

INSPECTION REPORT

ALEXANDRA SCHOOL

Harrow, Middlesex

LEA area: Harrow

Unique reference number: 102262

Headteacher: Dennis Goldthorpe

Lead inspector: Jacque Cook

Dates of inspection: 20 - 23 June 2005

Inspection number: 268528

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community special
Age range of pupils:	3 - 12
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	94
School address:	Alexandra Avenue South Harrow Harrow Middlesex
Postcode:	HA2 9DX
Telephone number:	020 88642739
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Sally Lippiatt
Date of previous inspection:	14 June 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Alexandra is a community, mixed day special school for pupils aged 3 to 12 with moderate learning difficulties and includes a mainstream nursery. There are 94 on roll including 31 children in the nursery who attend either mornings or afternoons. In total there are 78.5 full-time equivalent pupils. Seven children in the nursery have special educational needs and are being assessed for the appropriate provision. In the main school, there are approximately twice as many boys (40) as girls (23). Main additional special educational needs include 19 pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and 13 with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Just under a half the pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The largest group are Asian and there are a few Caribbean and African. 11 pupils are from homes where English is not spoken as the first language. No pupils are at an early stage of language acquisition. There are three asylum seekers and three travellers. One pupil is in public care. Very few pupils leave or join the school other than at the beginning of the academic year. However, because many pupils transfer from other schools, there are far more pupils in Years 6 and 7 than in the lower year groups and about 25 per cent of the pupils leave each year. The children's attainment on entry to the nursery is about average but in the main part of the school, pupils' attainment on entry is low and at times, very low.

The nursery is a neighbourhood provision, apart from the pupils with special educational needs who come from the wider Harrow area. The main school has pupils from Harrow and from surrounding education authorities. About 33 per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals and over 40 per cent of the nursery children are from homes where parents or carers claim job seekers' allowance or income support, indicating an overall less favourable socio-economic background for the school.

Awards gained by the school include Harrow Schools' Kodak Photo Awards from 2002 to 2005, and the Silver Artsmark, Investors in People and the Northwest London Education Business Partnership, all in 2004. There are inclusion initiatives including outreach to mainstream schools and training for mainstream schools and colleagues.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
2351	Jacque Cook	Lead inspector	Foundation Stage Music French English as an additional language
32655	John Bostock	Lay inspector	
17541	Fran Ashworth	Team inspector	Mathematics Information and communication technology Design and technology Personal, social and health education and citizenship Special educational needs
20397	Rosa Blunt	Team inspector	English Art and design Physical education
22391	Nick Smith	Team inspector	Science Geography History Religious education

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Alexandra is a very effective school with many excellent features. The leadership and management are very good and the ethos is excellent. As a result, children in the nursery and pupils in the main school achieve very well and make very good progress. The very good quality of teaching and the strong focus on learning contribute towards the excellent attitudes of the pupils. The staff work extremely well as a team and introduce a range of innovations successfully. This broadens the curriculum and makes it very suitable to meet the needs of all the pupils. Value for money is very good.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The organisation in the nursery is excellent and children get a very good start to their education. This is followed by equally high quality of provision in the class for reception-age children. The links between the main school and the nursery are beneficial to both.
- The quality of the leadership of the headteacher and school management team is outstanding and governance of the school is very good.
- Support staff are very effective in ensuring all pupils make the progress they should.
- Pupils' behaviour is very good, often showing a huge improvement since they joined the school.
- Pupils' personal and social development, the skills of literacy and numeracy, and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) are taught very effectively throughout the curriculum which is enhanced exceptionally well through a range of interesting and exciting activities.
- There are very productive partnerships with parents, the community is used very well, and links with other schools, particularly through the very high quality of outreach provided, are very good.
- Healthy living is promoted very well, notably through the excellent school meals' service.

Improvement since the last inspection is very good. The curriculum now has a full range of subjects and there are good procedures for checking that it is being taught effectively. The requirements for the daily act of collective worship are very well met. As well as these key issues, there has been very good improvement in pupils' achievement and progress, the quality of teaching and learning, the overall curriculum and provision for care, guidance and support.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	in relation to individual targets in:	
	Subjects of the curriculum	personal and social education
Year 2	Very good	Very good
Year 6	Very good	Very good
Year 7	Very good	Very good

Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor.

Pupils' achievement and progress are very good throughout the school.

Children in the nursery make very good progress towards meeting the goals they are expected to reach by the time they are five. Most are on track to meet the goals and a significant number are expected to exceed them. Children in the nursery with special educational needs and children of reception age in the main school also make very good progress and achieve very well. All children make excellent progress in their personal, social and emotional development and in developing their communication, language and literacy.

Pupils in Years 1 to 7 achieve very well in English, mathematics, science, ICT and personal, social and health education (PSHE). They improve their communication skills very well and develop good reading habits. Writing is very well developed with many writing clear sentences and interesting pieces. Numeracy skills and learning about measurement, shape and space are developed very well and pupils use their knowledge effectively in mathematics and in other subjects.

Pupils' personal qualities including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good. Attitudes are excellent and behaviour is very good. Attendance is very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is very good. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers plan lessons very well to ensure that all pupils make the progress they should. Strategies to help pupils learn are very effective. Clear routines provide a structure for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder and very effective rewards and sanctions ensure pupils with behaviour difficulties are also helped to improve. Pupils rise to challenges set by staff and work hard. They make choices and learn to work on their own or collaboratively with others. The curriculum is very good as is the provision for pupils with additional special educational needs. Parents are very well informed about the topics their children are studying and they know the progress being made. There are very good strategies for supporting and guiding pupils.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The effectiveness of leadership is excellent, driving the school forward and improving the achievement of the pupils. Responsibilities are shared between the staff which contributes to the strong teamwork. Management and the work of the governing body are very effective. All statutory requirements are met. The outreach provision is led and managed very well.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents comment very favourably about the school and praise its work. They feel very well supported and very well informed by communications, particularly the home to school book. Children thoroughly enjoy their school, like their teachers and support staff and feel they are listened to. They are pleased that their achievements are recognised and particularly enjoy swimming, lunchtime clubs, school camp and the visit to France in Year 6. Pupils also comment that they like their school dinners.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- No major issues for the school to address. Minor issues are outlined in the school improvement plan.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils' achievement and progress are very good. Children in the nursery and reception classes make very good progress towards meeting their early learning goals by the time they are five. A significant number of children in the nursery are expected to exceed the goals.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make very good progress in English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology (ICT) and personal, social and health education (PSHE).
- Children in the nursery and reception classes do particularly well in improving their communication skills and in their personal, social and emotional development.
- Pupils with behaviour difficulties make very good, and at times excellent, progress in improving their behaviour.
- Pupils make very good progress towards meeting their targets on their individual learning plans.

Commentary

1. The progress and achievement made by pupils since the last inspection has been very good. This is because:
 - Staff are skilled and work extremely well together as a team, leading to very good quality of teaching and learning.
 - There is a close focus on the learning of individual pupils, so none 'fall through the net'.
 - Monitoring of progress and achievement has improved considerably.
 - Individual learning plans are of a high standard and track progress very well.
2. The close watch maintained on the progress of individual pupils ensures that there is no measurable difference in the achievement made by boys and girls or any differences in achievement between minority ethnic groups. Pupils with additional special educational needs, such as autistic spectrum disorders, make very good progress, particularly in improving their communication skills and in working with other pupils and staff. Also, staff are skilled in adapting work and equipment so that all pupils are able to do their best. They have very good skills in improving the behaviour of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. A number of these pupils make outstanding improvements and transfer successfully to mainstream schools. Pupils from homes where English is not spoken as the first language make similar progress to their peers. Staff teach subject-specific and new vocabulary very well and constantly check for understanding. There are also staff who speak a number of the home languages which is very helpful if there are any difficulties. Pupils that are asylum seekers, travellers or looked after achieve very well and make very good progress.
3. Children in the nursery make very good progress towards meeting the early learning goals by the time they are five. Most are expected to meet the early learning goals and about a third of the children are on track to exceed them. Children with special educational needs and those of reception age also make very good progress towards the early learning goals. The school's additional success in improving children's personal, social and emotional development supports their learning in all other areas. Children learn to follow instructions and concentrate, to persevere and, most of all, to enjoy their learning. They gain a great deal of enjoyment from improving their communication, language and literacy, developing a love of stories, looking at books and enlarging their vocabulary. Children make very good progress in their mathematical, creative and physical development and improve their knowledge and understanding of the world very well.

