons, discussion and the scrutiny of pupils' work. The available evidence indicates that curricular provision in geography and history is satisfactory. No formal judgements were made in respect of standards and achievement. The available evidence suggests that both are satisfactory and that pupils have very positive attitudes to the subjects. In geography, for example, pupils in Year 2 understand simple maps, follow routes and identify key features. They compare their own locality with that of Lyme Regis and show a satisfactory awareness of places beyond this country. In history, they recognise changes that have taken place over time, for example in children's toys and in playground games. They discuss some famous people from the past, such as Florence Nightingale and Dr Barnardo, and relate these lives to some important contemporary events.
78. Similarly, the indications are that the standards achieved by Year 6 pupils are broadly in line with those expected. In geography, pupils understand scale, keys and grid references in relation to maps and are suitably informed about environmental issues. They compare life in Taplow with that in places such as St Lucia and the Indian village of Chembokolli. In history, pupils display typical knowledge and understanding of various periods in the past such as the Victorian Age and Ancient Greece.

79. Geography and history are delivered through a series of topics. The current guidance to help teachers plan their lessons provides a sound basis for the systematic delivery of the programmes and is in the process of being further defined. In addition to factual knowledge, geographical and historical skills such as map-work and the nature of historical evidence are given due emphasis. Research, visits and the use of the Internet usefully supports this balance. The co-ordinator checks provision through a manageable structure and this provides a good overview of learning and standards.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

Art and design was inspected in full. Design and technology, physical education and music were sampled and were not a major focus during this inspection.

Art and design

Provision in art and design is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well throughout the school and by Year 6, standards are above average.
- Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of a wide range of artists, albeit mainly from a western culture.
- The subject is led and managed well.
- There is good use of art to illustrate work in other subjects and to make the school an attractive learning environment.
- There is limited use of ICT.

Commentary

80. Pupils achieve well throughout the school and are making good progress in acquiring a range of art skills and knowledge and understanding of the work of other artists. As this is a practical subject, pupils with special educational needs also make similar gains. Evidence from around the school and lessons indicate that by the end of Year 6, standards are above those usually expected, particularly in drawing and sketching. Standards are broadly as expected at the end of Year 2. Teaching is good; teachers are gaining in expertise because they have good support from the co-ordinator and the scheme of work. Pupils engage in a good range of activities with a variety of media, including both two-dimensional and three-dimensional work. A strength of the curriculum is pupils' growing appreciation of famous artists and their work. Around the school, many pictures in the style of different artists are displayed. Pupils in Year 2 built on their knowledge of colour mixing, learnt in Year 1, and produced detailed representations based on the work of Seurat. In the lesson seen, Year 2 pupils looked very carefully at the prints and applied appropriate colour in the typical 'dotty' style of Seurat. Whilst in Year 4, pupils tried out the techniques favoured by Magritte and Escher. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 have developed good skills in drawing and painting.

There is good attention to observational art, noted in the detailed sketches of shoes drawn by Year 5. In the Year 6 lesson seen, good encouragement to evaluate work and improve it contributed towards pupils' successful portraits in the style of Picasso. The interactive whiteboard was used effectively to show the *Portrait of Sylvette David in a Green Armchair (1954)* as a starting point. Pupils worked hard to produce their portraits in the geometric form typical of Picasso's abstract portrait work.

81. Artwork is used well and often in support of other areas of the curriculum, and its careful display throughout the school plays a large part in creating a very attractive learning environment. In history, for example, pupils in Year 2 sketched portraits of Mary Seacole and Florence Nightingale. The use of computers to enhance pupils' artistic skills is, however, limited. The subject promotes pupils' spiritual and cultural development well. Pupils are encouraged to look carefully at pictures and describe the context and discuss the mood and process; this is helping them to have an appreciation of different artists and their styles. For example, pupils in Year 5 successfully sketched and painted in the style of Cezanne. Year 3 pupils were excited to experience an artist at work and had the opportunity to see how Mehndi patterns were traditionally painted by a visiting Mehndi artist. This was a very good opportunity for pupils to extend their knowledge of art forms from different cultures. This enabled them to sketch a variety of patterns based on the Mehndi patterns that they had previously seen. However, apart from the study of craftspeople in ancient civilisations, the use of work from other than western cultures is underdeveloped.
82. Leadership and management of the new co-ordinator are good. She is enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the subject and has already been influential in raising the profile of art and design within the school and bringing about good improvements. The co-ordinator offers very good support to her colleagues and has begun to devise a good scheme of work based on skills development. She has monitored teaching and learning and, through the portfolios of work, is monitoring standards. She is very aware of what needs to be achieved in the subject, which includes more studies of art and design from other cultures, even greater use of sketchbooks and encouraging teachers to 'have a go' at some 'outdoor' activities.