4. Pupils make very good progress in almost all of their subjects. In the main subjects of English, mathematics, science, ICT and PSHE it is easy to track their development and the improvement they make. They also make very good progress in music. In religious education, achievement and progress are only good because this subject is not as well organised as others.
5. Realistic, but nevertheless challenging, targets are set using detailed information. The targets are broken down into small steps, which accurately show progress and the steady year-on-year upward trend in achievements. Pupils' progress against the targets in their individual learning plan is very good. Half the pupils exceed their targets and are very proud of their efforts.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes to their work are excellent and their behaviour is very good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Attendance is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils and children develop excellent attitudes to their work as a result of the efforts of the staff.
- Very good behaviour enables lessons to proceed with little disruption.
- Pupils develop their independence skills very well.
- The school makes very strong provisions for pupils' personal development, which results in mature "well rounded" pupils.
- Improving levels of attendance enable pupils to benefit well from teaching.

Commentary

6. Pupils arrive at school happy, purposeful and enthusiastic and quickly settle down to their activities. They are keen to be involved, concentrate and contribute in lessons, co-operate well in team activities and work hard. They remain energetically involved in their lessons throughout the day and enjoy their studies. When considering "moving on" to the next school, their ideas about their emotions, and the usefulness of various strategies to cope with situations such as bullying, were discussed sensibly and with friendly support for each other's views. Teachers foster this interest by providing interesting and stimulating work, forming strong supportive relationships with pupils and creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere. These positive attitudes enable pupils to benefit very well from lessons.
7. Staff expect very good behaviour and use a wide range of strategies to encourage it. Pupils (including those with behavioural difficulties) respond very well, learning to improve their behaviour and maintain it even in difficult circumstances. Lessons proceed smoothly as a result of these qualities and pupils show self-control and care for others, for example, when playing games. Pupils consider behaviour in the school is very good. There was no evidence of bullying or racist behaviour. Teachers and learning support assistants are continually alert for any issues and very quickly sort them out. Parents are very pleased with the school's control of these risks.

Exclusions

The number of exclusions is very low. There were two, justifiable, brief fixed term exclusions (one boy and one girl) last year and this year only one pupil has been excluded. There have been no permanent exclusions.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	24	1	0
White – Irish	4	0	0
White – any other White background	6	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1	1	0
Mixed – White and Asian	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	10	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	4	0	0
Black or Black British – African	3	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	2	0	0

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

8. Pupils are encouraged to develop their independence through a choice of learning activities and taking responsibility for themselves. Children in the nursery select which activity they would like to start with and then go, usually without prompting, to the appropriate area. For example, they walk purposefully outside to design an obstacle course from the equipment that is available. Pupils are encouraged to maintain personal hygiene with regular washing of their hands and even at a young age are able to dress themselves and look after their possessions. The school's use of "privileges" (explained after paragraph 12) enables pupils to think through what sorts of things that they like doing best.
9. The staff develop pupils' knowledge about social, moral, and spiritual matters very well. Pupils feel comfortable in their school community and progressively acquire social skills as they move through the school. They meet wider social groups through an extensive range of visits and also from visitors to the school. Older pupils as members of the school council develop their skills in representing the views of other pupils extremely well. They discuss issues such as requests for even more lunchtime games and choosing food for the healthy school meals, and have their views taken into account. There are many stimuli, especially in assemblies, about moral and social issues and pupils are frequently reminded about rules of behaviour and treating people with care and fairness. Pupils have an extremely clear understanding about right and wrong. Their cultural awareness is enhanced through trips to the theatre, museums, concerts and environmental activities. Several places of worship of several faiths are visited to enrich pupils' spiritual knowledge and support the very good preparation for life in a diverse society.

Attendance

Attendance statistics have improved greatly in recent years. Pupils are keen to attend and look forward to coming to school. The vast majority of absence relates to medical treatment and

miscellaneous illness. The school advises parents very well about the importance of attendance and procedures to follow when pupils are absent. Unauthorised absence is due to parents not following these procedures appropriately. Unexpected absence is quickly looked into and good use is made of the education welfare service on the rare occasions where it is necessary.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.4	School data	1.5
National data	N/A	National data	N/A

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. There are strengths in the high quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum which is enriched extremely well, the care and guidance of pupils and links with parents, the community and other schools.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Assessment is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lesson planning is very good and ensures work is suitable for all pupils in the class.
- Very skilled learning support assistants are used very well.
- Very good strategies are used to capture and keep pupils' interest.
- Rewards are used very well so pupils try their best.
- Staff expect extremely high standards of behaviour and help pupils to achieve them.
- Pupils are confident and rise to challenges that are carefully phrased by teachers.
- Language, both subject-specific and communication in general, is taught very well throughout all lessons.

Commentary

10. The quality of teaching and learning has improved very well since the last inspection. The amount of very good and excellent teaching and learning has more than doubled and there are now very few lessons that are merely satisfactory. This is partly due to the monitoring and training of staff by members of the school management team and also by subject co-ordinators. Additionally, lesson planning, which takes account of the diverse needs of pupils in each class, is of a very high standard. It is often the result of close collaboration between teachers using their collective skills and knowledge. What pupils are expected to learn is made very clear and the use of support staff is planned for. In the nursery, for example, roles are established so that while one member of staff is teaching a group activity and the others are either working inside or outside.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 64 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
7 (11%)	38 (59%)	15 (23%)	4 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

11. Pupils enjoy their work because staff use strategies to make it exciting. In science, for example, the task is to "explore the witches' potion" or devise a means to serve the correct

drink in 'The Aliens' Juice Bar'. Pupils broaden their vocabulary by devising new words for the poem *Jabberwocky*. They learn how advertising works from analysing clips of advertisements in order to make an advertisement for their school. Pupils do not have time to get bored because lessons are usually at a brisk pace, new activities are introduced and pupils are made aware of how much time they have left.

12. The staff work extremely well as class teams and consistently apply reward systems. Praise and encouragement are a constant feature and pupils respond by redoubling their efforts and maintaining very high standards of work and behaviour. This builds pupils' self-esteem and confidence so they have strong relationships with the staff and listen attentively to what they say. Pupils with behaviour difficulties understand the need to follow instructions and know not to disturb other pupils. Alternative arrangements are sought to help them, for example, briefly leaving the classroom to manage their feelings and then returning. Pupils are very aware that they stand the risk of losing some of their 'privilege time' if they misbehave, so this happens infrequently.

Example of outstanding practice

Alexandra school has a very effective reward system that encourages pupils to strive to do their very best.

Pupils value the reward system and are keen to tell visitors how it works. At first glance it seems ordinary but it is the effect of the whole that makes it so effective. It is based on the five golden rules of the school. Children collect stars and when they have a certain number they are awarded a metal badges bronze, silver or gold. The last is highly prized and two pupils are working very hard to achieve theirs before they leave. The star chart is in the corridor behind glass, where all children pass and can instantly see how well they or their peers are doing. All classes have 'privilege time', especially the younger ones, who have sessions every day. This is a certain amount of time for making a choice of what they would like to do – go-carting, computer games, drawing, for example – but they lose time if they do not behave very well, so could spend part of their time in the classroom. Lastly, and most importantly, there is the 'Terrific Book'. To get their work into the Terrific Book and shown in the Friday celebration assembly is every pupil's aim. Pupils are proud to talk about this accolade and explain that it has to be really good.

13. Staff phrase challenges to pupils in a way that shows they are confident that they will meet them. For example, a teacher in a music lesson asked the pupils: "Do you think you can do that?" And then in response to the sea of hands and one cautious "I think so", the teacher said to the pupils, "Prove it to me!" Off they went into their groups and did just that.
14. Technical language is noted in teachers' planning and emphasised throughout lessons. Often in the round-up session at the end of lessons (the plenary), subject-specific words are revisited to check that the pupils have understood. This is very helpful for pupils who speak English as an additional language. Signs and symbols are used very well to support communication, consistently so for the children in the nursery and those of reception age and the younger pupils. Occasionally, teachers do not have time for a plenary session, so pupils do not have the opportunity to revisit and reinforce what they have learned.
15. Staff manage pupils with autistic spectrum disorders very well. There are clear routines and visual timetables using symbols provide a structure and the security of knowing what will happen during the day. Where appropriate, pupils work in special bays where they can concentrate without being distracted. Staff provide individual help in a quiet corner when this is best and support these pupils' whole-class activities when they are ready. As a result these pupils become gradually more involved and often make extremely good progress in all subjects.
16. Arrangements, for example, for those who find noise difficult, are well organised. In one instance a pupil left the room and returned when the television part was complete because he

knew he could not manage to sit and concentrate. Staff quickly made sure that the salient points were available when he returned.

17. Instances where teaching and learning are satisfactory usually occur when the routines established in a class are not maintained: for example, when a teacher gives a series of instructions without visual prompts, which the pupils find difficult to follow.

18. Staff use questions very well to establish what pupils know, understand and can do. Often support staff will record pupils' responses so that the teacher can concentrate on teaching. Very good use is made of the P (Performance) scales to establish how well pupils who have not reached National Curriculum levels are doing. This is recorded using the school's own system of 'ladders' which gives a very clear picture of the progress being made.
19. Very good use is made of homework. Even children in the nursery have homework and take books home to read. Parents are very well informed of the areas their children are studying so they can help them with their tasks which successfully reinforce or extend what they have learned in school.

The curriculum

A very good curriculum is provided for pupils of all ages with many exiting opportunities for enrichment. The provision of staff, resources and accommodation is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum provided is innovative, appropriate and meets the needs of all pupils very well.
- It is extremely well enriched and makes very good use of expertise both within and beyond the school.
- The curriculum encourages the personal and social development of pupils very well and there are very good systems for helping pupils move on to the next stages of education.
- At present, the PSHE and citizenship programme for Year 4 is repeated in Year 5.

Commentary

20. All requirements to teach the National Curriculum and religious education are now met very well. There has been very good improvement in the curriculum since the previous inspection and this is contributing very effectively to pupils' very good achievement. Innovations, such as yoga and privilege time enhance the provision. Great care has been taken to develop systems that help pupils learn, for example, expertise has been developed in 'emotional literacy' which is helping pupils to understand and express how they feel. This work ensures that pupils find positive ways of managing their emotions and so concentrate on their learning.
21. The curriculum is very well led and managed. Subject co-ordinators and teams regularly monitor and evaluate the curriculum planning and make improvements. This has resulted in two or three-year rolling programmes for each subject to ensure that, where more than one year group is taught in a class, pupils do not repeat what has been taught the year before. However, this work is not yet complete for PSHE and citizenship in Years 4 and 5. The provision for special educational needs is very good. Pupils' progress in key areas is recorded and any new physical or intellectual difficulty is noted, discussed and plans made to compensate. The school makes very good use of outside specialists, requesting their help, planning their time carefully, listening to their advice and implementing recommended strategies and programmes.
22. The excellent curriculum in the nursery focusses upon the early learning goals and is broad and very well planned to ensure that children have every opportunity to explore and begin to understand the world about them. This is extended into the reception and Year 1 class, ensuring that children who move from the nursery into the school continue to build on what they have already learned. Children that join Alexandra at reception age also get a very good grounding from well-planned activities and structured play.
23. Very good systems have been developed to ensure that the very small steps of achievement that pupils make can be recognised and used as pointers to the next stages of learning. The eight pre-level 1 stages called the P (Performance) scales are further sub-divided and the resulting small steps are called the 'Ladders'. These provide an excellent, comprehensive and visual way for staff, pupils, parents and members of the support services to understand what progress is being made and what the next steps should be.

24. The curriculum for PSHE and citizenship is very well planned and, together with the work about emotional literacy and understanding and expressing feelings, it very successfully supports pupils' development. Education about sex and relationships and drug and alcohol misuse are taught very effectively through several subjects particularly PSHE and citizenship and science. Pupils learn about their role as citizens and take part in a variety of activities linked to the wider world; for example, pupils have recently held elections and voted for school council members. Part of the PSHE programme is planned to provide very good opportunities for pupils to explore and prepare for the next stages of their education. The *moving on* section of the programme ensures pupils find out and become confident about the next stage of their school career. This includes discussions about their feelings as well as visiting their new schools.
25. Many clubs and activities are held at the school with a range of choices offered to all pupils throughout the week. There is also a wealth of visits and trips, such as to theatres, concerts, sporting events, synagogues and churches. In addition, the school holds very well-organised residential activities every year. There is a school camp where living under canvas provides a new experience for many, and for Year 6 pupils a trip to France that sees many pupils making their first trip on an aeroplane to another country. The school holds the Artsmark Silver Award and encourages pupils to show their skills, for example, two pupils recently won the Kodak Photo Awards in their age groups.
26. The match of teaching and support staff to the curriculum is very good. Although the lack of a technician leads to the ICT co-ordinator spending too much time fixing equipment. The teaching and learning support staff have very good levels of subject knowledge, which they use effectively when developing the school's curriculum. Resources are very good and the careful planning and development of the curriculum mean that they are very well targeted to support pupils' learning. The accommodation is very good especially in the nursery where a well-designed space with very good access to the outdoors ensures that pupils have a very good learning environment. Throughout the school, the accommodation, both in classrooms and in the grounds, is well kept and is used imaginatively to enhance pupils' learning.

Care, guidance and support

The school takes very good care of the welfare, health and safety of its pupils. It provides pupils with very good support, advice and guidance and takes very good account of their views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff are extremely caring and know pupils well.
- Thorough assessment and monitoring of pupils' work are used very well to create new learning targets for them.
- Healthy food makes a substantial contribution to pupils' healthy living.
- Thorough, and improving, management of care, welfare, health and safety arrangements enable pupils and staff to be looked after very well.
- The school responds very well to pupils' opinions and ideas.

Commentary

27. All staff caringly nurture pupils' emotional and physical well-being with the result that pupils feel confident to trust them when they have difficulties. Pupils easily turn to them when upset. Arrival and settling into school are carried out sensitively in a gentle, friendly and helpful way. There were many instances of this care during the inspection. One example was the great care and attention given to pupils during a swimming lesson when entering or leaving the pool and the help given to try extending their "comfort levels" in the water. Pupils are treated fairly, but firmly, and clear boundaries are quickly established and held to. Older pupils said that they were treated fairly – even when they were being disciplined for misbehaving. Pupils

respect and like their staff, saying “they help you lots and are understanding and helpful.” Parents are satisfied that the school takes very good care of their children.

28. Starting in the nursery and throughout the school, clear and straightforward targets are identified for pupils to help them improve their work. These are discussed with parents and are visible on the walls in their classrooms. Regular high quality monitoring and assessment of the progress of pupils is a feature of teachers’ work and the findings are used to create new targets. As a result of the focus on the individual, pupils that are asylum seekers, travellers or in public care have any additional needs identified quickly and strategies devised to manage them.
29. The school is rightly proud of the healthy menus and quality of food provided in its meals and snacks, which are cooked on the premises daily. It believes that, in addition to being a good thing for the pupils’ healthy living, the high quality also has a “spin off” benefit in the improved behaviour and concentration of the pupils. This was reflected in the behaviour seen during the inspection. Pupils enjoy the meals, which are subsidised from the school budget, and nearly all pupils have them. This includes the healthy breakfast which consists of wholemeal biscuits, dried fruit and a drink, often milk, which gets pupils off to a good start each day.
30. There are well-managed arrangements to ensure that the care and welfare of pupils are effective. Child protection procedures are very good. Wide-ranging use is made of supporting professional medical services. Routine visits from speech and language and occupational therapists occur each week. Accidents and incidents are handled sensitively and appropriately and record-keeping is being improved. Breaks are closely managed and many interesting games are available and played with the pupils. The school is dealing with a few minor health and safety issues noticed during the inspection. Parents expressed continuing concerns about bus and taxi arrangements at the beginning and end of the day, but this is very well organised and closely supervised by staff with the safety of the pupils of paramount importance. A traffic light controlled crossing for the main road has been newly installed
31. Pupils’ ideas and opinions are discussed in the school council, which is well established. Members change every six months and are elected after they make presentations about what they want for the school. They represent Year 3 to 7 pupils but discuss topics relevant to all pupils - such as playground games, food preferences and improvements to the toilets. Suggestions and decisions are fed back to all pupils through class discussions and in assemblies. The school has responded to suggestions in all these topics recently. Senior teachers “keep an eye” on proceedings. In some lessons pupils are able to choose what to do next – especially as a form of reward when they eagerly look forward to some activities. There are also many informal discussions between staff and pupils, from which the school becomes aware of pupils’ ideas.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Partnership arrangements with parents are very good. Links with the community are very good as are links with other schools.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good use is made of community facilities to support pupils’ learning.
- There are very effective arrangements for the transfer of pupils to senior schools.
- The school and pupils benefit greatly from its involvement with other local schools.
- Parents and the school work well together to improve pupils’ learning.
- There are very strong and well-regarded support services to other schools.