Design and technology

83. Design and technology was sampled and was not a major focus during the inspection. Only one lesson in Year 4 was observed, where teaching and learning was judged to be good. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, were involved in animated discussions when they evaluated their *wind propelled vehicle*. This is obviously a subject that motivates them, as was evident in their detailed description of the test process. Pupils judged which model went the furthest, using a hair dryer as wind power. Numeracy skills were used well to record the distances vehicles travelled. Pupils plotted their findings accurately on a graph; very good intervention and a reminder by the teacher meant pupils wrote in the horizontal and vertical axis. Evidence indicates that a satisfactory range of activities is provided and the subject receives due attention. Planning follows national guidelines and meets curriculum requirements. Pupils use a variety of techniques; for example, Year 3 pupils explore packaging by disassembling boxes and drawing a sketch to show how it was made, and this helped them make their own colourful boxes. There are good cross-curricular links with other subjects; for example, Year 4 pupils made ancient masks linked to their Anglo Saxon history topic. However, the co-ordinator considers that further links could be developed. Teaching and learning are monitored by the co-ordinator, who provides good support to his colleagues. He is enthusiastic and knowledgeable and is

a good role model in his practice. There is good attention to the design, make and evaluation processes and pupils complete their products with care. Recording is undertaken in pupils' sketchbooks which support pupils' literacy and artistic skills. Information and communication technology is used effectively to record pupils' finished product, for example photographs taken with a digital camera of Year 3 pupils and their boxes.

Music

84. The provision for music is excellent and this is a strength within the school. One lesson was observed where the quality of teaching was very good. Year 5 pupils were composing and performing melodies with confidence using glockenspiels and keyboards. Strong contact with the South Buckinghamshire Music Service provides excellent support and expertise. There is a thriving choir that performs outside school at local venues and an orchestra of up to 40 pupils consisting chiefly of violins, guitars, recorders and percussion but also including flutes, clarinet and saxophone. Their performance is accomplished and enables pupils to enjoy invaluable performing experience. There are a number of peripatetic music teachers providing coaching in woodwind, percussion, strings and piano. The choir has recorded three CDs, there is a tradition of musical performance and the singing in assemblies is confident and accurate. The quality of music enhances the spiritual ethos of the school.

Physical education

85. This subject was sampled during the inspection. Very few lessons were observed and these were a dance lesson and a games lesson in Years 3 to 6. Standards are above average and pupils' achievement is good, with many pupils achieving highly. Pupils have very positive attitudes and they all try hard to achieve their best standard. Relationships are very good and pupils learn well.
86. In the lessons observed, learning was characterised by a brisk pace and no time was wasted. Pupils were well focused on their tasks, which were pitched at the right levels because teachers are good at assessing how well their pupils are achieving. One strength in the games lesson was the level of challenge for the pupils so that each pupil was challenged to try just that little bit harder in order to achieve highly. Pupils rose eagerly to the challenges set for them as they evaluated their own and each other's performance. Girls and boys demonstrated sheer enthusiasm and, by building on previously acquired skills and setting activities of increasing complexity, the teaching boosted individual standards and achievement across the board. This holds good for pupils of all capabilities, including those with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.
87. The subject leadership is very good and the leader has worked very hard to improve the quality of physical education at St Nicolas' School. She is successful. Parents are pleased with the wide range of sporting activities, swimming and competitive matches and games that are available to their children both in and out of school, all of which enhance the provision of physical education. The school is fortunate in having excellent grounds, the use of which aids all pupils to develop their physical skills very successfully.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL, HEALTH and CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Provision in personal, social and health education and citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils and their families are valued and respected and all are given equal status.
- Pupils make good gains in their knowledge about how to keep safe and healthy as they develop into responsible citizens of the future.
- The school ethos encourages all pupils to care for each other.

Commentary

88. Personal, social, health and citizenship education is securely in place at St Nicolas' School. Staff and governors provide good role models and relationships are good. Pupils' social and leadership skills are developed well as they share in the work of the School Council, collect goods and funds for charity, act as 'playground buddies' as well as helping pupils to develop their social skills. These positive experiences help pupils to gain in confidence and achieve success. Sex, relationship and drug awareness programmes are in place and members of the community, such as the nurse, have a beneficial input into these programmes, helping to make them relevant and meaningful for the pupils.
89. Good attention is paid to promoting a healthy lifestyle and pupils are aware of the importance of eating fruit and vegetables as part of a good diet. Exercise is emphasised in order that pupils are physically and mentally alert. Safety in the home and playground is tackled thoroughly and pupils are well aware of the need for road safety. Pupils are very caring towards each other as well as towards those less fortunate than themselves. The 'Playground Buddy' and 'Circle Time' systems are working well as pupils learn to relate to each other and to have empathy for the needs of others. The youngest pupils in school are not at this level and there remains some way to go before their achievement in personal, social and emotional development is at an acceptable level for their age.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Inspection judgement

Grade

The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3
Value for money provided by the school	3

Overall standards achieved	3
Pupils' achievement	3

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	2
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

The quality of education provided by the school	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3

The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	3

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