Commentary

32. The school, through the commitment of the staff, ensures that parents have very high levels of satisfaction with their work. In addition to the termly newsletter, the home to school book

system is excellent, providing information about pupils' work, their homework, curriculum topics and communication between parents and school about the progress of the pupils. The school supports parents well. Several courses have been put on to improve their understanding of their children's learning but attendance has been low. The level of parental attendance at the important annual reviews is lower than the school would like, so successful efforts are being made to improve this. Several parents work on a voluntary basis in the school. They are particularly helpful in the nursery where they help children cook.

33. There are several staff who are able to act as interpreters, for example, speaking Gujarati, Hindi or Portuguese, or translators are invited to the meetings, which supports parents whose mother tongue is not English effectively. Many parents attend class assemblies and Christmas and summer productions and several help in school. The nursery has very good links with parents and children also have their work to do at home, helping those needing development of their English language.
34. Pupils enjoy an extensive range of visits into the community, which support both curriculum learning and their personal development. Good examples are the annual French and camping trips as well as visits to Tate Britain and Berkhamsted castle. Places of worship for several faiths, museums, garden centres, parks and shops also provide very good stimuli for pupils. The school benefits from very good links with Education Business Partnership which result in volunteers providing time, equipment and sometimes money. Visitors to the school bring an awareness of several public services and the local Member of Parliament has participated in a debate. The Christmas and end of year shows are open to friends, families and the community.
35. Transfer of pupils to senior schools is handled very sensitively. Pupils make several visits to the new schools, in increasing levels of independence, learning about the building and the procedures, as well as meeting the pupils. Their new teachers come to meet the pupils and to discuss in detail their new charges with the Alexandra teachers. Comprehensive information about assessments and tracking and the personal records of pupils are handed over and discussed. The school works very well with the main secondary school sharing planning about lesson content, to ensure a seamless transition of work, as well as teachers' training. Pupils from other schools visit to help on the camping trip and at other events. Students join classes for work experience and pupils visit other schools to see the various shows.
36. The school works closely with several schools in response to their requests for help and expertise. It provides very good support in assessing their pupils' special needs, improving the techniques used by the schools and creating exemplar lessons. Teachers are also involved in providing courses to train teachers throughout the area. A few pupils share their time between schools and others are supported in their own schools by liaison between the teachers. These other schools have high regard for the responsiveness and professionalism of the support given. Further expansion of this activity is planned.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. Leadership of the school is outstanding and the management is very good. Governance of the school is very good overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher has a very clear vision of the direction that the school should take based on accurate self-evaluation and recognition of trends in the greater complexity of pupils' needs.
- There is an excellent and very effective school management team.
- Excellent teamwork has been developed.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning is very well structured.
- There are very effective systems which ensure the smooth running of the school.

Commentary

37. The headteacher's vision and commitment to take the school forward and to achieve higher standards are outstanding. He inspires staff and delegates responsibility very successfully, not just to the school management team and subject leaders, but to all staff. Staff appreciate this, take their responsibilities seriously and work hard in teams to raise standards. As a result, innovations and changes are readily introduced, such as yoga, outreach and, in the forefront of many other schools, the provision of healthy school meals through taking over the service three years ago. Effective team-building strategies have been used to develop a staff that work extremely well together.
38. Monitoring is very effective and leads to the very good teaching and learning in the school. This is because a range of strategies are used very well. They include direct lesson observation and evaluation of planning and pupils' work and involve senior managers and teacher colleagues. The progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils is carefully tracked. Reasons for any lack of success in meeting targets are analysed and steps taken to remedy any deficiencies.
39. Strategic planning, based on a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, is very well developed. There are sufficient systems and procedures to evaluate and keep track of progress in all areas of the school's work. However, a weakness in the curriculum for PSHE and citizenship in Years 3 and 4 was undetected because the overall leadership and management of PSHE is weak and the co-ordinator, who has the monitoring role, teaches these groups. However, due to the high quality of the teamwork of other staff, this has not had an impact on the high achievement of the pupils.
40. The school benefits from an effective and very supportive chair of governors who is well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and leads a committed governing body. Governors challenge and support the school management team and carry out their role as 'critical friend' very well. There are some difficulties in raising the numbers of governors, but the very clear focus on school improvement means that all issues are dealt with very well. Governors ensure there is compliance with statutory requirements, including those concerning racial discrimination, religious education and, following a key issue from the last inspection, collective worship.
41. Administrative staff are very efficient and the day-to-day management is very good. The firm basis of cost-effectiveness and the ability to act quickly have improved the quality of administering the budget very well. Management of finances is very good, good practice is established effectively and the principles of best value criteria are being followed very well. Specific grants, such as the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant, are spent very well. The link between financial planning and the school development and improvement strategy is very strong.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2004 to March 2005

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	1,152,607	Balance from previous year	40,551
Total expenditure	1,152,276	Balance carried forward to the next	40,882
Expenditure per pupil	13,556		

42. Performance management is well established for teaching and support staff and links to school development and training are clear. In-school training is very good and matched to individual and school goals. The professional development opportunities are excellent. Training is individual and very focussed.
43. There is good improvement in the leadership and management of the school since the last inspection. The most significant aids to raising standards further are the leadership of the headteacher and other key staff's commitment to continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and pupils' learning.

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

There are excellent arrangements to ensure that children who move from the nursery to the main school class for children of reception age continue to build on their learning very successfully. This is because there is a common philosophy based on the central importance of learning through play and children enjoying the experiences. Additionally, the excellent, purpose-built accommodation for the nursery enables children to participate in a range of activities individually or in groups with staff or independently in areas such as construction, small world, art corner and outdoor play. Throughout, the leadership and the management of the provision for the children in the Foundation Stage are excellent. Long-term planning provides a comprehensive two-year programme of work so that children who start in the nursery and move to the reception class build on what they have learned before. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children learn to be independent as well as to work with others.
- Very good behaviour and manners are taught very effectively.
- Children learn the difference between right and wrong.
- Healthy eating habits are developed extremely well.
- Staff are skilled in providing opportunities that enable children to make choices.

Commentary

44. There is great emphasis on helping children to express their feelings and so develop their 'emotional literacy'. This contributes strongly to the excellent progress and achievement made by all children including those with special educational needs. As a result, most children are very well on track to achieve, and many to exceed, the early learning goals by the time they are five. The clear guidelines and routines established by staff ensure that high standards of behaviour and conduct are expected and maintained. Children learn to follow the 'golden rules', which they have devised, and they understand their significance. In one instance where two children were play fighting, another child collected the card where it was written 'gentle hands, gentle feet' from the board and showed it to them. Staff remind children, where necessary, to say or sign please and thank you. Even the youngest children clear up their plates after their lunch and in both the nursery and class for reception-age children, they help to put things away. A range of healthy snacks is readily available in the nursery and children help themselves when they are hungry. As well as fruit they enjoy raw carrot and sit and eat sensibly.
45. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. The very high quality of the planning ensures that all children learn at a rate that is best for them. A broad range of strategies interests and enthuses the children. For example, children in the reception class loved playing 'pass the parcel' and expressing their feelings when they did or didn't get a present. This taught them effectively that enjoying participating means that it does not matter if you don't win. In the nursery, children talk about the feelings of Sally, a girl in a story who starts school. Questions are skilfully phrased to increase children's self-esteem. For example, "What does Sally need to learn that you already know?" Classroom management is excellent, giving children the opportunity to make choices. They are told what is available and then select what they would like to do. The equipment provided gives further choice: often, for example, including different types of brush, colours, materials and dressing-up outfits.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children improve their communication skills very well indeed.
- The love of stories and books is developed extremely well.
- Early writing skills are taught very well.
- Language is developed very effectively.
- A very good range of signs, symbols and pictures supports children with communication difficulties very well.

Commentary

46. Children's progress and achievement are excellent and most are on track to meet or exceed the early learning goals. There is a very strong focus on developing children's communication skills. Excellent teaching and learning ensure that staff talk with and question the children to develop their speaking and listening skills very effectively. Children from homes where English is not the first language benefit greatly from the language-rich environments. Homework, for example, may ask for words in the home language. Parents were asked to encourage their child to draw a picture of a farmyard animal, as the theme was *Old MacDonald Had a Farm*, and to label the picture in the home language. Bilingual story-tapes are enjoyed by the children. Staff take time to talk with and listen to children who are learning English, checking their understanding. These children learn a great deal from their peers as they work and play with them.
47. Nursery rhymes are used very well. In the nursery, children write letters to Jack of *Jack and Jill Went up the Hill* telling him to get well soon. Children sequence lines from nursery rhymes and predict what they think will happen next. The close working with the speech and language therapists boosts children's learning very well and is particularly beneficial for children with autistic spectrum disorders. Therapists take a leading role in ensuring that children continue to develop a range of skills including speaking and listening, following instructions and where appropriate using signing and the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). Staff use signing and symbols consistently to support understanding which also aids communication for those speaking English as an additional language.
48. Stories are read exceptionally well so children enjoy listening and were really keen to learn about *Mrs Wishy Washy*. They look at the pictures in the big book with interest and predict what they think she does for a living. Children know that books are read from left to right and turn pages when they are listening to story-tapes. Frequent opportunities are made for children to develop their writing skills. They practise drawing lines and shapes in media such as paint, sand and shaving foam. Many overwrite their names and a few underwrite independently. When they write sentences or stories, they can tell you what they have written. Most recognise their names and are beginning to build a vocabulary of words they can read.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in mathematical development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Every opportunity is taken to reinforce mathematical skills.
- Practical activities help children understand what they are doing.
- Mathematical words are taught effectively.

Commentary

49. Children have many opportunities to reinforce their mathematical learning. They count, for instance, the number of children that are in school, sheep in the pen or spiders on the game board. Colour and shape are identified in response to clear questions from the staff. This is due to the very good planning of lessons and the very good teaching and learning. As a result, children are making very good progress and achieving very well. Most are well on their way to at least meet the early learning goals by the time they are five. Many children sort items using one or more properties, for example, model farm animals by type and by colour. Most count at least to five and recognise these numbers, and many go beyond. Resources are carefully selected to allow the children to find out for themselves. For example, they use a balance to establish lighter and heavier, weighing forks or toy snakes. The least able match items to pictures and understand bigger and smaller. The one-to-one working assists the concentration and perseverance of those children with autistic spectrum disorders. Care is taken to teach the meaning of words for those children from homes where English is not the first language, for example, pointing to and repeating the names of colours or shapes.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children learn a great deal from practical activities that arouse their curiosity.
- Very detailed session planning ensures children have a wide range of focussed activities.
- Very good quality resources are readily available.

Commentary

50. Children make very good progress towards achieving the early learning goals in knowledge and understanding of the world by the time they are five and a significant number are expected to exceed them. This is because children are given many opportunities to find out for themselves. They use a wide range of materials including paint, play dough, fabric, paste, sand and water. This enables them to investigate using their senses, observing and exploring texture, smell, sound and, where appropriate, taste. Nursery children, in their topic on eggs, made scrambled eggs in pitta bread pockets. Working in small groups and using the very good facilities of the school food technology room very effectively, they watched fascinated as the eggs changed. Firstly, as one child pointed out “it got yellow” as the raw egg was beaten together, then “lumpy” as it cooked. A good choice of the nursery rhyme *Incy Wincy Spider* gave the children of reception age the opportunity for close observation of spiders, including a very large real one!
51. Very good teaching and learning ensure there are plenty of opportunities for children to use a range of tools safely. They cut and join materials, using knives and hammers with appropriate supervision. In the construction area they build carefully and often intently with the various interlocking construction toys and many enjoy doing jigsaws. Praise and encouragement are used very well by staff to reinforce success, for example, in working a switch on programmable toys, operating a language master to sequence a nursery rhyme, or using a mouse to make things happen on the computer screen. Visits broaden their experiences. Children visited a local fishmonger to look at, smell and touch fish. They have also visited RAF Hendon where they watched air make a ball go up in the air. Children learn about customs and festivals, finding out about special people and places, which contributes very well to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in physical development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The safe outside play areas are used very well.
- Children develop their co-ordination skills very well.
- A range of equipment is used very effectively to encourage children to increase their confidence.

Commentary

52. Children's achievement is very good and they are making very good progress towards, and most are expected to at least meet, the early learning goals by the time they are five in their physical development. Many are already moving confidently and safely. They are aware of the space around them and are improving their co-ordination very well through repeating actions such as jumping, riding bikes or hammering in tacks to fasten shapes on a board. A few are more hesitant, cautious of their ability, for example, to jump from the obstacle course they have built in the playground into a hoop. Others are more confident and race along the blocks. Very good teaching and learning ensure that staff provide excellent support, for example, encouraging children to go over blocks and through a tunnel. Very good opportunities are made for children to improve their co-ordination. In whole-group work, children develop throwing and catching skills very well, with a few standing quite a distance apart, and they also improve their social skills of working together. Children of reception age enjoy going swimming.
53. The outside play facilities are used extremely well by both classes. Children choose where to work and may move between outside and inside. Large play equipment stretches their physical abilities and often their imagination as well.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Provision in creative development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are very good facilities for children to develop their creative ability.
- Children's imagination is developed very well.
- Children respond to music exceptionally well.
- Staff ensure that children have a very broad range of materials and tools to choose from.

Commentary

54. Children's achievement and progress in creative development is very good and most are expected to meet and a number to exceed the early learning goals by the time they are five. In both the nursery and the reception class, teachers plan very well to provide many opportunities for children to participate in creative activities. In the nursery, children build their own farmer's corner, playing in the tractor made from boxes. They dress up independently as different animals wearing masks and show the staff, making the animal noises and movements. Art materials including different tools are available for the children to use. They study the work of artists such as Haring and imitate his work, moving their bodies to music and "freezing" in positions such as crouching and stretching. Staff outline their bodies on paper and string them together to make a mural in Haring style. Observational drawings show a high degree of skill, for example, strawberries with the skin in different colours and, by a reception-age child, a drawing of a musical instrument. The quality of teaching and learning is

very good. Very well focussed questions probe children's imaginations. "What are you doing with the baby?" a boy was asked. "Bathing it" was the reply, "and putting soft creams on."

55. All children enjoy music. Teachers use singing to help them learn. Reception children sing *Incy Wincy Spider* with enthusiasm, signing the rain coming down and the sun coming out. The music co-ordinator inspires and enthuses the children. They giggle and laugh joining in the actions of *Everybody Do This* as the music gets faster and faster. The teacher introduces a new song very well, repeating the refrain "Fooba Wooba John"; a number of the children read the words from the chart and all join in, picking up the chorus. The emphasis on words is copied by the children. In *A Very Cross Song* several children placed their hands on their hips and shouted out the words, really getting into the spirit of the piece. This song linked very well with the topic of 'feelings'. Children in the reception class use a range of percussion instruments to make sounds. For example, they play loudly and quietly on the drum.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1, 2 and 3

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE

56. **French** is taught to the three classes of Year 6 and 7 pupils that are set by ability in their main subjects. Two lessons were seen of French and one brief session where a class demonstrated the vocabulary they knew. These lessons, discussions with staff and pupils, documentation, records and examples of work show that the pupils in the middle ability group are making the best progress because they are very well taught. Interesting activities, such as designing phrase books for those going to France this year, gain and sustain pupils' interest. The work is challenging for those in Year 7 who have already been to France because in the light of their experiences they have to design a book that will be useful for a Year 6 pupil. The teacher has excellent strategies for maintaining very good behaviour. Lesson planning is very good for this class and shared with the more able group. The teaching and learning seen in the more able group was satisfactory, partly because the teacher failed to settle the class at the beginning of the lesson and did too much talking to keep their interest. Pupils in the less able group do not have as much time as their peers in the other two classes for learning French. They sing simple French songs and have a limited vocabulary.

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils throughout the school make very good progress.
- The quality of teachers' planning is very good.
- The quality of teaching is always good and mostly very good.
- Assessment and the use of data ensure teaching and learning are very well matched to pupils' needs.
- The subject is very well led and managed.
- Very good joint work with speech and language therapists ensures pupils with communication difficulties make very good progress.

Commentary

57. Pupils' very good achievement and progress are due to the high quality of teaching and learning. Detailed planning is based upon teachers' very good subject knowledge and very detailed knowledge of the needs of their pupils. This knowledge is used very well in developing pupils' individual learning plans. Targets are carefully set for each pupil and these are explained to pupils who know what it is they must do to reach their goal. Careful recording and assessment ensure that all the staff in the class understand the pupils' next steps and are able to celebrate their successes with them. As a result, pupils are encouraged to try hard and to persevere when the work appears difficult.

58. In Years 1 and 2, pupils are learning to listen and take turns. They enjoy finding out about spiders and remember the *Incy Wincy Spider* rhyme. The staff use signing and symbols very appropriately to support pupils who have communication difficulties, and work in very close co-operation with the speech and language therapists. The therapists lead some classroom sessions and, as a result, all the staff are actively involved in supporting pupils in listening and following instructions, making choices, taking turns, and beginning to develop descriptive language. Pupils are very keen to join in, the most able pupils using sentences and the less able using signing and symbols cards very well. Pupils in Year 2 listen carefully to stories told from a big book. Through skilled questioning by the staff, they remember the story so far and are excited to find out more. A few pupils complete speech bubbles for the characters in the story with very little adult support, others point to, and name, characters from the story and read some words from the text. The continuing work on improving communication is particularly beneficial for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. They learn to make their needs and wants known which reduces levels of frustration and subsequent difficult behaviour dramatically. Additionally, pupils speaking English as an additional language also make huge gains, notably in speaking and understanding English, which is continued throughout their schooling at Alexandra.
59. Pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 continue to improve their literacy skills. Staff ensure that pupils read regularly and it is clear that pupils enjoy the one-to-one attention and are proud of their achievements. Pupils practise their writing skills, some copying from a model, and the more able beginning to write independently. In drama sessions staff help pupils to act out parts of stories successfully, develop ideas about what might happen if a *Tiger Came To Tea* or describe how the parents of *Zagazoo* felt when he turned into a big hairy monster. Pupils are confident and eager to share their ideas, making very thoughtful suggestions and listening carefully to their peers.
60. In Year 6, pupils continue to make good progress, enjoying the new activity of interviewing. They rise to the challenge from teachers to improve their spelling by learning new words before the end of the lesson, watching carefully as the interactive whiteboard is used to remind them of techniques they could use. All work very hard using a mixture of very good techniques to help them remember, including, 'look, say, cover, write and check', building from letter cards or making letters with clay. They celebrate and applaud each other's achievements when new words are remembered at the end of the session in the very effective plenary sessions. Reading continues to be a focus for pupils in these age groups and many are using the 'Catch Up' scheme to help them make progress. Pupils are happy to read and enjoy choosing their texts. This is because staff have selected a very good variety of books at each level.
61. Pupils in Year 7 make very good progress in their understanding of the parts of speech. They find and describe compound words using picture cards and describe what the words mean. Teachers get the best out of pupils, for example when reading a book called *I Want a Cat*, challenging them to say why such a request would be valid. Pupils think very carefully and give reasons for their responses. Other pupils study the poem *Jabberwocky*. They name the parts of speech that are used and concentrate and work hard to produce their own versions of the poem. Pupils use the poem as a source and write their own descriptive pieces. These show that pupils are gaining good skills in reading and writing independently. They share their writing with each other and, in very mature ways, enjoy the humour and wit that other pupils use in their work.
62. The co-ordinator has very good subject knowledge and is very effective in monitoring English throughout the school so that there is continuous improvement. The National Literacy Strategy format is used well and the development of high quality medium and short-term plans means that everyone is clear about the work in the subject. A clear focus on using the *Ladders* assessment criteria and ongoing assessment for each pupil means that work is finely matched to the needs of individuals. Lessons are made interesting through the use of very

good resources, the library and ICT including interactive whiteboards. The improvement since the last inspection is good.

Literacy across the curriculum

63. The development of pupils' literacy and language skills is very good in other subjects. Teachers plan opportunities in their lessons for language development and for reading and writing and all staff encourage pupils in their literacy skills. This is true from the youngest pupils who learn to read their own names and those of their classmates, to the older pupils who write passionately about their beliefs for their election posters for the school council. Pupils gain confidence in speaking skills and through the work on emotional literacy find ways of expressing themselves that are positive and affirming.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' planning is very detailed and is based on very good knowledge of the pupils.
- Pupils' understanding is increased by the excellent range of words, signs, pictures, symbols, body language and apparatus used to present ideas.
- Assessment is very good.

Commentary

64. All pupils, including those for whom English is an additional language, achieve very well and make very good progress in mathematics. As there is such a wide range of ability the progress takes different forms. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are working at recognising the lowest numbers, making repeating patterns, sorting things which are the same or different and joining in with mathematical rhymes and songs. More able pupils have a good grasp of number, even if they have made up their own names for them, but have social and language difficulties which have to be overcome. As pupils move through Years 3 to 6 the range becomes even wider because pupils with a greater degree of learning difficulties are still working at the very lowest levels whereas others have made so much progress that they are nearly reaching the level of their mainstream peers. This very good progress continues into Year 7. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorder are very well supported and therefore make very good progress.
65. Teaching is very good throughout the school and, as a consequence, pupils learn new ideas, become more confident at tackling activities and enjoy their lessons. The relationship between teachers and pupils is excellent, and learning support assistants play a very important role in every classroom. Behaviour is managed skilfully and pupils learn that controlling their behaviour is rewarded. Materials and tasks are carefully chosen to interest and be accessible to different pupils. Mathematical language is explained well, helping pupils from homes where English is not the first language to understand effectively. An expectation that everyone will do their best is evident in all lessons and there is plenty to keep everyone busy. A very good emphasis throughout the school on using and applying mathematical ideas rather than just learning by heart develops learning further. Older pupils are expected to understand that there is more than one way to reach an answer and to begin to explain their reasoning. Interactive whiteboards are very well used to present ideas in an interesting way and to allow pupils to show their answers. They love it when pressing the right answer produces a fanfare and are not too disappointed by the noise which greets a wrong answer! Teachers occasionally miss opportunities to recap the main ideas at the end of lessons or to have visual cues available to help with understanding.

66. Leadership and management are good. The co-ordinator is quite new to the post. She is enthusiastic and committed and has clear ideas about how she can help the subject to improve. She is aware that moderation is needed to ensure that judgements about attainment levels are consistent. Examples of pupils' work are annotated to show how much help was needed for each task. School data is well used to track progress and identify problems.
67. There has been very good improvement in mathematics since the previous inspection. The progress and teaching in Years 1 and 2 have shown the most improvement and are now very good. The progress of older pupils has also improved and the teaching of the oldest remains very good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

68. This is very good. Teachers use all the opportunities which arise in other subjects to encourage pupils to practise their mathematics. Pupils are often asked to count, to sort things into groups, to measure or to work with graphs and charts. During registration time, the younger pupils often sing counting songs and practise the days of the week, they match and sort colours in art and estimate length using the robot in ICT. Older pupils begin to interpret graphs in ICT and to design packages and do product costings in design and technology.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching ensures that all pupils make very good progress and achieve very well.
- Very good management of the subject makes it possible for every pupil to experience the most appropriate scientific activities.
- The teamwork of staff is effective in helping pupils learn.
- Pupils' enjoyment of lessons leads to an improvement of concentration and observational skills.

Commentary

69. Teachers use their very good subject expertise extremely well to plan interesting and stimulating lessons that include practical activities which are suitably difficult. The attitudes of the pupils are excellent; they all work extremely hard to be "real scientists". Pupils in Year 2, for example, use puppets and live spiders in a practical approach to increase their knowledge and understanding of differences between alive and not alive. The activities are chosen extremely well so that pupils enjoy what they are doing. Pupils in Year 6, for instance, consider how to determine acid or alkali at an alien juice bar, 'The Flying Cabbage'. They use very good scientific language in their discussions, and use ICT programs to provide stimulating exercises to check their findings. Pupils are skilled: no aliens die! In using their scientific skills, pupils apply their knowledge of floating and sinking in deciding how many items they can place on a little boat.
70. Pupils in Year 7 study genes in their work on features that cannot change. They work hard to understand variation. They are totally involved: they discuss in groups and in pairs and decide whether plants need water and sunshine. They understand how the processes work. Pupils rise to challenges and enjoy each session. As a result their confidence increases and they develop skills in observation and in using information from experiments.
71. Teaching and learning are very well planned so that pupils are introduced to a fascinating range of activities and experiments. For example, they take part in games such as 'The Witches' Potion'. This captures and sustains pupils' interest and helps them develop a curiosity about their surroundings. Learning support staff are used very well to ensure that

every pupil is able to take part, and very good and plentiful resources are used effectively. An activity on separation, for example, used everyday items like sieves.

72. The leadership and management of science are very good. Expertise is excellent and seen at an innovative best when managing the loss of the facilities of a specialist room successfully. The arrangements for distributing resources are very good and enable everyone to be aware of what is available. The subject is very well organised for teachers to plan with confidence and use information from assessment to plan for future sessions. The co-ordinator is experienced and has very high expectations. She has a very clear vision for the future development of science in the school and wastes no opportunity to set very high standards. Links with the Royal Society, for example, are excellent and have enabled the school to develop very good plans and teaching programmes. As a result, teachers use very high quality projects and the results are, at times, outstanding. For example rockets are built and fired using compression. Pupils make clinometers to measure flight, height and allied findings. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is enthusiastically led and very well managed.
- The hardware and software available are interesting and suit the abilities of the pupils.
- Pupils love the subject and try very hard. Many of them continue activities at home and during free time at school.
- ICT is used extensively in the teaching of other subjects.

Commentary

73. In Years 1 and 2, pupils make good progress because they have hands-on experience in ICT lessons, in other subjects and when they choose to use the computer in 'privilege time'. They use digital cameras and begin to direct a robot around a pathway. The more able learn how to start the computer for themselves and use a variety of software to draw pictures, handle data and write simple text.
74. In Years 3 to 6 pupils make very good progress for their abilities and this also applies to Year 7. They use an increasingly wide variety of software, pictures and text from the Internet and become more able to work independently. Control work continues with directing a giant robot, programming the microwave in food technology, and the infra-red control of buggies and other devices made from construction toys. In the top classes a number of pupils begin to use real data in sophisticated ways so that their attainment is nearly up to the level of their mainstream peers.
75. The majority of teaching is very good which is the major factor in pupils' very good achievement. Lessons are well planned and structured with clear objectives and lots to do. Behaviour is managed very well by low-key discussions about the consequences of continued refusal to co-operate. Known rewards and punishments are used consistently so that pupils are aware of the consequences. Learning support assistants provide particularly good support to pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. There is an important emphasis on correct language. The occasional malfunctioning equipment is usually dealt with effectively but sometimes causes queues and wasted time.
76. In Years 3 to 7, tasks are designed so that all pupils succeed at their own level although a few will only do so with adult support. Teachers know the software well and are confident in their presentations. Teachers use role play, humour, games and interesting Internet sites to stimulate and challenge pupils. This is particularly powerful when the data used is from the

world outside school, for example when pupils experience the lives of 'real' people in a simulation exercise. The interactive whiteboards improve pupils' opportunities to be involved in class and the sessions in the computer room are well planned to maximise each child's hands-on time. At times there are parts of lessons where the teacher does too much explaining without involving the pupils by asking them questions and giving them time to think or assimilate the information.

77. Leadership and management are very good. The co-ordinator is very knowledgeable and keen to share his expertise. He has high expectations for pupils, and they are encouraged to use quite complex programs. He is committed to making sure everything runs smoothly but, because the school lacks a technician, this means spending too much of his time doing repetitive technical tasks.
78. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning have improved and the subject is much better resourced.

ICT across the curriculum

79. The introduction of interactive whiteboards, easy access to the Internet and the availability of a range of software relevant to the needs of different pupils, have meant that ICT is used extensively in most subjects. Teachers make material more visual and exciting with pictures and video clips. Pupils enjoy using the interactive whiteboards. They are involved in making videos, taking photos and illustrating text in a range of different subjects.

HUMANITIES

80. It was only possible to see two lessons in humanities, both were history. Evidence through analysis, discussions and examination of displays show that in **geography**, pupils in Year 6 identify where different foods come from using the class maps. They use graphs to indicate levels of rubbish and consider the cause and effect of pollution. Pupils have opportunities in **history** to explore the Tudors and enjoy learning about castles and dungeons. Their understanding of Victorian times enables them to discuss poverty and the lives of children in those days. All pupils improve their observation and concentration skills when they take part in difficult activities to examine differences at the seaside between now and in the fifties and sixties. Pupils are interested to discover a range of cures for ailments such as boils at the time of The Black Death. They become aware of how far and how fast the disease travelled.
81. The leadership and management of humanities are very good. Very careful planning ensures that the balance of time spent teaching history and geography is appropriate and that work builds on previous knowledge and understanding. The co-ordinator has very good plans for future development, monitors the quality of teaching and learning effectively and is committed to making improvements. This ensures, for example, that ICT is used well in both subjects. There are very good systems to review planning and spending and for assessing pupils' progress. Visits and trips abroad enhance pupils' learning very effectively. Both history and geography make strong contributions towards pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The use of visits, resources and artefacts is effective.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well.
- Teaching religious education through other subjects enriches quality.

Commentary

82. It was only possible to see two lessons of religious education during the inspection. However, discussions with staff and pupils, the displays of work, teachers' planning and records and pupils' work show that teaching and learning are good and pupils achieve well. Pupils take part in many interesting activities that enable them to become aware of a wide range of religions, cultures and customs.
83. By the end of Year 2, pupils understand the importance of special places. They have learned about themselves and the importance of the natural world. Teachers take care to make links to pupils' previous learning. For example, through exploring signs and symbols from the local community, pupils explore the signs and symbols of religion. They begin to learn about the different faiths represented in the community. Practical experiences are effective in helping pupils increase their knowledge and understanding. Pupils in Year 6 and in Year 7, for example, use their knowledge of special places on visits. They ask pertinent questions about artefacts when visiting the synagogue. They also show clear respect for the scrolls and understand why they must not be touched. This reinforces earlier lessons on the Jewish faith.
84. Good teaching bringing together different subjects which gives pupils more rounded views. For example, learning about the history of Ghandi enabled pupils to appreciate the non-violent solutions for resolving conflict. They develop ideas and sympathy for others. Assemblies make a good contribution to pupils' religious knowledge. They are very well planned and resourced. Themes include festivals such as Diwali and illustrate the importance of these events. Assemblies and religious education help pupils to understand the cultural diversity of the world they live in.
85. The overall leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The co-ordinator does not have opportunities to monitor effectively and staff plan their work independently. However, the Locally Agreed Syllabus is used well as a basis for work. Very good displays on classroom walls and school corridors show high quality work, photographs of celebrations and activities. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

86. It was only possible to observe two lessons of **art and design**. However, evidence from teachers' plans and records, from discussion with the subject co-ordinator and from the high quality art work displayed around the school shows that the pupils use a very broad range of different media in their work. They work with artists in residence and are introduced to the work of a wide variety of other artists. The school holds the Artsmark Silver Award and is working towards the Gold Award. Pupils also successfully take part in such events as the Kodak Photo Awards.
87. Teachers' planning is good, resources are well used and links made with other areas of learning. For example, pupils making a picture of a journey had used a story as the basis and had chosen shapes for their work based upon the continents. All the pupils were encouraged to think about and plan their work, all made choices about the media they would use and used sketch-books well to plan and experiment before settling on their final approach to the work. The school has a kiln, which is safely used in an area not open to pupils. It is well used and pupils' three-dimensional work using clay is of high quality.
88. Evidence from examples of pupils' work, interviews, discussions and three **design and technology** lesson observations show that this subject is very well led and that staff have considerable expertise and enthusiasm in this area. This leads to very good progress throughout the school as pupils gain confidence and practical skills at their own level. Staff helped, where appropriate, pupils in Year 1 to cut out the spiders they had drawn. The pupils were delighted when their spiders moved up and down a slide like *Incy Wincy Spider*. The curriculum is well balanced, with topics and materials adapted to enable all pupils to succeed. For example, a class of Years 2, 3 and 4 pupils were closely supervised as they learned how to cut and chop vegetables safely with real knives. This lesson demonstrated how well the

cultural diversity of the community is explored: pupils shopped for Indian vegetables for a curry, touching and smelling them as they prepared them during their lesson.

89. Teachers' plans are detailed and a very good photographic record is kept in the electronic portfolio to show what pupils have achieved. Pupils develop skills in designing and making and are genuinely interested in their tasks. Pupils in Years 6 and 7, for example, made yoghurt, designed the packaging and then considered advertising their wares. They successfully analysed video clips of advertisements and used the ideas to write an advertisement for their school. Working collaboratively and with enthusiasm, one group made a presentation to pupils and another to parents.
90. During the inspection only two **physical education** lessons and one swimming session were seen. Evidence from the subject co-ordinator, teachers' plans and records and the extensive photographic records of school events show that the pupils have access to a wide range of physical activities. Very good use is made of facilities: the school has a small gym and good outside areas, which are supplemented by community facilities for swimming and other activities. The range of school clubs includes many sports and pupils have opportunities to experience yoga and trampoline as well as the more usual range of activities. Pupils at the school camp are able to try pony-riding, often for the first time. They also enjoy large-scale obstacle courses and the physical challenge of climbing walls. Older pupils have opportunities to canoe.
91. Teachers' planning is good and resources are well used. Teachers explain objectives carefully and ensure that pupils know exactly what they must do. Good practice is followed in reminding pupils about what they must do to stay safe, and listening to and following instructions are insisted upon. Pupils listen carefully to coaching tips when trying to improve their long jump techniques and follow instructions well. They are very pleased when they find that their results improve throughout the lesson. Pupils are able to co-operate with each other to move equipment safely and all can explain what they have achieved during the lesson.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most pupils make very good progress and achieve very well in music.
- Pupils develop their singing voices very well.
- The subject contributes very well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- 'Singing' assembly gives pupils an excellent opportunity to practise their skills.
- The music room is a valuable resource for staff and pupils.
- The leadership and management of music are very good.

Commentary

92. All pupils enjoy their music lessons and gain a sense of achievement from their work. Pupils in Year 2 learn to follow the rules of the music room well and are keen to play a range of percussion instruments. Staff help them explore sound-making materials effectively and to play loud and soft or fast and slow. Skilful use of praise encourages pupils to perform to others, singing or using instruments. Excellent teaching and learning ensure that pupils in Years 4 and 5 develop a rhythmic ostinato using voice, clapping and drums. They rise to the challenge set by the teacher who uses extremely effective behaviour management strategies to maintain the interest and participation of a pupil with autistic spectrum disorders.
93. By the time pupils are in Years 6 and 7, they are using their ICT skills to illustrate their compositions effectively. By Year 6, they have learned to listen attentively to pieces of music such as Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and describe what the music makes them

think about. They build on this work during Year 7, broadening their understanding of the range of starting points for musical composition.

94. The quality of teaching and learning is very good, partly because staff are given very clear guidance and support by the enthusiastic co-ordinator who has high levels of expertise. As a result, lesson planning is very good and clearly identifies strategies to support pupils where needed and different levels of work that are suitably matched for all pupils in the class. Account is taken of the needs of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, a few of whom find the noise levels in music sessions difficult to manage.
95. The co-ordinator maximises the contribution of music to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by using the computer network to share music for the week. In one week, for example, there were songs about co-operation, in another there was a cultural emphasis on music from Mexico. Additionally, there are resources for staff including useful classics, our favourites, story songs, sound effects and helpful web-sites. Currently a musical link to every topic in the school is being developed to enhance teaching and learning further. Since the last inspection, improvement is very good.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

96. **Citizenship** is introduced in the top three classes and is very well taught. The planning is very detailed and allows for pupils' differing abilities. It also takes into account that the pupils stay in these classes for two years. Lessons tackle topics on pupils' rights and responsibilities, sex education and education in drug misuse and a well-designed unit in the summer term which prepares the pupils for the benefits and problems of moving to a new environment.

Personal, social and health education

Provision in personal, social and health education (PSHE) is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Concern for the personal development of all pupils is a strong feature of this school.
- Pupils' personal development is very good because all members of staff, in all lessons, have pupils' welfare and well-being at heart and reinforce the messages being given in PSHE lessons.
- Teachers of Years 6 and 7 work closely together to make sure the teaching builds on previous work.
- Overall co-ordination is lacking.

Commentary

97. Pupils make very good progress in Years 1 to 3 because of very good teaching. Teachers use equipment, symbol cards, spoken and written words, facial expression and gestures to hold pupils' attention and convey meaning. They make very good use of rhymes, songs and story contexts and materials which pupils can touch, hold and handle. There is usually a choice of activities and all work is linked to familiar experiences so that the pupils know this is about themselves.
98. The teaching and learning of PSHE lessons in Years 4 and 5 are satisfactory. The planning has not been adapted to ensure that pupils in Year 5 build on their previous work and assessment is less thorough than in other years. The materials used do not always accommodate the wide range of ability. Progress is still good because of all the opportunities in other lessons.
99. In Years 6 and 7 the very detailed planning and high quality teaching ensure that pupils are helped to face the changes, challenges and temptations to make bad choices which they may

encounter when they leave. Pupils are involved in thinking about and discussing issues, and are encouraged to make increasingly independent choices.

100. The quality of teaching and learning is very good which leads to pupils' very good achievement. Teachers in all years show respect for the pupils' different backgrounds and social settings. They encourage pupils to be independent, to care for others, to know when and how to offer help. There is a very trusting relationship between staff and pupils. The learning support assistants are especially talented at helping pupils with autistic spectrum disorders.
101. The leadership and management of the subject are weak. The co-ordinator gives advice on resources but does not monitor teaching and planning nor analyse pupils' progress. Teaching teams work successfully together to plan and adapt the curriculum and to track the progress of pupils in their classes. However, no-one has a complete overview of the subject. This has led to repetition of topics in Years 4 and 5.
102. The introduction of emotional literacy has been a powerful development for the school because for many pupils the management of their emotions is a hard task. The staff have discussed and agreed on descriptions of the developmental stages in learning behaviour, conduct behaviour, emotional behaviour and self-care and this has provided a good structure for assessing whether or not pupils are making progress in these areas year-on-year.
103. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. High standards have been maintained in the majority of lessons and the pupils' personal development is again very good.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	2
How inclusive the school is	1
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2
Value for money provided by the school	2
Overall standards achieved	2
Pupils' achievement	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	1
Attendance	2
Attitudes	1
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	2
The quality of teaching	2
How well pupils learn	2
The quality of assessment	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	1
Accommodation and resources	2
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2
The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	2
The leadership of the headteacher	1
The leadership of other key staff	1
The effectiveness of management	2

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

In a special school such as this, **standards achieved** are judged against individual targets and not against national standards.